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The Perceptual Difference in Roles and Responsibilities

of

Special Education Paraprofessionals

by

Carmen Renee Harris

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

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of

Special Education Paraprofessionals

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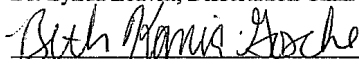
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education



Dr. Lynda Leavitt, Dissertation Chair

4/13/2012

Date



Dr. Beth Kania-Gosche, Committee Member

4-13-2012

Date



Dr. Sherrie Wisdom, Committee Member

4-13-2012

Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Carmen Renee Harris

Signature: Carmen Renee Harris Date: 4-13-12

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Abstract

Based on the researcher's experience as a coordinator of special education, general and special education administrators are challenged with creating, implementing, and supervising special education services addressing the diverse needs of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The researcher has collaborated with principals to review programming options for students with disabilities participating in inclusive general education classrooms and found that often this inclusive programming involves the use of a special education paraprofessional.

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to determine if there was a difference in perception between a student's team members (general education teacher, special education teacher and special education paraprofessional) regarding the roles and responsibilities of special education paraprofessionals in the general education classroom. If there was a difference, the primary investigator attempted to determine why that difference existed as the researcher believed a difference could possibly lead to uncoordinated efforts between the general education teacher, special education teacher and special education paraprofessional supporting a student with a disability.

A random sample of participants from five elementary schools in a large suburban school district was constructed from the larger population consisting of general education teachers, special education teachers, and special education paraprofessionals assigned to students in the general education setting supported by a special education paraprofessional. The results of quantitative data analysis did not show statistically significant differences between team members' (special education teacher, general education teacher, special education paraprofessional) views of the roles and

responsibilities of specific paraprofessionals assigned to a student with a disability in the inclusive / general education setting. However, the qualitative analysis of data including individual interviews and observations, provided evidence to conclude five of five educational teams differed in their perceptions of the majority of roles/responsibilities of their assigned special education paraprofessional. Results from one-on-one interviews conducted in this study identified the majority of teams did not have regularly scheduled collaborative times nor devote specific time for instructional planning as a group.

The researcher recommended that educational administrators need an opportunity to structure their educational teams to allow collaborative team time between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional to discuss specific roles/responsibilities of paraprofessionals supporting students in the general education setting. The research reinforced the ideas that educators may benefit from the use of a checklist or survey to assist teams in their alignment of what roles/responsibilities are required to support a specific student in the general education setting and how to communicate changing needs to the entire IEP team, specifically including parents. The researcher also recommended a timeline be created in which dates are periodically selected throughout the year to provide an opportunity for the educational team to meet with parents to specifically discuss current paraprofessional supports, possible changes to paraprofessional supports, and a plan of action to potentially decrease paraprofessional support in an effort to increase student independence.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
List of Tables	Error! Bookmark not defined.
List of Figures	Error! Bookmark not defined.x
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Background of the Study	1
Definition of Terms.....	6
Statement of Problem.....	9
Significance of the Study	11
Purpose of Study	11
Research Questions and Hypotheses	13
Methodological Framework.....	14
Limitations of Study	15
Conclusion	15
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature	18
Defining a Paraprofessional	19
History of Paraprofessionals	19
Legal Aspects of Paraprofessionals	22
Laws Affecting Paraprofessionals.	22
Court Decisions Regarding the Criterion of Benefit for a Paraprofessional.	22
Roles and Responsibilities of Paraprofessionals.....	23

Determining the Need for Paraprofessional Support.....	27
Factors Influencing Paraprofessional Support.....	29
Parent Input.....	29
Supervision and Training.....	31
Paraprofessional Turnover.....	35
Concerns Regarding Paraprofessionals.....	35
Paraprofessional Challenges.....	35
Overreliance on Paraprofessionals.....	37
General Concerns.....	39
Student Perspectives regarding Paraprofessional Support.....	41
Summary.....	42
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	45
Research Overview.....	45
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	46
Research Setting.....	47
Participants.....	48
Methodology.....	50
Procedures.....	51
Quantitative Procedures.....	51
Instrumentation.....	51

Development of the Instrument	52
Instrument Reliability	52
Instrument Validity	53
Survey Procedures	54
Qualitative Procedures.....	54
Interviews.....	54
Observations	55
Data Analysis	55
Summary	57
Chapter Four: Presentation of Research Findings	58
Overview.....	58
Hypotheses and Research Questions	58
Quantitative Data Analysis	59
Qualitative Data Analysis	65
Classroom Observations.	65
Teacher Interview Responses.	71
Summary of Findings.....	77
Chapter Five: Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations	79
Overview.....	79
Results.....	81

Research Questions and Hypothesis Testing	82
Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners	91
Recommendations for Furture Research.....	94
Conclusion	97
References.....	104
Appendices.....	117
Vitae.....	127

List of Tables

Table 1. <i>Instructional Paraprofessionals in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Instructional Responsibility:2003-04</i>	21
Table 2. <i>Demographics of Research Site School District</i>	48
Table 3. <i>Five Paraprofessional Role Constructs</i>	60
Table 4. <i>Average Survey Response by Role</i>	61
Table 5. <i>ANOVA Results</i>	62
Table 6. <i>Primary Investigator’s Hypothesized Distributions by Team</i>	63
Table 7. <i>Chi Square Goodness of Fit by Team</i>	64
Table 8. <i>Chi Square Goodness of Fit by Role</i>	65
Table 9. <i>Team and Participant Role Years of Experience</i>	72
Table 10. <i>Interview Consensus Items</i>	74
Table 11. <i>Team Collaboration Time</i>	75

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.</i> Team Perception Alignment	83
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Chapter One: Introduction

Background of the Study

Nearly every public school across the United States of America includes students with disabilities (NEA, 2011). Since the 1800s, public educators have been educating students with disabilities. However, students with significant disabilities were often not allowed to participate in general education. In 1893, the Massachusetts Supreme Court agreed with decision of the public school district to deny access to a student with mental retardation (*Watson v. City of Cambridge*, 1893). In 1919 the Wisconsin Supreme Court agreed with the decision of the public school district to deny access to a student with a physical disability (*State ex rel Beattie v. Board of Education*, 1919). Crossley (2000) reported the number of special education classrooms increased at the beginning of the 20th century. The increase coincided with the movement toward compulsory education and the large number of children immigrating to the United States. Enrollment in public school systems grew drastically and altered the organization of schools. School systems developed formal procedures in which students advanced from one grade to the next on the basis of age or academic achievement. Mentally deficient children or those who required special attention did not fit in this system; thus, these children were removed from general classrooms and funneled into “special” classrooms.

By the 1970s, education for students with disabilities in the United States occurred in a separate institution from that of the general education school district and served approximately eight million students (Crossley, 2000). School districts continued to provide educational services to only one in five children with disabilities, including exclusion of students with specific disabilities including deafness, blindness, emotional

disturbance, and mental retardation (Crossley, 2000). On November 29, 1975, Congress enacted the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (1975) in an effort to protect the rights of students with disabilities to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive educational environment which may include the general education classroom. The percentage of kindergarten through 12th grade students identified as needing special education rose from 8.3% in 1976-77 to 11.8% in 1998-99 (Greene, 2002) as school districts improved their efforts to appropriately diagnosis educational disabilities. The National Education Association (2011) reported currently there is a continual increase in enrollment of students in special education programs throughout the United States with three out of every four students with an identified educational disability spending part or all of their school day in a general education classroom outside of the special education setting, allowing students with disabilities to access their least restrictive learning environment.

One type of support identified by general education teachers as essential to the inclusion of students with disabilities is the use of extra classroom support such as a paraprofessional, a noncertified adult who assists students under the direction and guidance of certified educators in the educational setting (Wolery, Werts, Caldwell, Snyder, & Lisowski, 1996). Many school districts have begun to utilize paraprofessionals (teacher assistant or paraeducator) to support the efforts of both teachers and students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Doyle, 1997; French & Pickett, 1997; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997).

Paraprofessionals are employed in over 90% of U.S. public elementary and secondary schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). The practice of

hiring special education paraprofessionals to meet the increased general education programming needs of students with disabilities tremendously impacts the vast majority of school districts throughout the United States (Giangreco, 2010). Though school administrators are involved in hiring and assigning paraprofessionals often the roles and responsibilities of those paraprofessionals are not clearly defined which often results in confusion or unclear efforts of all involved (Giangreco et al., 1997).

The current number of paraprofessionals working in public schools today has increased significantly with more than 600,000 paraprofessionals working throughout the United States (Hampden-Thompson, Diehl, & Kinukawa, 2007). It is suggested that the increased number of paraprofessionals supporting students with disabilities in the general education setting may be the result of a variety of state and federal initiatives paired with the growth of special education programs throughout the country (Gerber, Finn, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001). As school districts continue to increase their programming options for students with disabilities to access the general education setting, the use of paraprofessionals may provide a budget friendly option as the cost of a paraprofessional's salary may be significantly less than that of a certified, licensed teacher level staff member.

Paraprofessionals in the United States are asked to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities in a variety of settings, particularly in the general education setting/classroom. Special education teacher shortages and increased demands on teacher level staff (e.g. increased class size, additional responsibilities, and clerical obligations) are identified as reasons for the increased use of paraprofessionals to support students in the general education setting. (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2001; Killoran,

Templeman, Peters, & Udell, 2001; Mueller & Murphy, 2001). Paraprofessionals are being viewed as essential components to effective inclusionary programming for students with disabilities across the United States (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Minondo, Meyer, & Xin, 2001).

Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka (2005) discussed the differences of paraprofessionals assigned to self-contained special education classrooms opposed to those assigned to the general education inclusive settings. In the self-contained special education classroom the special education teacher and paraprofessional(s) work together in the same classrooms throughout the school day. In this type of setting there is a supervisory opportunity for special education teachers to direct and observe paraprofessional efforts in a small group setting. In the general education inclusive setting, paraprofessionals work in an environment which is separated from the special education teacher creating a collaborative obstacle for team members as well as a supervisory challenge for the special education teacher who may spend minimal time with the paraprofessional throughout the educational day (Giangreco, Smith, & Pinckney, 2006). In a study conducted by Giangreco and Broer (2005), data reported from 153 special education paraprofessionals found nearly 70% of the paraprofessionals stated they were responsible for making curriculum decisions for students without direct input from a teacher or special educator. As the direct supervisor of paraprofessionals, special education teachers report decreased opportunities for supervising their staff who are assigned to the general education setting and state spending approximately 2% of their available time conducting supervision activities (Giangreco & Broer, 2005).

In addition, preparation to assume roles and responsibilities is required of all educational staff as outlined in federal legislation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEA, 2004]; No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB, 2001]). Further review of legal documents, including rulings from courts and the Office of Civil Rights, identified four important findings with regards to paraprofessionals (Katsiyannis, Hodge, & Landford, 2000). Documents reviewed in order to establish relevant legal parameters with regards to paraprofessionals included Office of Civil Rights (OCR) rulings and court rulings from 1990-1999. During the review, four important findings were discovered.

First, public schools are required to provide paraprofessional supports for students if it is determined that paraprofessional support is required in order for the student to access a free appropriate public education (FAPE) (IDEA, 2004). The determination of whether paraprofessional services are required in order for a student to access FAPE is made by a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), which is the written document outlining the goals and services needed for a student with a disability to access their curriculum (IDEA, 2004). Second, though school districts have discretion regarding their hiring practices, specific student needs outlined in a student's IEP, a written document for students with disabilities which is created, reviewed, and revised annually (IDEA, 2004), can require school districts to hire staff with specific characteristics. The decision regarding which staff personnel will be assigned to a student is often determined collaboratively by administrators and teachers. Third, paraprofessionals who may lack appropriate training, including but not limited to courses in behavior management skills, self-care skills, etc. are not allowed to provide direct education services to students such as those provided by certified teacher level staff. Districts should provide high quality

professional development opportunities for paraprofessional staff on an annual basis.

Fourth, with direct teacher level staff supervision, appropriately trained paraprofessionals may provide educational supports to students with disabilities. Paraprofessionals may only provide support under the direct guidance and supervision of a certified teacher level staff member.

Based on the researcher's experience as a coordinator of special education within a large school district, both general and special education administrators are challenged to create and implement special education services in the general education setting to meet the varying needs of students with disabilities. The researcher has collaborated with principals to review programming options for students with disabilities participating in inclusive general education classrooms and often this inclusive programming involves the use of a special education paraprofessional. The research literature outlines multiple concerns for schools whose inclusionary efforts focus primarily on the use of paraprofessionals (Giangreco, 2003). This study will examine five educational teams in a large suburban school district, at the elementary level, who support a student with a disability in the general education classroom through the use of a dedicated special education paraprofessional.

Definition of Terms

Paraprofessional: A paraprofessional is also known as a teacher assistant or paraeducator for the purpose of this study. The paraprofessional is defined as school employees who,

provide instructional support including those who (1) provide one-on-one tutoring if such tutoring is scheduled at a time when a student would not otherwise receive

instruction from a teacher, (2) assist with classroom management, such as by organizing instructional materials, (3) provide instructional assistance in a computer laboratory, (4) conduct parental involvement activities, (5) provide instructional support in a library or media center, (6) act as a translator, or (7) provide instructional support services under the direct supervision of a highly qualified teacher. (IDEA, 2004, Section 1119)

Giangreco et al. (2001) defined a paraprofessional as individuals who are trained to work with, and alongside, educators in classrooms and other educational settings to support the education of students with and without disabilities in a variety of capacities (e.g., physically, socially, instructionally). Paraprofessionals are school employees who, while not hired to work in the capacity of a professional position (e.g., teacher, special educator, related services provider), do provide important supportive services in schools under the direction and supervision of qualified school personnel. (p. 3)

Inclusive: Inclusive education is defined for the purposes of this study as that which occurs in the general education classroom. “Students with disabilities are supported in chronologically age-appropriate general education classes in her home schools and receive specialized instruction delineated by their individualized education programs (IEPs) within the context of the core curriculum and general class activities” (Halvorsen & Neary, 2001, p.1).

General Education Setting: The setting in which students with and without disabilities participate in general education curriculum for the purpose of this study. In

this setting the teacher level staff member assigned to the classroom typically does not have special education licensure.

Special Education Setting: “The setting in which an educational program and/or practice designed for students, as handicapped or gifted students, whose mental ability, physical ability, emotional function, etc. requires special teaching approaches, equipment, or care outside a regular classroom” (Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 2010, p. 1376).

Perception: “Observation/awareness of the elements of environment” from the general education teacher, special education teacher and paraprofessional (Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 2010, p. 1068)

FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education): “the protection of the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance, including federal funds” (IDEA, 2004, sec. 504).

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States . . . shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. (IDEA, 2004, sec. 504)

NCLB (No Child Left Behind) Act:

Congressional act of 2001 to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments aiming to bring all students up to the proficient level on state tests by the 2013-2014 school year. (NCLB, 2001, sec. 1001)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): “To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.” (IDEA, 2004, sec. 612)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: “Ensures that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living.” (IDEA, 2004, sec. 300)

Statement of Problem

Paraprofessionals have many different perceptions of their roles, duties, and responsibilities, but expectations may often vary among individuals who work at the same school. Marks, Schrader, and Levine (1999) used a semi-structured in-depth interview process to investigate the experiences of 20 paraprofessionals working with students with disabilities in the inclusive setting. The paraprofessionals perceived that they, “bore the primary burden for success for the students with disabilities with whom they worked” (p. 317) and stated a feeling solely responsible for the success of the inclusionary efforts for the student(s). In addition, the paraprofessionals also believed their roles and responsibilities in the classroom included: ensuring students with disabilities were not a distraction to the classroom teacher; providing immediate

accommodations or modifications to academic materials; and being expected to have vast instructional knowledge for the student they are supporting (Marks et al., 1999). The overwhelming challenge is to identify the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals. There are several educational staff who may be involved in the efforts of providing appropriate services successfully in inclusive classrooms in a way that is beneficial for all involved (Marks et al., 1999). Educational staff may have differences in perceptions and beliefs which may result in a lack of clearly defining roles and responsibilities for everyone involved (Patterson, 2006). Throughout the research literature paraprofessionals express concerns associated with how they are trained and supervised for their positions, as well as, the description of their roles and responsibilities (Gerber et al., 2001; Wallace, Shin, Batholomay, & Stahl, 2001). Wallace et al. (2001) conducted a study in which over half of the paraprofessionals he surveyed reported concerns with the amount of time they had to spend with their supervising teacher.

This study utilized a mixed methods approach to investigate if there is a difference in the perceptions of specific educational team members (general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional) regarding the roles and responsibilities of special education paraprofessionals in the general education classroom. The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a difference in perception and if so, to determine why that difference exists. The reason for investigating a possible difference in staff perceptions is that the difference may lead to uncoordinated efforts between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional supporting a student with a disability. This study was

conducted at the elementary level across five separate elementary schools in a large suburban school district.

Significance of the Study

As the United States currently addresses a financial crisis, school districts are directly impacted as funds for programming are decreasing. Districts must prioritize needs and make best use of their current resources to ensure they are meeting the needs of all students. This fiscal responsibility must include appropriate use of all resources, including staff such as paraprofessionals (Breton, 2010). Paraprofessionals must have appropriate training, knowledge, and collaborative time with teacher level staff in order to maximize their level of effectiveness as a resource for students with disabilities. This study will address the perceived knowledge of paraprofessionals and their collaboration with both general and special education teacher level staff as they provide support to students with special needs in the general education classroom. Needs for additional training, instruction and or resources may be identified, providing districts with a vision of what specific needs school personnel may have in order to better serve students with disabilities in the general education setting. This study will also add to the current paraprofessional research by providing an in-depth look at five educational teams and their perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of their special education paraprofessional.

Purpose of Study

For over 50 years, the number of paraprofessionals supporting students in public schools throughout the United States has continued to grow (Blalock, 1991; Pickett, 1996). The researcher's experience has revealed that paraprofessionals work in one of

two settings: the special education or general education setting. In the general education setting, the paraprofessional works with one or more students with identified disabilities in a setting with both disabled and non-disabled students. This study will focus on those paraprofessionals providing assistance to students in the inclusive, general education setting. Given the increased use of paraprofessionals, the collaborative efforts of educational teams including paraprofessionals are of utmost importance when outlining roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional and ensuring consistent communication regarding the effectiveness of the educational team servicing a student (French, 1998).

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to determine if there is a difference in perception between a student's team members (general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional) regarding the roles and responsibilities of special education paraprofessionals in the general education classroom. If there is a difference, the primary investigator will attempt to determine why that difference exists as the researcher believes a difference could possibly lead to uncoordinated efforts between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional supporting a student with a disability.

In order to create a successful inclusionary environment it is essential for team members (general education teacher, special education teacher, and paraprofessional) to have clearly defined roles (Schattman, 1992). According to Schattman (1992), when staff mutually agree upon roles and responsibilities, this decreases potential conflict among team members and allows paraprofessionals to effectively meet student needs in the general education classroom. According to Vasa, Steckelberg, and Pickett (2003), paraprofessionals working in special education settings are observed, coached, and

supervised by special education teachers however, the vast majority of those teachers have not received training or guidelines regarding how to supervise (Lindeman & Beegle, 1988; May & Marozas, 1986). In an advice article, Boomer (1977) recommended utilizing a team approach during which the teacher and paraprofessional meet on a weekly basis engaging in frequent communication.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Hypothesis #1. There is a difference in the perception of paraprofessional use in the inclusive setting between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional, measured by responses to a Likert-scale survey.

Null Hypothesis #1. There is no difference in the perception of paraprofessional use in the inclusive setting between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional, measured by responses to a Likert-scale survey.

Hypothesis #2. There will be a difference when comparing response rates for the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional to the expected response rates.

Null Hypothesis #2. There will be no difference when comparing response rates for the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional to the expected response rates.

Research Question #1. What are the differences and similarities in the views held by special education teachers, general education teachers, and special education paraprofessionals of the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional in the general education setting?

Research Question #2. Can specific roles/responsibilities needed to support students with disabilities in the general education setting, be delivered by school staff other than a special education paraprofessional (i.e. general education teacher or special education teacher)?

Methodological Framework

This study utilized a mixed methods approach providing both qualitative and quantitative data. A random sample of participants from five elementary schools in a large suburban school district was constructed from the larger population consisting of general education teachers, special education teachers, and special education paraprofessionals assigned to students in the general education setting supported by a special education paraprofessional. Teachers and special education paraprofessionals were chosen based on their assignment to a student with a disability who participates in the general education setting with the assistance of a special education paraprofessional. Five teams consisting of one special education teacher, one general education teacher and one special education paraprofessional, were selected for interview and observation by the primary investigator and a collaborating colleague at the study school.

Quantitative data was collected through an electronic survey emailed to study participants via Survey Monkey. The survey consisted of 15 questions utilizing a Likert-type scale with responses numbered from one (not appropriate), to seven (most appropriate), with a mid-point of four (appropriate). Qualitative data was obtained through an interview and classroom observations. The study sample consisted of five general education teachers, five special education teachers, and five paraprofessionals. All participants were invited to participate in one face-to-face recorded interview and

three 30-45 minute classroom observations over a two-month period for case study analysis.

Limitations of Study

The study participant size was a limitation in this research. The study was limited to five educational teams in five school buildings for a total of 15 participants. The study was limited to five educational teams for a total of 15 study participants allowing for greater depth of working knowledge of each team.

The population for this study was another limitation. The primary investigator worked exclusively within one large suburban district servicing approximately 22,000 students which may not be representative of team member perspectives in other regions or countries. This study was conducted at the elementary level only, across five separate elementary schools. Narrowing the focus of the study to the elementary level limited the opportunity to study teams assigned to grades six through 12.

The primary investigator's role as an administrator within one district was an additional limitation. Study participants were not directly supervised by the primary investigator during this study.

Conclusion

The use of special education paraprofessionals in the inclusive setting is identified by general education teachers as a critical component of inclusionary programming to support students with disabilities in their classrooms (Wolery, et al., 1996). As school districts continue to consider paraprofessionals as required components for inclusion of students with disabilities (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Minondo et al., 2001) a great challenge facing educational teams is to appropriately identify the roles of

paraprofessionals in general education classrooms in a way that is beneficial for all involved (Patterson, 2006). Special education teachers working with paraprofessionals in the inclusive setting report spending minimal time observing paraprofessionals under their direct supervision (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Some paraprofessionals also report not having planning time with the teacher(s) who direct their work (Wallace et al., 2001).

Given the increased use of paraprofessionals, the collaborative efforts of educational teams including paraprofessionals are of utmost importance when outlining roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional and ensuring consistent communication regarding the effectiveness of the educational team servicing a student (French, 1998). In order to create a successful inclusionary environment it is essential for team members (general education teacher, special education teacher, and paraprofessional) to have clearly defined roles (Schattman, 1992). According to Schattman (1992), when staff mutually agree upon roles and responsibilities, this decreases potential conflict among team members and allows paraprofessionals to effectively meet student needs in the general education classroom.

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a difference in perception between a student's team members (general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional) regarding the roles and responsibilities of special education paraprofessionals in the general education classroom. If there is a difference, the primary investigator will attempt to determine why that difference exists as it may lead to uncoordinated efforts between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional supporting a student with a disability.

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature regarding the use of paraprofessional staff in educational settings. The review provides a brief history and legal review of educational paraprofessionals, specifically those assigned to support students with disabilities. The chapter also outlines how the need for paraprofessional support is determined and the multiple factors which influence the support. A summary of concerns associated with paraprofessionals is provided, detailing a variety of topics found throughout the literature.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Schools often assign educational responsibility for their most challenging students to paraprofessional rather than certified teacher level staff members (Brown, Farrington, Ziegler, Knight, & Ross, 1999; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001). In the researcher's experience the use of paraprofessionals to support students in the inclusive setting continues to be reviewed by educators as the numbers of paraprofessionals continues to grow. There is a concern that utilizing a paraprofessional in the general education setting may result in general education teachers feeling a decreased responsibility for the student resulting in the student's primary instruction coming from the paraprofessional staff member as opposed to the teacher level staff member (Giangreco, 2003).

Paraprofessionals play an important support role in either enhancing, or potentially hindering students' academic and non-academic progress given explicit guidance from highly qualified educators (Carter, Sisco, & Lane, 2011).

This chapter provides an overview of the research regarding the use of paraprofessionals in the school setting. The first section reviews the multiple definitions of the term paraprofessional found within the literature. An outline of the history of paraprofessionals and their use in education is provided in the second section. The third section details legal actions which have influenced the use of paraprofessionals by educational teams. The roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals are defined throughout the fourth section. The fifth section provides an explanation of how to determine the need for paraprofessional support. Various factors that influence the use of paraprofessionals including parent input, appropriate supervision and training, and paraprofessional turnover are review in the sixth section. The seventh section provides

concerns regarding the use of paraprofessionals including paraprofessional challenges, overreliance on paraprofessionals, and general concerns. The final section examines student perspectives regarding paraprofessional support.

Defining a Paraprofessional

Paraprofessionals are nonprofessional instructional personnel known by a variety of names including teacher aide and instructional assistant (French, 1998). For the purpose of this study, the primary investigator has chosen to use the term paraprofessional. Throughout the literature, a paraprofessional is defined as “an employee who works under the supervision of a teacher or another professional staff member who has the ultimate responsibility for the design, implementation, and evaluation of educational programs and related services” (Riggs, 2004, p. 9).

“Nationwide, there is no universally accepted definition for the term paraprofessional” (Pickett, 1994, p. 7). However, The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals defined paraprofessionals as:

an employee whose position is either instructional in nature or who delivers other direct and indirect services to children, youth and /or their parents; who works under the supervision of teachers or other professional personnel who have ultimate responsibility for the design and implementation of education and related services programs, and the assessment of the impact on student progress and other education outcomes. (Pickett, 1994, p. 8)

History of Paraprofessionals

More than 200 years ago the practice of hiring support personal to assist students with disabilities began when Madame Guerin was hired to assist a physician with his

work with an individual child (Boomer, 1994). The use of paraprofessionals in education parallel the medical field's use of lesser-trained personnel such as nurses, physicians assistants, etc. in which certain personnel were hired to conduct select procedures without direct supervision (French, 2003). Similarly, many have speculated that the increased use of paraprofessionals is the direct result of changes to academic standards, federal legislation, and a demand for highly qualified personnel (French & Pickett, 1997; Katsiyannis et al., 2000).

School administrators may provide paraprofessional support to educational teams often with the best of intentions. In the researcher's experience, paraprofessionals may be assigned to support the work of both general and special education teachers and may also be utilized with individual students in response to requests from parents. Giangreco et al. (2006) stated, "The use of paraprofessionals has emerged as *the way* rather than *a way* to operationalize inclusive education for students with disabilities" (p. 216). This idea has significantly increased the number of special education paraprofessionals throughout the United States (Pickett, Likins, & Wallace, 2002).

Scull and Winkler (2011) examined the trends in the number of special education students and personnel at both the national and state levels from 2000-01 to 2009-10 and noted the ratio of teachers to students has fluctuated over the last decade. Public schools employed 65 special education teachers per 1,000 special education students in 2000-01 to 63 special education teachers per 1,000 special education students in 2008-09, however, the number of special education paraprofessionals increased in number and ratio throughout the decade from 326,000 to 430,000 (Skull & Winkler, 2011). The ratio of special education paraprofessionals to students rose from 52 paraprofessionals per

1,000 special education students in 2000-01 to 60 paraprofessionals per 1,000 special education students in 2008-09. (Skull & Winkler, 2011).

The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2007) states most public elementary and secondary schools hire paraprofessional level staff to implement instructional strategies to students with disabilities, equaling approximately 12% of their total work force the majority of whom are employed full-time. According to Hoffman and Sable (2006), each school averages approximately eight full time paraprofessional staff. Table 1 outlines instructional paraprofessionals by their specific responsibility.

Table 1

Instructional Paraprofessionals in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Instructional Responsibility: 2003-04

Instructional Responsibility	Total²	Percentage of schools with instructional para-professionals	Average number per school	Average number of teachers per instructional para-professional	Percentage full-time
Total Paraprofessional	633,671	90.6	7.9	4.8	74.5
Special education	311,908	76.3	4.6	8.5	80.0
Regular Title I	94,934	35.5	3.0	11.2	68.7
ESL/bilingual	51,346	31.2	1.9	23.1	57.6
Library/media center	38,611	38.4	1.1	36.5	67.7
Other Instructional	136,871	41.8	3.7	9.8	74.0

¹ Estimates are calculated only for schools with instructional paraprofessionals. Estimates by type of instructional paraprofessionals are calculated only for schools with those instructional paraprofessionals.

² Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

³ Does not distinguish between full- and part-time status of staff.

NOTE: Standard errors are available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid+2007008>.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Questionnaire,” 2003-04.

Legal Aspects of Paraprofessionals

Laws Affecting Paraprofessionals. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) specified that “paraprofessionals who are adequately trained and supervised may assist in delivering special education and related services” (section 300.156). The reauthorization of IDEA (2004) required states to identify professional development areas required for staff, including paraprofessionals, to effectively support the academic and non-academic needs of students with disabilities and provides autonomy to states in how they meet this requirement (IDEA, 2004).

IDEA (2004) stated paraprofessional support must be provided to students with disabilities (including one-on-one services) if these services are required for the student to receive FAPE. *Education v. Rowley* (1982) defined what is considered appropriate as “access to specialized instruction and related services which are individually designed to provide educational benefit” (p. 3048). The IDEA (2004) also required that children be educated in the least restrictive environment [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(5)(A)].

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) stated paraprofessionals may perform a variety of support tasks including individual and classroom instructional support, parental collaboration, and provide translation services (2001). NCLB also addressed the supervision of paraprofessionals dictating a paraprofessional “may not provide any instructional service to a student unless the paraprofessional is working under the direct supervision of a teacher consistent with section 1119” (2001, para. 3).

Court Decisions Regarding the Criterion of Benefit for a Paraprofessional.

Lake Travis Independent School District (2003) argued that a student could not access the general education classroom without the provision of a one-to-one

paraprofessional to support the student's instructional needs. The hearing officer ruled in favor of the family finding that the benefit of inclusionary instruction for the student would not be achieved with the assignment of an individual paraprofessional. Another court decision involving a parent request for an individual paraprofessional to support their child in the general education setting is *Limestone County Board of Education* (1999). The school district believed that the student's inclusionary time was to be focused on socialization with typical peers and cited concerns that the assignment of a one-to-one paraprofessional would impede the student's ability to progress socially and offered peer support as an alternative to the use of an adult in the classroom. The hearing officer sided with the district agreeing that the assignment of a one-to-one paraprofessional would directly impact the student's ability to naturally socialize and building relationships with peers. Parents have also argued regarding the sufficiency of specific classroom aides and questioned potential deteriorations in a student's academic and behavioral performance (*Montgomery County Public Schools, 1997*). The Administrative Law Judge determined that the student needed a one-to-one paraprofessional to make adequate educational progress and cited the current classroom supports in place would not provide the student with the needed individual instruction required.

Roles and Responsibilities of Paraprofessionals

When determining the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals, the educational team including staff, student, and parents, must adhere to the procedures and protocols outlined in federal and/or state law (Ashbaker & Morgan, 1999). States and local education agencies continue to review how to best address student and staff needs to

ensure appropriate supports and education for students with disabilities (Hilton & Gerlach, 1997).

Marks et al. (1999) described several roles and responsibilities expressed by special education paraprofessionals working in the general education classroom supporting students with disabilities who felt they held the primary responsibility for student outcomes related to the inclusionary programming. Paraprofessionals must work in collaboration with teacher level staff to effectively meet the needs of students and should be provided specified plans which outline the paraprofessional's work in the classroom (French, 2001). When given clear expectations and defined roles, paraprofessionals feel they are a key member of a student's educational team (Giangreco et al., 2001).

Ghere and York-Barr (2003) reviewed the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals in inclusive programs across three school districts at both the elementary and secondary level with staff (special education directors, special education supervisors, principals, and paraprofessionals) identified as working effectively with students with disabilities in the general education setting. Selected staff was also responsible for the supervision of at minimum two paraprofessionals. Data collected through semi-structured interviews and group interviews identified six specific categories of responsibility including provision of academic support, assisting communicative attempts, facilitating social interactions, and managing specific student self-care needs (Ghere & York-Barr, 2003).

In 2006, a study completed by K.B. Patterson examined the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals through an interview process with 22

paraprofessionals working with students in kindergarten through 12th grade schools with a variety of disability categories including autism, Asperger's syndrome, cerebral palsy, developmental disability, Down Syndrome, emotional or behavioral disorder, and learning disability. Paraprofessionals reported their roles which consisted of the following: assisting a student or group of students, completing clerical tasks (copying, running errands, etc.), modifying activities, and managing student behavior.

Paraprofessionals also noted concerns indicating a need for a more defined role in their current job description, professional development, and collaboration between teachers, parents, and paraprofessionals (Patterson, 2006). Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008) conducted a study investigating the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals assigned to young children (ages three to five) with disabilities in the preschool setting in which paraprofessionals were asked to rate the frequency with which they conducted certain activities. Paraprofessionals reported the most frequently performed duty was to reteach concepts originally presented by the general education teacher and to monitor and support student behaviors both in and out of the classroom.

Another paraprofessional role and responsibility examined in the research literature is the facilitation of peer relationships. Paraprofessionals have the opportunity to facilitate peer relationships as they are often the staff spending the most time with students with disabilities in the general education setting (Rossetti & Goessling, 2010). When assigned to the general education setting as a support for a student with disabilities, paraprofessionals have an opportunity become familiar with the culture of the classroom and the opportunities for both academic and social interactions within them. Students sometimes see paraprofessionals as more approachable than teacher level staff and can

plan an important role in assisting students with disabilities in their attempts to obtain and maintain friendships (Roessetti & Goessling, 2010).

The specific set of responsibilities assigned to paraprofessionals, are determined based on designation to specific programming needs (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002). Giangreco et al. (2002) conducted a study through the use of questionnaires, observations, and interviews with 215 individuals including general education teachers, paraprofessionals, special educators, and school administrators in one kindergarten through 12th grade school district. Staff reported a shift in paraprofessional responsibilities from clerical to more instruction as a result of inclusionary programming for students with disabilities, however, paraprofessionals reported concerns that they were assuming roles and responsibilities similar to that of their higher paid teacher level counterparts without receiving any form of compensation. Staff also reported concerns that there was an overall increase in paraprofessional supports that occurred over a period of time that was not designed with an implementation plan by educators (Giangreco et al., 2002).

Brown et al. (1999) wrote, “It is reasonable to assign a paraprofessional to a school, a team, or a class, but only in the most extreme circumstances should one be assigned to a student” (p. 252). It is the primary investigator’s experience that paraprofessionals are often assigned to an individual student if he or she demonstrates significant behavioral or health concerns. When paraprofessionals are assigned to a specific classroom or program versus a one-to-one assignment with a specific student, this provides an opportunity for the teacher and paraprofessional to work collaboratively to assist several students in the general education setting (French, 1998).

Determining the Need for Paraprofessional Support

Etscheidt (2005) reported school administrators are given autonomy with regards to the hiring and assignment of a particular paraprofessional unless that assignment or choice impacts the student's ability to access FAPE or impedes his or her wellbeing. School districts must focus on providing paraprofessional support which provides student access to educational programming unless specific needs are outlined in the student's IEP (Etscheidt, 2005). The need for paraprofessional support to be assigned to a student with disabilities is determined by a student's IEP team. Giangreco, Broer, and Edelman (1999) suggested IEP teams collaborate and discuss the frequency and type of support needed by a paraprofessional to provide access to the student's academic curriculum.

Mueller and Murphy (2001) utilized a planning process and instrument to assist teams as they view students who require paraprofessional support for 50% or more of their day, assisting IEP teams to determine when to assign paraprofessionals to support students with disabilities. IEP teams conduct an intensive needs checklist and matrix which focuses on what students with disabilities can or cannot do and what type of assistance is needed during various portions of the student's day (Mueller & Murphy, 2001). Teams must also develop a plan to increase student independence in an effort to fade adult support and potentially increase appropriate peer socialization throughout a student's day (Etscheidt, 2005).

An IEP team may consider several factors when determining if the use of a paraprofessional is required for a student. Freschi (1999) created a template for educational team use when addressing paraprofessional student support needs which includes the identification of student goals and an outline of what accommodations or

modifications could be made to a student's educational program that would not require the use of a paraprofessional. Similarly, Giangreco et al. (1999) created specific recommendations for teams considering the use of a paraprofessional by asking teams to identify existing supports or resources available to students which could be reallocated and organized to support several children in the classroom.

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1999) provided additional clarification to educational teams when determining what roles and responsibilities will be performed to paraprofessionals and which may only be performed by highly qualified and certified staff members. In the researcher's experience, the amount of support provided to a student by a paraprofessional cannot be considered special education instruction as the paraprofessional is not hired as the highly qualified, certificated staff member. Etscheidt (2005) agreed that the teacher-level staff members maintain the instructional responsibility for all students.

However, Marks et al. (1999) found that paraprofessionals assigned to the general education setting were the individuals providing the majority of the support for students with disabilities. Marks et al. (1999) suggested school districts cannot require paraprofessionals to assume primary instructional responsibilities for inclusion students and reiterated the importance of collaboration and teaming when working to meet the needs of students. When assigning specific roles and responsibilities to paraprofessionals, French (2001) recommended providing detailed guidelines to assist the paraprofessional with the specific interventions required for a student as well as how those interventions will be supported and monitored by the supervising teacher(s). When paraprofessionals receive clear direction regarding their roles and responsibilities they

express a feeling of being a valuable member of a student's educational team (Giangreco et al., 2001).

As the numbers of paraprofessionals continue to grow, school districts are beginning to develop procedures to assist them in the utilization of this increased resource (French, 2003; Giangreco, 2003; Mueller & Murphy, 2001). Giangreco, Edelman, and Broer (2003) conducted a qualitative study across 46 schools in 13 states in which participants utilized a defined process to assess their current use of paraprofessionals and develop a possible action plan for areas of noted concern. Teams who utilized the system to create an action plan with their paraprofessionals found it improved overall rapport with paraprofessionals and created an opportunity for professional collaboration (Giangreco et al., 2003). As teams continued to meet and increase their alignment regarding the use of paraprofessionals they reported the collaborative efforts increased instructional efforts for teams, improved student achievement, increased social opportunities, and decreased inappropriate student behaviors (French, 2003).

Factors Influencing Paraprofessional Support

Parent Input. Often parents of students with disabilities request one-to-one paraprofessional support stating the lack of support would result in the student's inability to make academic achievement or access the general education setting (French & Chopra, 1999). Parents express concerns that their child's needs (physical, social, academic) will not be met in the educational setting without individual adult assistance provided by a paraprofessional (French & Chopra, 1999). French and Chopra (1999) utilized a focus parent group which stated the paraprofessionals working with their children were

compassionate and dedicated people and especially valued the paraprofessionals' roles as team members, instructors, caregivers, and health needs providers. School districts are required to include students with disabilities into the general education setting as much as possible which may require the use of a paraprofessional to effectively support students (Etscheidt & Bartlett, 1999).

However, Blacher (2007) cautioned parents stating, "The use of a paraprofessional works best when parents and school staff work together toward the common goal of full inclusion" (p.76). Additionally, concerns have been noted by both educators and parents regarding consistency of instructional implementations, supports, and communication between school and home when utilizing paraprofessionals to support students with disabilities (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007). When parents focus on singular portions of a student's educational program and request maximum paraprofessional support in an effort to achieve those specific goals, the parent may also be limiting their student in other areas specifically in the area of communication and socialization with peers (Mueller & Murphy, 2001).

It is recommended that educational teams frequently collaborate with families to obtain a greater understanding regarding requests for paraprofessional support (Giangreco et al., 2005). Collaboration opportunities could occur on a group or individual basis during which time the teacher and special educator explain their collaborative efforts with regards to educational programming. Following collaborative meetings, information could be shared with families regarding the potential positives and drawbacks associated with the use of paraprofessional supports (Giangreco et al., 2005).

Supervision and Training. One of the critical components of effectively using paraprofessionals includes training them. According to Mueller (2002), paraprofessional training can be described in three levels: preservice, on-the-job, and inservice training. Preservice training is provided prior to the paraprofessional starting work and is typically scheduled in blocks of time with specific agenda items. On-the-job training is the most common method of training utilized with paraprofessionals (Mueller, 2002). This training affords the opportunity for supervisors to observe both the paraprofessional and the student in the classroom and guide the paraprofessional's intervention implementation (Trautman, 2004). Paraprofessionals are given an opportunity to implement specific intervention strategies given direct, immediate, and specific feedback (French, 2003). Inservice training focuses on high quality professional development over a period of time which focus on specific paraprofessional roles, responsibilities, and skill sets (for example behavior management) (Vasa, Steckelbert, & Pickett, 2003). When determining the professional development needs of paraprofessionals, Cobb (2007) suggested following three steps to ensure appropriate and effective training activities. First, a needs assessment should be created requesting additional information of teacher level staff regarding instructional strategies utilized in their classrooms. Second, a series of training sessions lasting 45-60 minutes each should be created and the number of training sessions should be determined by the amount of time allowed for paraprofessional staff to be out of the classroom for training. Third, immediate follow-up and visual copies of materials should be provided to all staff (Cobb, 2007).

Historically, school districts have not focused their allocation of time and funds toward high quality professional development opportunities for paraprofessional level

staff development (Pickett, 1986, Pickett, 1996). Teacher level staff, assigned to supervise paraprofessionals, often require additional professional development regarding how to effectively collaborate and manage adult staff (Hilton & Gerlach, 1997; Pickett, 1996; Salzberg & Morgan, 1995). School districts often find the allocation of time, funds, and space difficult in order to provide the various levels of paraprofessional training (Harkness, 2003).

Wadsworth and Knight (1996) developed five training ideas for preparing paraprofessionals to work successfully within an inclusive setting. A centralized interdisciplinary training team should take a leadership role in preparing paraprofessionals for inclusion. Paraprofessionals should be prepared for new roles and unique responsibilities. Wadsworth and Knight also believed the special education teacher should establish rapport and an open communication system with the general education teacher, and should explain the role of the paraprofessional in the general classroom jointly to the paraprofessional and the general education teacher. Educational administration must review possible flexibility in paraprofessionals' academic schedules and duty assignments to provide for staff meetings at least once a week (Wadsworth & Knight, 1996). Paraprofessionals must be prepared to use a variety of techniques when working with a student in the general classroom setting, and should be provided adequate knowledge of each student's individual strengths and weaknesses and the level of assistance required by the paraprofessional (Wadsworth & Knight, 1996).

Paraprofessionals should be included in the planning of student assessment systems to ensure a full picture of each student's progress (Wadsworth & Knight, 1996). Carnahan, Williamson, Clark, and Sorenson (2009) believed when teacher-level and

paraprofessional-level staff share a philosophy regarding teaching and learning in the classroom, a consistent, coherent classroom environment can be supported.

Other individuals have focused on developing online self-paced technology programs for staff development specifically targeted for paraprofessional level staff. Steckelberg and Vasa (1998) developed a technology-oriented program of staff development for special education paraeducators known as the *University of Nebraska Paraeducator Training Program*, based on recognized principles of adult learning, as well as components of similar projects. The program consists of the following eight units: roles and responsibilities of paraeducators; ethical issues; organization and management of the classroom; developing instructional skills; behavior management; observing and recording student behavior; effective communication with students, teachers and other professionals; and special education programs and procedures (Steckelberg & Vasa, 1998). This program was field-tested in 1996 and 1997 in seven locations in Nebraska, and found to have improved the knowledge and skills of the majority of participants in all areas (Steckelberg & Vasa, 1998). Morgan, Forbush, and Nelson (2004) studied a 10-week online paraprofessional training program utilized by 54 participants, which yielded positive ratings from users and educational administration. This type of an online training program provided an opportunity for educational institutions to provide cost-efficient, instructor based training on a variety of approved professional development standards for paraprofessionals (Morgan et al., 2004).

Breton (2010) conducted interviews and surveys with 750 paraprofessionals assessing perceptions regarding the adequacy of their pre-service training and supervision, as well as, current professional development needs. Forty six percent of

respondents stated their training to provide strategies and techniques for working with their students was very poor to fair. When asked if they had received adequate support and direction on the job to conduct their roles and responsibilities, 29% indicated they were uncertain to strong disagreement with that statement. Sixty and a half percent of respondents reported having minimal collaborative opportunities with their supervising teacher with 15.9% of paraprofessionals indicating they did not receive specific directives regarding support needs for their assigned student (Breton, 2010).

Often teachers report that specific instructional plans were not provided for the paraprofessionals and were often only provided to paraprofessionals verbally (French, 2001). French (2001) expressed concern that paraprofessionals, “who traditionally have little or no training, may be working without direction or with hastily constructed or easily misconstrued oral directions” (p.51). Giangreco and Broer (2005) reported only 2% of special education teachers available time was spent to meet and collaborate with each paraprofessional they supervised.

The possibility of tort liability for injury exists for school districts when assigning paraprofessionals to perform tasks, however, staff or administration are not liable for negligent of a properly appointed and qualified paraprofessional (Etscheidt, 2005). If a teacher or principal assigned duties “for which the aide is not qualified” or that extended beyond the scope of employment, the supervisor may be liable for negligent acts by the aide (Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 575). School districts must inform all personnel involved in the assignment, supervision, or collaboration with paraprofessionals of potential legal concerns (Yell, 2002).

Paraprofessional Turnover. Effective inclusion education programs require team collaboration (Ghere & Barr, 2007). It is the primary investigator's experience that changes in personnel can have negative impacts on the collaborative efforts of staff which may directly impact service delivery to students. Paraprofessionals report several reasons for leaving paraprofessional positions including low pay and limited or nonexistent benefits in comparison to their teacher level co-workers (Ghere & Barr, 2007). Ghere and Barr (2007) identified four main areas reported by paraprofessional staff as reasons for leaving their current position: life events (i.e. retirement, entering college, etc.), transferring to another position within the school district, expectations and pressures of the job, lack of collaboration between team members. Paraprofessionals working in identified "low turnover" schools reported feeling they were an important part of the team supported and respected by their colleagues (Ghere & Barr, 2007). Employee turnover can be costly for school districts as a replacement employee salary can cost between 70% and 200% of the previous employee's salary (Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2001).

Concerns Regarding Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessional Challenges. The assignment of paraprofessionals to support students with disabilities is an increasingly popular programming option to meet inclusionary needs (Giangreco & Broer, 2009). Concerns with this type of programming can arise when the social interactions of students with disabilities occur primarily with a paraprofessional and not their peers and when curriculum accommodation and modification decisions are made by the paraprofessional and not the teacher level staff member (Causton-Theoharis, Giangreco, Doyle & Vadasy, 2007). Unfortunately,

teachers who are given the responsibility of supervising paraprofessionals often have no previous training or guidance regarding effective supervision techniques (Wallace, 2003).

Many teacher education programs emphasize strategies for classroom organization and managing student behavior, but few offer meaningful coursework or guidance to prepare teachers for supervising other adults (Carnahan et al., 2009).

Carnahan et al. (2009) outlined several key components for developing and maintaining effective paraprofessional and teacher level teams including conducting regularly scheduled staff meetings, consistent assessment of paraprofessional performance, provision of ongoing learning opportunities, and problem solving meetings. It is recommended that teams meet for 30 to 40 minutes weekly with a prepared agenda prior to the meeting as regularly scheduled meetings allow for the discussion of expectations and student performance, increase opportunities to provide positive feedback, and allow paraprofessionals to understand the reasons behind the work asked of them (Carnahan et al., 2009).

McGrath, Johns, and Mathur (2010) identified 10 potential “scenarios” and provided supportive suggestions for how to address the concern. Examples of the scenarios include “The Paramother” (p. 3) which is reported as a paraprofessional who has obtained their position after their own children are grown. The advantage to this paraprofessional is the comfort they may likely have with children and their ability to relate to them. The disadvantage to this paraprofessional is it may be difficult for them to create professional relationships with students. The suggestion for addressing this scenario is for teachers to clearly outline paraprofessional roles and responsibilities while praising the positive assets of the paraprofessional. Another example by McGrath et al.

(2010) is working with “The Teacher Wanna-Be” (p.5) reported as paraprofessionals who can create conflict with teacher-level staff, feeling they may be more effective in the meeting the needs of the student(s) than the teacher. This sometimes occurs when the paraprofessional has been assigned responsibilities which are typically performed by teacher level staff. The suggestion for addressing this scenario is for the teacher to outline the paraprofessional’s responsibilities from day one.

Overreliance on Paraprofessionals. Potential legal liability concerns have been identified for schools when assigning duties to paraprofessionals. When appropriately assigning a qualified paraprofessional to support student needs, school administration and staff are not considered liable if in the event the paraprofessional is careless in their duties (Etscheidt, 2005). However, if a teacher or principal assigns duties “for which the aide is not qualified” or that extended beyond the scope of employment, the supervisor may be liable for negligent acts by the aide (Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 575). Paraprofessionals who are asked to provide curriculum modifications without the guidance and direction of a teacher level staff member may potentially violate FAPE (Etscheidt, 2005).

Giangreco et al. (2006) stated, “The use of paraprofessionals has emerged as *the way* rather than *a way* to operationalize inclusive education for students with disabilities” (p. 216). Utilization of a paraprofessional staff member to support students with disabilities provides several potentially restrictive outcomes including: adult dependence, limiting social opportunities with peers, and decreased interactions with the general education teacher (Giangreco & Broer, 2009). Researchers cautioned teams considering the provision of paraprofessional staff to support inclusion programming and not provide

the support as an automatic “default”. Often administrators and teacher-level staff in schools will have concerns regarding paraprofessionals’ academic skills and their ability to teach so they may reach the conclusion that additional training is needed (Giangreco & Broer, 2009).

Giangreco et al. (2006) created a systematic program to assist educational teams as they attempt to address the potential overreliance of paraprofessional supports in inclusive school programs. The program identifies 10 major steps needed for teams to begin review of their current staffing practices. First there is the establishment of a team of individuals known as a planning team. This team utilizes specific guidelines to examine their current practices and identify priority needs which would be addressed through the creation of an action plan. It is recommended that input be sought from various stakeholders included staff and parents. The planning team is then asked to complete a 16 item screening tool which includes items of potential concern when utilizing paraprofessional staff (Giangreco et al., 1997; Giangreco et al., 2001; Giangreco et al., 2002; Giangreco et al., 2001). Giangreco et al. (2006) created a 20 item self-assessment that is completed by the entire school team (teacher, special educators, and administrators) which will prioritize the areas of greatest need to consider alternatives to current staffing practices to address the concerns and create an action plan to address priorities. The outcomes from Giangreco et al. (2006) noted that nearly half of the students with severe disabilities working with an individually assigned paraprofessional found great success functioning in the general education classroom with classroom-assigned paraprofessional supports intended to support all students in the classroom.

Over a three-year period, no adverse effects were noted and student performance was equal to or better than when assigned to an individual paraprofessional.

General Concerns. Giangreco (2003) identified additional concerns with the practice of placing paraprofessionals in general education classrooms to support students with disabilities. Some general educators may believe that a minimal amount of training provided to a paraprofessional is adequate and that the paraprofessional can perform all instructional activities for students with disabilities (Giangreco, 2003). Some paraprofessionals indicate they feel a responsibility to ensure the student they are supporting does not interfere with the classroom teacher's instruction (Marks et al., 1999).

When discussing paraprofessionals, it is important to consider the potential negatives outcomes for students when relying paraprofessionals as the main support option for students with disabilities who access the general education classroom (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001). Often paraprofessionals are the least qualified personnel available to support students and yet they are often given primary instructional responsibilities (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). Paraprofessionals face a number of challenges in their efforts to support students including a lack of defined roles and responsibilities, appropriate supervision, and professional development opportunities (Brown, et al., 1999). Student independence and limited social interaction opportunities with peers are a few of the concerns identified in the literature regarding the excessive use of individually assigned paraprofessional support for students with disabilities (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Blacher (2007) cautioned parents regarding the individual assignment of paraprofessionals to students with disabilities, citing advantages and

disadvantages for the student. While one-to-one paraprofessional support assists students with potential repetition of academic materials, facilitation of social skills, and personal care assistance (bathroom use, eating, dressing, etc.) the support may also interfere with peer interaction and create over reliance on the paraprofessional to complete tasks (Blacher, 2007). Giangreco and Broer (2005) also stated, “Virtually no student outcome data exist suggesting that students with disabilities do as well or better in school given paraprofessional supports” (p. 11).

For children with disabilities, IDEA (2004) specified that the services delineated on the IEP should be provided by individuals with the highest qualifications. Findings reported by French (1998, 2001) indicated that many paraprofessionals are providing services without written direction from a teacher level staff member and minimal collaborative opportunities with their supervising teacher(s). In a study conducted by French (2001), 447 special education teachers were surveyed regarding the amount of time each teacher spent collaborating or planning with their assigned paraprofessional staff members. Less than a third of the teacher level study participants reported planning with their assigned paraprofessional staff members and 25% reported they never met with their paraprofessional (French, 2001).

NCLB (2001) also outlined the responsibilities of the supervising teacher when creating student programming, modifying or accommodating curriculum, and evaluating student achievement; tasks that often are responsibilities given to paraprofessionals in many schools today (Giangreco et al., 1997). Downing, Ryndak, and Clark (2000) asserted that when assigned to inclusive settings, paraprofessionals are responsible for supporting students with disabilities within a classroom that may vary significantly from

that of a special education classroom. Furthermore, when paraprofessionals support students in general education classrooms, there is a limitation to the supervision and support that can be offered to the paraprofessional from the special education teacher (Downing et al., 2000). In addition, direct supervision of paraprofessional work in the general education classroom may be limited as many general education teachers may not have the experience or knowledge needed to guide paraprofessional supports provided to students with disabilities (Downing et al., 2000). It is recommended that teachers utilize a systematic approach when collaborating with paraprofessionals which includes shared planning opportunities and a clear overview of the expectations, goals, objectives, and teaching methods to use during specific learning activities (Carnahan et al., 2009).

Student Perspectives regarding Paraprofessional Support

In a qualitative study conducted by Tews and Lupart (2008) researchers interviewed eight high school students to obtain their perceptions of the role of their paraprofessionals and the impact of having a paraprofessional in the inclusive setting. Analysis of the interview data found defined themes such as the impact of a paraprofessionals on student peer interactions, the autonomy of the student with a disability, professional attributes of the paraprofessional identified by students with disabilities, the impact of the paraprofessional's presence on teacher level staff interactions with the student with disabilities, and the impact of a paraprofessional on the student's ability to be included into the school (Tews & Lupart, 2008). The majority of the eight participants believed their assigned paraprofessional was well received by other students in their classroom however, there was a feeling that it may have impacted student interaction opportunities as some peers did not want to interact with the student

supported by their individually assigned paraprofessional and five of the eight participants indicated their instructional interactions occurred more frequently with their paraprofessional than their classroom teacher (Tews & Lewpart, 2008). Results from the study further suggested that, “the promotion of socialization and peer networking may be compromised given that students reported they spent a majority of the school day interacting with their paraprofessional in contrast to the other students in the class” (Tews & Lewpart, 2008, p.44).

Broer, Doyle, and Giangreco (2005) studied 16 young adults with intellectual disabilities, who had received paraprofessional support to access the general education setting throughout their schooling. The former students perceived their paraprofessionals as mothers, friends, protectors from bullying, and as their primary teacher. Students reported that during their inclusive programming opportunities their academic and non-academic adult interactions occurred primarily with the paraprofessional and the majority of participants expressed their concerns of embarrassment, loneliness, rejection, and stigmatization as a result of having paraprofessional support (Broer et al., 2005) stating, “I want to be independent...in the halls, in the cafeteria” and “Well, sometimes I get tired of being with someone [a paraprofessional] for a long time” (p. 424).

Summary

Public educators have been working to create educational programming for students with disabilities for decades while the use of paraprofessionals to support the needs of students with disabilities is heavily documented in the research (Giangreco et al., 2001). Giangreco et al. (2006) stated, “The use of paraprofessionals has emerged as *the way* rather than *a way* to operationalize inclusive education for students with

disabilities” (p. 216). It is believed this has contributed to an increasing number of special education paraprofessionals nationally (Pickett et al., 2002). Over the past 10 years, special education paraprofessional numbers have increased from 360,000 to 430,000 across the United States of America (Scull & Winkler, 2011).

Educational law has directly impacted the use of paraprofessionals including IDEA (2004) which states that school districts must provide paraprofessional supports to students with disabilities if it is determined that the student’s accessibility to a free and appropriate public education would be impacted without such support to access their least restrictive environment [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(5)(A)]. The law further defined the supervision of paraprofessionals as outlined by NCLB stating a paraprofessional, “may not provide any instructional service to a student unless the paraprofessional is working under the direct supervision of a teacher consistent with section 119” (2001, para. 3). The paraprofessional is required to perform a variety of roles and responsibilities including assisting an individual or group of students, completing clerical tasks (copying, running errands, etc.), modifying activities, and managing student behavior (Patterson, 2006).

The need for paraprofessional support to be assigned to a student with disabilities is determined by a student’s IEP team. It is recommended that teams identify the areas of support required to meet students’ needs and review those needs to determine a plan for where, when, and how paraprofessional support will be provided (Giangreco & Broer, 2009). There are several factors which may influence paraprofessional support including requests from parents for a specifically assigned paraprofessional to support the academic and non-academic needs of their child (French & Chopra, 1999). Team collaboration is

identified as a key success factor when utilizing paraprofessionals for inclusion of students with disabilities. It is believed that the special education teacher should establish a rapport and an open communication system with the general education teacher, and the special education teacher should explain the paraprofessional's role in the general classroom jointly to the paraprofessional and the general education teacher (Wadsworth & Knight, 1996).

Giagreco and Broer (2009) reported that educational programming including paraprofessionals to support students with disabilities is an increasingly popular programming option to meet inclusionary needs. Unfortunately, teachers who are given the responsibility of supervising paraprofessionals often have no previous training or guidance regarding effective supervision techniques (Wallace, 2003).

In Chapter 3, the research questions and hypotheses for this study are outlined. A description of the research setting and participants is provided for review. This study utilized a mixed methods approach which is detailed in Chapter 3. Quantitative and qualitative research procedures involving the use of a survey, interviews, and classroom observations are detailed. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the data and summary of results.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Research Overview

This study investigated if there is a difference in the perceptions of specific educational team members (general education teacher, special education teacher and special education paraprofessional) regarding the roles and responsibilities of special education paraprofessionals in the general education classroom. The researcher believes investigating this difference may lead to uncovering uncoordinated efforts between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional supporting a student with a disability. Paraprofessional research literature contains significant material regarding the history, roles and responsibilities, and concerns regarding the use of paraprofessionals (Ghere & York-Barr, 2003; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008). However, the researcher found a limited number of studies reviewing the perceptions and dynamics of the educational team working together to provide paraprofessional support to students with disabilities.

This chapter will provide a description of the setting and participants utilized in the study. The study's mixed methods methodology will be outlined providing a description of the quantitative and qualitative procedures conducted. Various data sources will be described including an electronic participant survey, interview, and classroom observation.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question #1. What are the differences and similarities in the views held by special education teachers, general education teachers, and special education paraprofessionals of the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional in the general education setting?

Research Question #2. Can the specific roles/responsibilities needed to support students with disabilities in the general education setting, be delivered by school staff other than a special education paraprofessional (i.e. general education teacher or special education teacher)?

Hypothesis #1. There is a difference in the perception of paraprofessional use in the inclusive setting between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional, measured by responses to a Likert-scale survey.

Null Hypothesis #1. There is no difference in the perception of paraprofessional use in the inclusive setting between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional, measured by responses to a Likert-scale survey.

Hypothesis #2. There will be a difference when comparing response rates for the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional to the expected response rates.

Null Hypothesis #2. There will be no difference when comparing response rates for the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional to the expected response rates.

Research Setting

The study was conducted across five elementary schools in a large suburban school district in St. Louis County, Missouri. Table 2 shows the 2009-2010 population and student demographic data of the school district. This table demonstrates trends consistent with those across the state of Missouri such as increased free/reduced lunch rates. Spanning approximately 150 square miles, this district, contained 30 schools serving nine communities (RSD, 2010). In the researcher's experience, the delivery of special education services to students in St. Louis County, Missouri is a unique scenario as all special education services are provided by one large school district. The special education study participants were employed by a large suburban school district which provided special education services to children with disabilities in 265 public schools in 22 partner school districts throughout St. Louis County, Missouri (SSD, 2010).

Table 2

Demographics of Research Site School District

	School Year				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total Enrollment	22,047	22,245	22,412	22,285	22,382
Asian	876	925	1031	1136	1207
Number	4.0	4.2	4.6	5.1	5.4
Percent					
Black	2,279	2,458	2,504	2,303	2,262
Number	10.3	11.0	11.2	10.3	10.1
Percent					
Hispanic	322	342	385	395	405
Number	1.5	1.5	1.7	1.8	1.8
Percent					
Indian	39	46	50	44	39
Number	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Percent					
White	18,531	18,474	18,442	18,407	18,469
Number	84.1	83.0	82.3	82.6	82.5
Percent					
Free/Reduced Lunch (FTE) ^a	2,652.50	2,789.00	2,778.20	2,646.60	3,112.20
Number	12.6	13.1	13.0	13.2	14.4
Percent					

^aJanuary Data is used as the denominator when calculating the percent. Source: Missouri Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education Core Data As Submitted by Missouri Public Schools. Posted November 12, 2010.

Participants

A limited sample of participants at the elementary level in five elementary schools (n=15; 5 general education teachers, 5 special education teachers, and 5 special education paraprofessionals) was taken from the larger population (110 general education teachers, 25 special education teachers, 18 special education paraprofessionals) assigned to students in the general education setting supported by a special education paraprofessional. Though the small sample size of this study (n=15) is a limitation,

Holton and Burnett (1997) stated, “One of the real advantages of quantitative methods is their ability to use smaller groups of people to make inferences about larger groups that would be prohibitively expensive to study” (p. 71). For the purpose of this study, examining the total population of special education paraprofessionals would not have been feasible for this particular study as there are over 200 currently assigned to this district.

Teachers and special education paraprofessionals were chosen by the primary investigator based on their assignment to students with educational disabilities participating in the general education setting with the assistance of special education paraprofessionals. Five teams consisting of one special education teacher, one general education teacher, and one special education paraprofessional, were selected to participate in this study based on their assignment to a building not supervised by the primary investigator. All participants individually completed an electronic survey and face-to-face interview. Three classroom observations in the general education setting were completed by the primary investigator and a collaborating colleague at the study school utilizing the classroom observation tool (Appendix A). Additional field notes were taken to provide specific information regarding the number of students, size of classroom, and types of student activities conducted during the observations.

Given the anonymous nature of this study, participant information is generally summarized. All participants were assigned to an elementary school, grades kindergarten through fifth. Participants’ experience in education ranged from two years to 25 years and general education teacher participants for this study taught kindergarten, first, and fourth grades. Special education teacher participants for this study provided itinerant

(student spent less than 60% of their day in the special education setting) and self-contained (student spent more than 60% of their day in the special education setting) level special education services for students in an assigned building. Each team (general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional) was assigned to a different building.

Methodology

This study utilized a sequential mixed methods approach. Mixed methods research is defined as, “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). The researcher applied the eight step process developed by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) in which the researcher determines a question, decides the appropriateness of a mixed design, selects a mixed-method or mixed-model research design, collects, analyzes, and interprets the data to draw any possible conclusions.

Similarly, Johnson and Turner (2003) suggested researchers who utilize a variety of methods to analyze a mixture of information are able to obtain results outlining strengths and minimizing weaknesses. For this study, multiple data sources were analyzed including interviews, an online survey, and classroom observation. Information collected using the online survey, provided baseline data to triangulate participant response during their individual interviews and data collected during classroom observations. The interview protocol provided a greater depth of understanding regarding the various participant’s perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of the special education paraprofessional.

Procedures

First, the researcher obtained permission to utilize the survey instrument in this study from the Associate Superintendent and Directors of Research for both districts (Appendix B). Written permission was then obtained from study participants at the time of the face-to-face interviews (Appendix C). After obtaining written permission from participants, face-to-face 20 minute audiotaped interviews were conducted with study participants at their designated schools in March 2010 (Appendix D). Participants were asked questions about their educational experiences, backgrounds, trainings, and perspectives regarding the roles and responsibilities of the special education paraprofessional. An electronic version of a previously developed survey by Minondo et al. (2001) was then emailed to all study participants with a survey cover letter (Appendix E). The final procedure, classroom observations, was completed during which the primary investigator completed an observational checklist documenting specific observed roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional (Appendix A). Classrooms were observed on three separate occasions for 40-60 minutes each. Observations were conducted over a two-month period at various times during the instructional day.

Quantitative Procedures

Instrumentation. An initial literature review of existing data regarding special education paraprofessional roles and responsibilities was completed by the primary investigator in an effort to identify previously established data measurement tools utilized in research. During the review, the study completed by Minondo et al. (2001) was obtained which utilized a 15 question survey instrument involving various roles and responsibilities completed by special education paraprofessionals. The primary

investigator contacted each author of the Minondo et al. (2001) study, requesting permission to utilize the survey instrument.

Development of the Instrument. This study involved the use of a survey instrument originally developed by Minondo et al. (2001). Minondo et al. (2001) collected an initial listing of 116 role and responsibility statements compiled through a literature review on paraprofessionals in school settings. In addition, job descriptions for paraprofessionals were solicited from school districts within New York State and from several additional districts from regions known to be experienced in inclusive programming for students with severe disabilities. Five researchers with expertise in teaching students with severe disabilities then individually sorted the role and responsibility statements into 15 items which were developed into the survey (Minondo et al., 2001).

A total of 94 general education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals rated the appropriateness of the survey items developed by Minondo et al. (2001). Each general education teacher had experience working with an average number of five students with significant disabilities, each special education teacher instructed an average of seven, and each paraprofessional worked with an average of four. However, the average teaching experience in inclusive settings for all general education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals was two years.

Instrument Reliability. To assess inter-rater reliability, Minondo et al. (2001), obtained an expanded sample of 52 paraprofessionals who participated in a test-retest study; 13 who had participated (at first testing) in the first sample agreed to take the retest as well, and an additional 39 paraprofessionals were recruited specifically for the test-

retest study. All had worked in inclusive classrooms in urban areas of New York and Pennsylvania for a minimum of two years (35 at the elementary and 17 at middle school levels). Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated based on the categories and total survey scores. Test-retest reliability across the one-month interval was .98 ($p < .001$) for the total survey scores. Correlation coefficients for the four factors (see validity) were .40, .61, .67, and .51, indicating moderate to high stability of the survey factors. All correlations were significant at the .001 level. (Minondo et al., 2001).

Instrument Validity. The 15 item scores were factor analyzed using a varimax oblique rotation (SPSS for Unix) by Minondo et al. (2001). Loadings of 15 items categorized into four factors. The intercorrelation of the 15 items ranged from .51 (item 10, family liaison) to .81 (item 9, provide general school duties). The four factor labels were: Instruction Role, School Support Role, Liaison Role, and Personal Support Role. The analysis revealed intercorrelation for the 15 items, which indicated that all items for the survey measured various aspects of the roles and responsibilities consistently.

One-way ANOVA was used by Minondo et al. (2001) was to examine differences in the responses of the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals in inclusive settings across the three groups (general education, special education, and paraprofessionals). The analysis revealed a significant difference between two categories: school support role, [$F(2,91 \text{ df}) = 5.28, p < .05$], and liaison role, [$F(2,91 \text{ df}) = 4.05, p < .05$]. A post hoc analysis determined that the ratings by general education teachers and paraprofessionals differed significantly on these categories (Minondo et al., 2001).

Permission to conduct research within both districts was obtained (Appendix B), and invitational emails were submitted to participating teachers. Permission was also

obtained from five individual elementary building principals to perform observations and interviews within the building.

Survey Procedures. Once the primary investigator received permission to utilize the Minondo et al. (2001) study, the primary investigator created an electronic version of the Minondo et al. survey utilizing an online survey program – Survey Monkey (See Appendix F). The primary investigator generated an email from the Survey Monkey account sent in April 2010 to all participants' school email addresses paired with an electronic survey cover letter (Appendix E). The email contained a link to the electronic survey for participants to complete. As participants completed the online survey, results were collected and maintained electronically for future analysis.

Qualitative Procedures

Interviews. Participants completed an audio taped interview, conducted by the primary investigator prior to completion of the electronic survey (See Appendix D). Participants were asked specific questions in an effort to obtain additional information regarding participants' professional experiences in education. Additional interview questions were added regarding three survey items which were unobservable during classroom observations: a) What type of additional classroom support such as running errands, copying, etc. is provided by the paraprofessional? b) Do you participate in community based instruction? c) What type of communication do you have with the family of your student? Interviews were coded and transcribed for analysis by the primary investigator. Patton (1990) described three types of qualitative interviewing: a) informal, conversational interviews; b) semi-structured interviews; and c) standardized, open-ended interviews. This study utilized a standardized, open-ended interview

ensuring each study participant received the same open-ended questions. Patton (1990) also stated the use of a tape recorder during interviews is “indispensable” (p. 348). The primary investigator utilized a tape recorder during interviews and maintained audio data electronically for further analysis.

Observations. Classroom observations of each special education paraprofessional were conducted in the general education setting during the spring semester of the 2009-2010 school year. Patton (1990) recommended interviews be conducted in conjunction with observations as observations provide an opportunity to obtain a greater depth of knowledge and first person account of the context in which questions are answered. The researcher observed all five special education paraprofessionals to identify what roles and responsibilities they performed in the general education classroom on two separate occasions by primary investigator. A third observation was also completed by a collaborative colleague utilizing the classroom observational tool, in an effort to determine inter-rater reliability. Special education paraprofessionals were observed for 30 minutes in the general education classroom setting during which time the researcher completed a classroom observation sheet derived from information in the Minodo et al. (2001) survey (See Appendix A).

Data Analysis

Analysis of interviews, observations, and surveys took place in three stages including: coding data, summarizing coded data, and synthesizing data. In the first stage, coding data, all interviews and observations were coded into meaningful units that signified a specific category. All members of the five teams (general education teacher, special education teacher, special education paraprofessional) were coded to signify their

association with a specific team and specific role. In the second stage, summarizing coded data, the researcher examined and summarized all interviews and observations to obtain essential information from each. In the third and final stage, synthesizing data, the researcher interpreted all interview and observation data to find relationships among categories and to identify any potential patterns.

The researcher maintained the results of the survey electronically and analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to analyze possible differences in responses across the three groups (general education teachers, special education teachers, and special education paraprofessionals). Bluman (2006) stated the ANOVA technique should be utilized when attempting to determine if there is a significant difference among three or more means. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test the following null hypothesis: There is no difference in the perception of paraprofessional use in the inclusive setting between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional, measured by responses to a Likert-scale survey.

Due to the small size of each team (three participants – one general education teacher, one special education teacher, and one special education paraprofessional), a Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test was also completed to determine if observed proportions for a response within a specific team differed (Bluman, 2006). The Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test was conducted to test the following null hypothesis: There will be no difference when comparing response rates for the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional to the expected response rates. A second Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test and a Chi Square Test for Independence were conducted

to determine if a team member's job role influenced the rate of agreement between the researcher and the study participant.

A second Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test was conducted to analyze the consistency of response when compared to the researcher's expected response level. The researcher developed an expected response based upon literature review and personal observations and experiences as a special educator. The Chi Square Test for Independence was used to support those results and checked the null hypothesis: The agreement rate on responses concerning perception of role is independent of the job position (Principal Investigator, General Educator, Special Educator, Paraprofessional).

Summary

This study provides an in-depth look at five educational teams working together to provide support to students with disabilities in the general education setting. The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a difference in perception between a student's team members (general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional) regarding the roles and responsibilities of special education paraprofessionals in the general education classroom. This study involved a sequential mixed-methods approach utilizing data (interviews, surveys, and observations) collected during the 2009-2010 school year. Chapter 4 presents the results of all qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Research Findings

Overview

In the experience of the researcher, school districts continue to initiate, improve, and grow inclusive settings for students with disabilities. Thus, schools are seeking ways in which to effectively and efficiently provide support for students in the general education setting. As districts determine how to best meet their student needs, the use of special education paraprofessionals to assist students in the general education setting continues to be an option. The researcher believes that district leaders may use the results of this research to develop trainings regarding best practices when creating educational programming involving the use of special education paraprofessionals. This study utilized a sequential mixed-methods approach. The quantitative component of the study asked study participants to complete a 15 question electronic survey utilizing a Likert-type scale with responses numbered from one (not appropriate) to seven (most appropriate), with a mid-point of four (appropriate). The qualitative component of the study utilized two separate data sources. The first source of data came from one-on-one, face-to-face interviews completed with each study participant. The second source of data came from classroom observations conducted by the primary investigator on three separate occasions.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

The researcher conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and a Chi Square Goodness of Fit to test to the following hypothesis:

There is no difference in the perception of paraprofessional use in the inclusive setting between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional, measured by responses to a Likert-scale survey.

The researcher conducted a Chi Square Test for Independence and a Chi Square Goodness of Fit test to the following hypothesis:

There will be no difference when comparing response rates for the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional to the expected response rates.

Research question (RQ1): What are the differences and similarities in the views held by special education teachers, general education teachers, and special education paraprofessionals of the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional in the general education setting?

Research question (RQ2): Can specific roles/responsibilities needed to support students with disabilities in the general education setting, be delivered by school staff other than a special education paraprofessional (i.e. general education teacher or special education teacher)?

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data component of this study involved the use of a survey instrument originally created by Minondo et al. (2001). The primary investigator obtained permission to implement a survey utilized in Minondo et al. (2001) consisting of 15 items related to various roles performed by paraprofessionals. The Minondo et al. (2001) survey placed all 15 survey items into five role constructs (Table 3) below.

Table 3

Five Paraprofessional Role Constructs

-
1. Instructional Role
 - a. Team membership
 - b. Emotional support for student(s)
 - c. Monitoring student performance
 - d. Staff development
 2. School Support Role
 - a. Provide general school duties
 - b. Basic support tasks
 - c. Community-based instruction
 3. Liaison Role
 - a. Material adaptation
 - b. Peer facilitator or connector
 - c. Family Liaison
 4. Personal Support Role
 - a. Personal care
 - b. Therapy objectives
 - c. Take on student's role
 - d. Assist with entire class
 5. One-to-one role
 - a. One-to-one in-class support
-

Utilizing a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), participant responses to each survey item were analyzed across three groups (general education teachers, special education teachers, and special education paraprofessionals). The survey was electronically created utilizing Survey Monkey and emailed to study participants for completion.

Null Hypothesis: There is no difference in the perception of paraprofessional use in the inclusive setting between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional, measured by responses to a Likert-scale survey.

Table 4

Average Survey Response by Role

	General Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Paraprofessional
Personal Care	5	4.8	4.6
1:1 In Class	6.8	6.4	5.8
Therapy Objectives	6.4	5.6	4
Material Adaptation	5.6	5.6	5.4
Assist with Entire Class	4.2	5.4	5
Peer Facilitator	6.6	6.8	6
Classroom Support	1.6	3.2	5
Community Instruction	2.6	3.2	3.4
General School Duties	2.2	5	3
Family Liaison	4.6	3.2	2.6
Team Member	4.8	2.4	4
Monitor Performance	2.4	4.4	3.2
Emotional Support	7	3.2	5.2
Staff Development	5.8	6.4	4.4
Take on Student's Role	3.8	3.4	3.8

As detailed in Table 5, each of the 15 roles and responsibilities from the Minondo et al. (2001) study are grouped into five paraprofessional role constructs. Though not identical, there was no statistically significant difference between team members' perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of the special education paraprofessional

assigned to a student in an inclusive setting. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Table 5

ANOVA Results

Category	F ¹	Sig.
<i>Instructional Role</i>		
Team Member	2.023	.167
Emotional Support	1.636	.240
Monitor Performance	1.141	.392
Staff Development	2.717	.091
<i>School Support Role</i>		
General School Duties	2.000	.171
Classroom Support	1.924	.183
Community Instruct	.567	.692
<i>Liaison Role</i>		
Material Adaptations	1.149	.389
Peer Facilitator	.825	.538
Family Liaison	1.270	.344
<i>Personal Support Role</i>		
Personal Care	.839	.531
Therapy Objectives	.317	.860
Assist with Entire Class	1.403	.302
Take on Student's Role	1.017	.444
<i>One-to-One Role</i>		
1:1 In Class	.741	.741

¹F-critical value = 39.00

*alpha = 0.05

df = 14

Due to the small size of each team, a Chi Square Goodness of Fit Test was completed to determine if observed proportions for a response within a specific team differed from the hypothesized proportions.

Null Hypothesis: There will be no difference when comparing response rates for the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional to the expected response rates.

As seen in Table 6, a hypothesized distribution per team was created by the researcher following individual interviews and classroom observations of the special education paraprofessional in the general education classroom. The researcher hypothesized differences in the teams given the various academic and non-academic needs of the students supported by the special education paraprofessional and comments specifically made by the general education teacher with regards to the special education paraprofessionals' interactions with all students in the general education classroom.

Table 6

Primary Investigator's Hypothesized Distributions by Team

	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Team 5
Personal Care	7	1	6	1	1
1:1 In Class	7	6	7	7	6
Therapy	5	2	5	6	4
Objectives					
Material	6	1	7	1	2
Adaptation					
Assist with	2	1	1	1	4
Entire Class					
Peer	4	7	5	7	2
Facilitator					
Classroom	1	1	1	1	1
Support					
Community	1	1	1	1	1
Instruction					
General	7	3	3	1	1
School Duties					
Family	4	1	3	1	1
Liaison					
Team	6	7	2	4	2
Member					
Monitor	3	2	3	6	1
Performance					
Emotional	6	7	6	6	2
Support					
Staff	5	2	2	5	2
Development					
Take on	4	1	7	1	2
Student's					
Role					

Results of the Chi Square Goodness of Fit test by team are provided in Table 7. The mean of responses from each team was compared with the researcher’s hypothesized team response. A comparison of results shows no significant difference between team values and expected values therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Table 7

Chi Square Goodness of Fit by Team

	Team	Researcher
<i>Team 1</i>		
Chi-Square	2.400	2.267
Asymp. Sig.	.966	.894
<i>Team 2</i>		
Chi-Square	3.333	8.000
Asymp. Sig.	.972	.092
<i>Team 3</i>		
Chi-Square	6.000	.600
Asymp. Sig.	.423	.988
<i>Team 4</i>		
Chi-Square	7.000	6.600
Asymp. Sig.	.637	.086
<i>Team 5</i>		
Chi-Square	1.200	5.533
Asymp. Sig.	.997	.137

*alpha = 0.05

A Chi Square Test for Independence compared average response for each role to the expected response of the researcher to test the null hypothesis: The agreement rate on responses concerning perception of role is independent of the job position (Principal Investigator, General Educator, Special Educator, Paraprofessional). The researcher did not reject the null hypothesis (test value, 12.15; critical value, 55.78). The perception is independent of the role of the professional. The job role does not seem to influence the rate of agreement.

Table 8

Chi Square Goodness of Fit by Role

	General Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher	Paraprofessional
<i>Chi-Square</i>	2.628	5.749	4.811
<i>Critical Value</i>	55.758	55.758	55.758

*alpha = 0.05

Results of the Chi Square Goodness of Fit test by role compared the mean of responses from each of the three role categories (general education teacher, special education teacher, special education paraprofessional) with the researcher’s hypothesized role responses. The null hypothesis was: The agreement rate on responses concerning perception of role is consistent with expected values found by the PI. A comparison of results shows no significant difference between specific roles values and expected values therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Classroom Observations. The researcher completed observations of the special education paraprofessional in the general education setting. Observations ranged from 40-60 minutes and were not conducted outside of the general education teacher’s classroom. The primary investigator created an observation tool derived from Minondo et al. (2001) (See Appendix A). The classroom observation tool was created to be used in conjunction with a narrative description of events seen in the general education classroom. The observation tool was comprised of a checklist for 11 of the 15 questions from the participant electronic survey. Four questions were excluded from the

observation tool as the researcher determined these paraprofessional roles and responsibilities were not observable in the general education classroom: providing general classroom support, participating in community based instruction, communication with student families, and professional development. These four questions were added to the participant interview in an effort to gather additional information for each.

The researcher conducted two observations with a third observation completed by a collaborating colleague. The researcher reviewed narrative data to determine whether a specific paraprofessional role/responsibility from the electronic survey was observed or non-observed. Paraprofessional roles and responsibilities were documented specifically if viewed during one or all three classroom observations. Of note, four roles/responsibilities were not observed with any team: general school duties were not observed as all observations occurred in the general education classroom; team membership was not observed with any team as no team meetings were conducted in the general education classroom during the time of observations; and monitoring of performance (checking and grading homework) was not observed with any team. The primary investigator believes monitoring of performance may not have been viewed due to observations occurring in general education classrooms at the elementary level which tend to provide less opportunity for graded homework. Therapy objectives, such as fine motor activities from an occupational therapist, may have been observed but were not documented as the primary investigator did not have specific student information with regards to therapy objectives.

Team one observations occurred in a classroom with approximately 17 students in an average sized room. Students were seated with both individual desks as well as

student group centers utilizing round tables. During observations, students completed work at individual tables and on the floor, as well as, an integration of technology using an interactive whiteboard. The special education paraprofessional was not observed providing personal care to the assigned student but was observed ensuring the student had space to ambulate around the crowd of peers in the classroom to avoid any potential falls as a result of objects and/or peers. One-to-one classroom support such as providing assistance with writing, redirection to task, and repetition of directions was constantly provided as the paraprofessional sat in close proximity of the student with disability(s) throughout observations. Materials were adapted during each observation, specifically modifying writing activities for the student. Assistance with the entire class was not observed though the paraprofessional would acknowledge and/or redirect students as needed. Peer facilitation was documented during one observation in which the paraprofessional provided verbal cuing to the student during a social discourse with a peer. The majority of classroom activities did not allow for social opportunities during observations as students were participating in large group or independent academic tasks focused on teacher directives. The paraprofessional did appear very aware of the assigned student's peers and welcomed any potential social interactions. The most observed role/responsibility was providing the student with emotional support. The paraprofessional provided constant verbal encouragement and praise as the assigned student initiated and completed work. Some physical assistance in the form of hand-over-hand support was provided during some writing tasks. The general education teacher was observed providing individual directions and verbal cues and reminders to the student during observations.

Team two observations occurred in a classroom with approximately 18 students in an average sized room. Students were seated at large round tables throughout the room. During observations both table work and floor work was completed by students, as well as, an integration of technology using an interactive whiteboard. The special education paraprofessional was not observed providing personal care to the assigned student; however, the team reported the need for assistance with fasteners during toileting. One-to-one in-class support involving verbal and visual cueing and redirection to task was provided to the student with disability(s) at various times during the observation. The special education paraprofessional adapted materials as needed such as providing a written model or highlighting lined paper specifically when activities contained a writing component. Repetition of general education teacher directions was also provided. During each observation, the special education paraprofessional provided support such as repetition of directions, redirection to task, and assistance with manipulatives (scissors, pencils, etc.) to several students in the classroom in addition to the assigned student. Peer facilitation was also observed during two of the three observations. The special education paraprofessional intervened when appropriate, and attempted to facilitate communication by modeling appropriate turn taking and engaging both peers in a topic of shared interest. Emotional support was minimally observed and did not appear to be needed for the assigned student. The special education paraprofessional was not observed taking on the student's role and doing work for the assigned student. The general education teacher was observed providing individual directions and verbal cues and reminders to the student during observations.

Team three observations occurred in a classroom with approximately 20 students in an average sized room. Students were seated in pods of desks – four students to a pod with one desktop computer to share. During observations both table work was completed by students, as well as, an integration of technology using an interactive whiteboard. A fire drill was completed during one observation. The primary investigator followed the class group outside during the drill and continued to collect data. The special education paraprofessional was not observed providing personal care for the assigned student. One-to-one in-class assistance was consistently provided for the assigned student as the special education paraprofessional maintained close proximity to the student at all times. Material adaptation was not observed; however, frequent follow-up was provided by the special education paraprofessional as she clarified and repeated procedures designed by the general education teacher. The special education paraprofessional provided some assistance to other students in the classroom in addition to the assigned student such as answering student questions regarding vocabulary and assistance with student textbooks to find specific page numbers or passages within the text. Specifically, assistance was provided to the students seated at the assigned student's table. Minimal peer facilitation was observed due to the nature of the activities conducted in the classroom. The assigned student received a great deal of emotional support during each observation. The special education paraprofessional provided constant praise and encouragement during each activity. Physical assistance was not provided to the student during observations. The general education teacher was not observed providing individual directions or assistance to the student during observations.

Team four observations occurred in a classroom with approximately 18 students in an average sized room. Students were seated at round tables throughout the classroom. During observations both table work and floor work was completed by students. The special education paraprofessional was not observed providing personal care for the assigned student. One-to-one in-class support was provided to the assigned student at all times as the special education paraprofessional maintained close proximity. Classroom material adaptation was not observed. The special education paraprofessional assisted with the needs of the entire class when students engaged and requested assistance. Of note, peer facilitation was not documented during any observation. Per survey and interview, the assigned student's greatest needs are in the social skill area requiring a great deal of peer facilitation. The special education paraprofessional provided frequent interactions with the assigned student in an effort to address any emotional needs. Physical assistance to complete student work was not observed. The general education teacher was not observed providing individual directions or assistance to the student during observations.

Team five observations occurred in a classroom with approximately 17 students in an average sized room. Students were seated at individual desks positioned in rows. During observations both table work was completed by students, as well as, an integration of technology using an interactive whiteboard. The special education paraprofessional was not observed providing personal care assistance to the assigned student. One-to-one in-class support was provided to the student during certain times of observations. The special education paraprofessional minimally maintained close proximity to the student and maintained at the side of the classroom during the majority

of observations. Material adaptations were not observed during observations. The special education paraprofessional provided great assistance to the rest of the class. Whole class instructions were provided by the special education paraprofessional on two separate occasions. Peer facilitation activities were not documented during any observation as classroom activities observed did not provide social opportunities. The special education paraprofessional provided constant cuing and encouragement to her assigned student in an effort to maintain attention to task and complete work. Physical assistance to complete student work was not observed. The general education teacher was not observed providing individual directions or assistance to the student during observations.

Teacher interview responses. Participants completed an audio taped interview, conducted by the researcher, consisting of 11 questions derived from information in the Minodo et al. (2001) survey (See Appendix D).

The first interview question asked participants, “How long have you been in education?” This question obtained some background information regarding the participants and their varied years of experience in education regardless of his/her current role (i.e. general education teacher, special education teacher, special education paraprofessional). Several participants had experience in multiple roles. In four of the five teams the paraprofessional was the least experienced team member.

Table 9

Team and Participant Role Years of Educational Experience

Team	General Education	Special Education	Paraprofessional
Team 1	9	24	9
Team 2	11	6	25
Team 3	5	10	2
Team 4	4	9	2
Team 5	14	30	5

The second interview question asked participants, “What type of professional development have you participated in to assist you with working with students with special needs?” This question obtained information regarding participants’ background knowledge specifically in the area of special education. Professional development experiences ranged from college coursework to workshops offered at the district level. When probed by the primary investigator to identify specific professional development topics, participants reported experience with the following: autism, academic differentiation, and behavior interventions. One team reported recent attendance at an inclusion workshop in which the general education teacher and special education teacher attended together.

The third interview question asked participants, “What type of assistance does your student require in the classroom?” This question obtained information regarding the specific needs of the student in the general education classroom. Participants reported a

variety of student needs ranging from attention and task focus to safety and behavior. Within four of the five teams, each team member (general education teacher, special education teacher, special education paraprofessional) provided both similar and varied needs for their student. One team aligned all of their answers reporting the student required assistance for safety in the general education setting.

The fourth interview question asked participants, “What type of support do you provide for your student?” This question obtained information regarding the specific interventions and/or support provided by each team member role (general education teacher, special education teacher, special education paraprofessional). In four of the five teams, the special education teacher reported providing student support in the special education setting only. One team included a special education teacher who provided weekly support in the general education classroom. One general education teacher did not provide specific examples of support but reported, “I treat her (student) like every other student. I attend to her needs as much as others.” In four of the five teams, the general education teacher reported providing individual assistance to the student as needed in the form of repeating directions and/or checking for understanding.

The fifth interview question asked participants, “What are the greatest needs of your student?” This question obtained the individual perspective of specific team members with regards to the priority need(s) of the student they serve. Two of the five teams met consensus regarding the greatest need(s) of the student they serve.

Table 10

Greatest Student Need

	General Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Paraprofessional
Team 1	Safety	Safety	Encouragement to complete tasks
Team 2	Task focus/Social skills	Self regulation	Social skills
Team 3	Toileting/modification of work	Task focus	Modification of work
Team 4	Social skills	Social skills	Social skills
Team 5	Task focus	Task focus	Task focus

The sixth interview question asked participants, “How do you identify the needs of your student?” This question obtains information regarding how each team member gathered student data. Team members reported a wide range of methods for identifying needs including: communication with various team members, classroom observation, and parent input. One paraprofessional reported, “I’ve worked with her for about a year now, I really know her” regarding knowledge of the needs of the student.

The seventh interview question asked participants, “How do you continually assess the needs of your student?” This question was meant to obtain information regarding how student needs are assessed in both the academic and non-academic areas. In all five teams, the general and special education teachers reported both formal and informal assessments of their student regarding academic needs. Four out of five paraprofessionals reported observation as the primary means for assessing the needs of their assigned student. One paraprofessional reported, “I can’t do the whole ‘aide and

fade’ thing because I have to constantly watch him.” No team reported assessment of their student regarding non-academic needs.

The eighth interview question asked participants, “How often do you meet and collaborate as a team (special education teacher, general education teacher, teacher assistant)?” This question obtained information regarding how often the entire team met either formally or informally to discuss the needs of their student. During the interview, the primary investigator stressed that each team member was present during the collaborative time. Study participants appeared anxious when answering this question as several individuals commented that they did not meet as a team and felt that was a concern. One general education teacher commented, “I don’t feel we are connected as a team.” One special education paraprofessional commented, “I feel like I’m interrupting sometimes if I want to talk about something.” Three of the five special education teachers reported meeting with the special education paraprofessional on a daily basis.

Table 10

Team Collaboration Time

	General Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Paraprofessional
Team 1	2-3 times a week	Daily	3-4 times a week
Team 2	Never	Never	Never
Team 3	Never	Never	Never
Team 4	Once a year	Never	Not very often
Team 5	Monthly	Hardly ever	Never

Interview questions nine, 10, and 11 were created in an effort to obtain information that may not have been able to be obtained through classroom observation.

The ninth interview question asked participants, “What type of additional classroom

support such as running errands, copying, etc. is provided by the paraprofessional.”

Three of the five special education teachers reported they did not know if the special education paraprofessional was providing this type of support to the general education teacher. All five special education paraprofessionals indicated they performed very little to no additional classroom support. One paraprofessional stated, “I do very little of that, sometimes I copy maybe one sheet but she (teacher) knows I’m there for the student.”

One general education teacher stated, “The paras I don’t like I send them on errands and such, the paras I do like I have them run a center and support all the kids”.

The 10th interview question asked participants, “Do you participate in community based instruction? If so, what type of assistance is provided for your student?” Four of five teams reported they did not participate in community based instruction. The team actively participating in community based instruction indicated this was the first year of implementation of specialized instruction outside of the school setting in which students were given an opportunity to demonstrate daily living skills such as following directions and using money. Both the special education teacher and special education paraprofessional indicated their assigned student did not require any support during community based instruction.

The 11th and final interview question asked participants, “What type of communication do you have with the family of your student?” Team responses varied greatly with this question and appeared to be related to the practices and procedures of their assigned building. General education teachers reported providing communication to parents that was similar to those of students without assigned special education paraprofessional support. Special education teachers reported communicating to parents

daily or weekly with individual student communication logs and frequent emails. Two of the five special education paraprofessionals reported having no contact with the family of their assigned student. The other three special education paraprofessionals reported minimal contact with the family of their assigned student and stated they often refer the parent to the special education teacher if there are specific questions.

Summary of Findings

This research study evaluated the perceptions of identified team members utilizing a special education paraprofessional to support a student with an educational disability in the general education classroom. Educational teams may use a special education paraprofessional to provide assistance to students as they access the general education environment. The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a difference in perception between a student's team members (general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional) regarding the roles and responsibilities of special education paraprofessionals in the general education classroom.

The quantitative analysis of data provided by the ANOVA and Chi-Square Goodness of Fit, provided insufficient data to reject the null hypothesis and support the alternate hypothesis. Thus, the conclusion of the study is educational teams consisting of a special education teacher, general education teacher, and special education paraprofessional did not differ significantly in their views of the roles and responsibilities of specific paraprofessionals assigned to a student with a disability in the inclusive / general education setting. The qualitative analysis of data including individual interviews and observations, provided evidence to conclude five of five educational teams differed in their perceptions of the majority of roles/responsibilities of their assigned special

education paraprofessional. Coincidentally, the team (team one) who met consistently had one of the highest correlation of perceptions of the roles/responsibilities of the paraprofessional among team members. Chapter 5 provides further discussion and conclusions drawn from the study results as well as recommendations for future research studies.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations

Overview

By the 1970s, education for students with disabilities in the United States occurred in a separate institution from that of the general education school district and served approximately eight million students (Crossley, 2000). Today, nearly every general education classroom across the United States of America includes students with disabilities (NEA, 2011).

Based on the researcher's experience as a coordinator of special education, general and special education administrators are challenged with creating, implementing, and supervising special education services addressing the diverse needs of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The researcher has collaborated with principals to review programming options for students with disabilities participating in inclusive general education classrooms and found that often this inclusive programming involves the use of a special education paraprofessional. Concerns associated with paraprofessional support are documented throughout the research literature outlining potential negative consequences of paraprofessional use including the concern that general education teachers may feel a decreased responsibility for the student resulting in the student's primary instruction coming from the paraprofessional as opposed to the teacher level staff member (Giangreco, 2003).

The practice of hiring special education paraprofessionals to meet the increased inclusionary needs of students with disabilities tremendously impacts most school districts in the United States (Giangreco, 2010). Throughout the research literature paraprofessionals express concerns associated with how they are trained and supervised

for their positions, as well as, the description of their roles and responsibilities (Gerber et al., 2001; Wallace et al., 2001). In addition, Wallace et al. (2001) reported over half of the paraprofessionals he surveyed reported concerns with the amount of time they had to spend with their supervising teacher. In a study conducted by French (2001), 447 special education teachers were surveyed regarding the amount of time each teacher spent collaborating or planning with their assigned paraprofessional staff members. Less than a third of the teacher level study participants reported planning with their assigned paraprofessional staff members and 25% reported they never met with their paraprofessional (French, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a difference in perception between a student's team members (general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional) regarding the roles and responsibilities of special education paraprofessionals in the general education classroom. If there was a difference, the researcher attempted to determine why that difference exists as the difference can lead to uncoordinated efforts between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional supporting a student with a disability. The qualitative analysis of data including individual interviews and observations, provided evidence to conclude five of five educational teams differed in their perceptions of the majority of roles/responsibilities of their assigned special education paraprofessional.

This study utilized a mixed methods approach providing both qualitative and quantitative data. A random sample of participants was taken from the larger population consisting of general education teachers, special education teachers, and special

education paraprofessionals assigned to students in the general education setting supported by a special education paraprofessional. Teachers and special education paraprofessionals were chosen based on their assignment to a student with a disability who participates in the general education setting with the assistance of a special education paraprofessional. Five teams consisting of one special education teacher, one general education teacher, and one special education paraprofessional, were selected for interview and observation by the primary investigator and a collaborating colleague at the study school.

Quantitative data was collected through an electronic survey emailed to study participants via Survey Monkey. The survey consisted of 15 questions utilizing a Likert-type scale with responses numbered from one (not appropriate) to seven (most appropriate), with a mid-point of four (appropriate). Qualitative data was obtained through an interview and classroom observations. Study population consisted of: five general education teachers, five special education teachers, and five paraprofessionals. All participants were invited to participate in one face-to-face recorded interview and three classroom observations for case study analysis.

Results

The quantitative analysis of data provided by the ANOVA, Chi Square Test for Independence, and Chi Square Goodness of Fit, provided insufficient data to reject the null hypothesis and support the alternate hypothesis. Thus, the conclusion of the study is educational teams consisting of a special education teacher, general education teacher, and special education paraprofessional did not differ significantly in their views of the roles and responsibilities of specific paraprofessionals assigned to a student with a

disability in the inclusive / general education setting, and the view is independent of the participant's role. However, the qualitative analysis of data including individual interviews and observations, provided evidence to conclude that all five of the five participating educational teams differed in their perceptions of the majority of roles/responsibilities of their assigned special education paraprofessional.

In the foundational study conducted by Minondo et al. (2001), data analysis revealed a significant difference between two categories: school support role and liaison role: general education teachers and paraprofessionals differed significantly on these categories. The current study found qualitative differences in both categories, specifically the school support role where general education teacher, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals differed.

Research Questions and Hypothesis Testing

The researcher designed two research questions addressing the collaborative efforts of educational teams working to support the needs of an assigned student with a disability in the general education setting. Results of the proposed hypotheses and tests did not reveal any statistically significant differences between the perceptions of team members regarding the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional assigned to support the student with a disability in the general education setting. Likewise, there was no statistically significant difference when comparing response rates for each educational team to expected response rates of the primary investigator.

Research Question #1. What are the differences and similarities in the views held by special education teachers, general education teachers and special education

paraprofessionals of the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional in the general education setting?

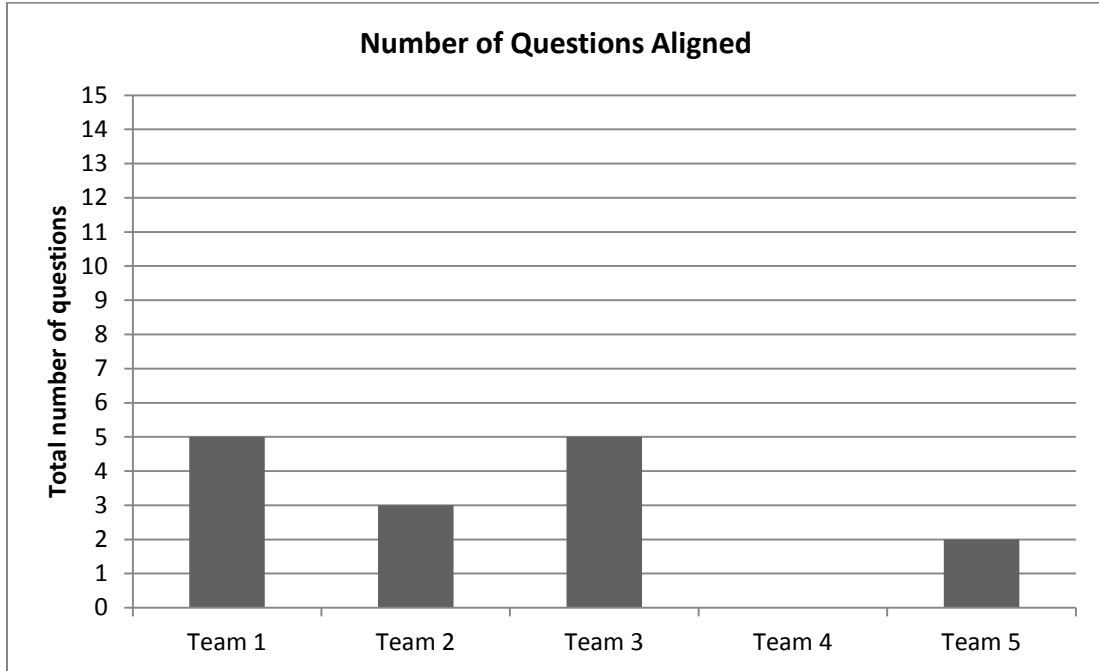
Null Hypothesis for ANOVA and Chi Square Goodness of Fit. There is no difference in the perception of paraprofessional use in the inclusive setting between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional, measured by responses to a Likert-scale survey.

Null Hypothesis for Chi Square Goodness of Fit. No difference will be observed when comparing response rates for the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional to the expected response rates.

Null Hypothesis for Chi Square Test for Independence. The agreement rate on responses concerning perception of role is independent of the job position (Principal, Investigator, General Educator, Special Educator, or Paraprofessional).

Raw survey data showed observable differences in perceptions across all 15 paraprofessional roles/responsibilities.

Figure 1. Team Perception Alignment



Interestingly, the team with the highest alignment of perceptions of the paraprofessional's roles/responsibilities was team one, who indicated they met as an entire team on a regular basis (at minimum two-three times weekly). The next highest alignment of perceptions is team three who indicated they never met as an entire team, however, the general education teacher and the special education paraprofessional were highly aligned in their perceptions on 11 of 15 roles/responsibilities. Team four did not have alignment of perceptions on any paraprofessional's roles/responsibilities. This team was aligned regarding their perception of the greatest need for their student being social skills; however, peer facilitation was not documented during any observations. Team four also had the least number of total years of educational experience. Though teams differed in perceptions, the difference was not statistically significant therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Given the small sample size utilized in this study, a Chi Square Goodness of Fit test was conducted to compare the mean responses of each team with the primary investigator's hypothesized team response. The primary investigator created a hypothesized team response following classroom observations and individual interviews with each educational team member. A comparison of results showed no significant difference between team values and expected values therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. An additional Chi Square Test for Independence was conducted to determine if a team member's job role (general education teacher, special education teacher, special education paraprofessional) influenced the rate of agreement between the researcher and the study participant. A comparison of the results showed no significant difference between specific roles' values and expected values.

In the review of literature, there are multiple concerns noted regarding the use of special education paraprofessionals in the inclusive setting with students with disabilities. French (1998, 2001) found that many paraprofessionals provide educational support to students in the general education setting without written plans and minimal collaborative time with teacher level staff. Results from one-on-one interviews conducted in this study identified four of five teams did not have regularly scheduled collaborative times as a team.

In addition, direct supervision of paraprofessional work in the general education classroom may be limited as many general education teachers may not have the experience or knowledge needed to guide paraprofessional supports provided to students with disabilities (Downing et al., 2000). It is recommended that teachers utilize a systematic approach when collaborating with paraprofessionals which includes shared

planning opportunities and a clear overview of the expectations, goals, objectives, and teaching methods to use during specific learning activities (Carnahan et al., 2009).

Throughout the primary investigator's observations, limited interactions were observed between the general education teacher and special education paraprofessionals in the general education classroom. Giangreco et. al. (2001) found higher general education teacher interactions with students with disabilities when a special education paraprofessional was assigned to a classroom as opposed to an individual student. Within all five teams, special education paraprofessionals were assigned to individual students. Only one of five teams demonstrated agreement regarding the special education paraprofessional's role in assisting not only their assigned student but the entire class.

Research Question #2. Can specific roles/responsibilities needed to support students with disabilities in the general education setting, be delivered by school staff other than a special education paraprofessional (i.e. general education teacher or special education teacher)?

Classroom observations provided the primary investigator the opportunity to examine the special education paraprofessional's work in the general education classroom. When reviewing classroom observation data several items were noted regarding the type of assistance provided to the student by the special education paraprofessional.

During observations of team one, one-to-one classroom support was constantly provided as the paraprofessional sat in close proximity of the student with disability(s) throughout observations which was consistent with all team interview responses indicating the need for close proximity to the student as safety was the student's greatest

concern. Minimal physical assistance was provided in the form of hand-over-hand support during some writing tasks. The most observed role/responsibility was providing the student with emotional support which was consistent with interview responses from the special education paraprofessional. Constant verbal encouragement from the paraprofessional was observed as the student initiated and completed work. The general education teacher was not observed providing emotional support for the student. Though the general education teacher may have also provided the student with verbal encouragement and praise, the general education teacher was not observed providing emotional support for the student. The paraprofessional was also observed modifying writing activities for the student. Modification of written work may have also been completed by the general education teacher prior to the beginning of the lesson but was not observed. The general education teacher was observed communicating with the paraprofessional during observations which was consistent with interview responses from the general education teacher which stated, "I check in with the TA to make sure she has everything she needs to support the student".

During observations of team two, the paraprofessional provided some assistance to other students in the classroom in addition to the assigned student with disability(s). One-to-one in-class assistance was consistently provided for the assigned student as the paraprofessional maintained close proximity to the student at all times. The paraprofessional provided a great deal of emotional support during each observation, providing praise and encouragement during each activity. The level of emotional support that appeared to be required for this student would have been very difficult for the general education teacher to implement. The paraprofessional was observed providing a

great deal of clarification and repetition of directions/procedures designed by the general education teacher which was consistent with the interview responses from the paraprofessional. The general education teacher may have also provided the student with a repetition of directions, however, this was not observed.

During observations of team three, the paraprofessional provided assistance for all students in the classroom as well as one-to-one support for the assigned student with disability(s). Frequently, the paraprofessional would provide a repetition of general education directions and assist in peer facilitation between the assigned student with disability(s) and peers. The general education teacher was not observed repeating directions for the student with disability or checking for understanding which was not consistent with interview responses in which the general education teacher indicated she frequently checked in with the student understanding. Though peer interactions may have also been facilitated by the general education teacher, as was indicated in the general education teacher interview responses, the paraprofessional was the only adult observed assisting.

During observations of team four, the paraprofessional provided one-to-one in-class support for the assigned student with disability(s) maintaining close proximity throughout observations. The paraprofessional would assist with the entire class as needed when students requested assistance. Interestingly, peer facilitation was not documented during any observation which was not consistent with interview data in which all team members indicated the student's greatest needs were in the social skill area requiring a great deal of peer facilitation. The primary role of the paraprofessional during observations appeared to be that of a security resource to the student – a trusted

individual whose assistance could be sought out at need but whose assistance did not appear to be required. The paraprofessional provided frequent interactions with the assigned student in an effort to address any emotional needs. Frequent check-ins may have also been provided by the general education teacher but was not observed and was not consistent with the general education teacher's interview response stating, "I give him constant repetition of directions and try to get him to stay on task".

During observations of team five, the role/responsibility most observed was providing assistance to the entire class which was consistent with interview responses from the general education teacher and the paraprofessional. The paraprofessional did not maintain close proximity to the student and maintained at the side of the classroom during the majority of observations. The paraprofessional provided consistent cuing and encouragement to the assigned student in an effort to maintain attention to task and complete work which was consistent with all interview responses from team members. Cuing and encouragement may have also been provided by the general education teacher but was not observed and was not consistent with the general education teacher interview responses stating, "I provide one-on-one instruction to her (student)".

French (2001) researched instructional plans for paraprofessionals and how those plans were presented by the supervising teacher level staff member. Often paraprofessional instructional plans were not consistently provided and when provided were most often transmitted orally. French stated paraprofessionals, "may be working without direction or with hastily constructed or easily misconstrued oral directions" (p.51). As the direct supervisor of paraprofessionals, special education teachers report decreased opportunities for supervising their staff who are assigned to the general

education setting and state spending approximately 2% of their available time conducting supervision activities (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). All five special education teachers reported communicating with the special education paraprofessional under their direct supervision on a daily or weekly basis, however, no special education teachers conducted observations of the paraprofessional in the general education setting.

Data from this study found the majority of teams did not devote specific planning time to meet as a group. During interviews, one out of five teams indicated they had set aside regular planning time to meet as a group on a regular basis to specifically discuss supports required for the assigned student with disability(s). Coincidentally, the team (team one) who met consistently had one of the highest correlation of perceptions of the roles/responsibilities of the paraprofessional among team members. Team three had an equally high level of correlation of perceptions among team members: however, this team had no planning time as a group. Within this team, the paraprofessional and general education teacher were highly aligned in their perception of the roles/responsibilities of the paraprofessional, ranking 11 of 15 roles/responsibilities exactly the same.

Giangreco (2003) identified concerns with assigning paraprofessionals to classrooms providing instruction to students with disabilities. One concern noted was that some general education teachers may entrust the paraprofessional with most if not all responsibility for a student with a disability. During observations, decreased general education teacher interactions with the assigned student with disability(s) were noted. It is the researcher's opinion that several of the roles/responsibilities performed by the paraprofessional could also have been performed by the general education teacher including: providing emotional support for the student, monitoring student performance,

basic support tasks, and peer facilitation. The role/responsibility of material adaptation appeared to be a task completed by the general education or special education teacher. Etscheidt (2005) states educational teams should consider potential alternatives to the use of an assigned paraprofessional to support a student with disabilities in the general education setting. Suggested alternatives include: use of a natural peer, school, and classroom support. When considering alternatives to paraprofessional support educational teams have utilized peer supports which have been found to increase peer interaction and academic engagement of students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2011). Two of the five students in this study may have been able to utilize peer supports in the general education classroom as an alternative to the adult support they received specifically to assist with redirection to or maintaining of attention to task.

Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners

The utilization of special education paraprofessionals in inclusive settings to assist students with disabilities has been a practice of educators for decades (Giangreco et al., 2001). As teams continue to consider the use of paraprofessionals to assist with inclusionary efforts the research provides guidance to educational teams. Giangreco, Broer, and Edelman (1999) created specific recommendations for teams considering the use of a paraprofessional by asking teams to identify existing supports or resources available to students which could be reallocated and organized to support many students. Freschi (1999) created a template for educational team use when assigning paraprofessional support for students which includes the identification of student goals and an outline of what accommodations or modifications could be made to a student's educational program that would not require the use of a paraprofessional. As the number

of paraprofessionals continues to grow, the research recognizes the need for policy and procedure to guide educational teams in their decision making processes (French, 2003; Giangreco, 2003; Mueller & Murphy, 2001). Currently the researcher's district of employment is implementing a new practice in which educational teams utilizing paraprofessional support for students are asked to complete what is known as an "Adult Needs Matrix". This matrix provides an overview of the student's educational day and asks teams to identify the needs of the student throughout the day, who may provide assistance to the student (teacher, paraprofessional, peer), and how the team will work toward student independence and a plan for decreasing adult support.

Given the increased use of paraprofessionals, the collaborative efforts of educational teams, including paraprofessionals are of utmost importance when outlining roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional and ensuring consistent communication regarding the effectiveness of the educational team servicing a student (French, 1998). It is recommended that educational teams utilizing paraprofessionals meet for 30 to 40 minutes weekly with a prepared agenda prior to the meeting as regularly scheduled meetings allow for the discussion of expectations and student performance, increase opportunities to provide positive feedback, and allow paraprofessionals to understand the reasons behind the work asked of them (Carnahan et al., 2009). This study found the two teams with the highest alignment of responses regarding the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional included the team who met together as a group on a consistent basis (daily to weekly) and the team with the special education teacher frequently communicated with the paraprofessional to provide support and direction.

The literature also outlines best practices for ensuring paraprofessionals are provided professional development opportunities which meet their individual needs. It is recommended that trainings for paraprofessionals be comprehensive and systematic and provide specific feedback to paraprofessionals on identified skill sets recognized as priorities to meeting student needs (Vasa, Steckelbert, & Pickett, 2003). Team (general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional) collaboration and common planning time is another area of concern noted throughout the literature. Four of the five teams who participated in this study did not have a common planning time in which the general education teacher, special education teacher, and paraprofessional met. According to French (1998, 2001) many paraprofessionals provide services without written plans and few formal direct meetings with teachers. It is also noted that often paraprofessionals in schools today are given responsibilities that should be provided by certified, teacher level staff (Giangreco et al., 1997).

The researcher of this study, a special education administrator, has been continually tasked with determining the allocation of district resources. One allocation of resources is the use of assigned special education paraprofessionals to assist specific students with disabilities access the general education classroom. The researcher believes that educational administrators need an opportunity to structure their educational teams to allow: collaborative team time between the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional to discuss specific roles/responsibilities of paraprofessionals supporting students in the general education setting. Providing teams with collaborative planning time during the instructional day is a challenge given the variance in schedules between staff as most special education teachers support students in

multiple grade levels. Paraprofessionals must work in collaboration with teacher level staff to effectively meet the needs of students and should be provided specified plans which outline the paraprofessional's work in the classroom (French, 2001). When given clear expectations and defined roles, paraprofessionals feel they are a key member of a student's educational team (Giangreco et al., 2001).

This researcher reinforces the ideas that educators may benefit from the use of a checklist or survey to assist teams in their alignment of what roles/responsibilities are required to support a specific student in the general education setting and how to communicate changing needs to the entire IEP team, specifically including parents. It is recommended that teachers utilize a systematic approach when collaborating with paraprofessionals which includes shared planning opportunities and a clear overview of the expectations, goals, objectives, and teaching methods to use during specific learning activities (Carnahan et al., 2009). The researcher would also recommend a timeline be created in which dates are periodically selected throughout the year to provide an opportunity for the educational team to meet with parents to specifically discuss current paraprofessional supports, possible changes to paraprofessional supports, and a plan of action to potentially decrease paraprofessional support in an effort to increase student independence. Interview data from this study showed five of five educational teams provided students' families with academic and non-academic progress but did not include communication regarding the support provided by the paraprofessional.

Recommendations for Future Research

In review of the limitations of this study, the participant size was a concern as the study was limited to five educational teams for a total of 15 study participants. The

smaller participant size allowed for a greater depth of working knowledge of each team, however, this significantly impacted the study's range of impact. It is recommended that in future studies the participant size should be increased in an effort to provide a greater opportunity to find statistical significance within the data points. It is recommended when at all possible to utilize a larger sample as they, "tend to minimize the probability of errors, maximize the accuracy of population estimates, and increase the generalizability of the results" (Osborne & Costello, 2004).

The population for this study was another limitation as the research worked exclusively at the elementary level only, across five separate elementary schools. Narrowing the focus of the study to the elementary level limited the opportunity to study teams grades six through 12. It is recommended that in future studies investigators expand the population in an effort to observe practices at both the elementary and secondary levels. Research in this study provides a variety of examples of kindergarten through 12th grade studies (Giangreco et al., 2002; Breton, 2010; Carter et al., 2011) as well as examples specifically targeting elementary (Hughes & Valle-Riesta, 2008) and secondary (Tews & Lupart, 2008) populations. While elementary level affords a greater opportunity potentially for classroom observations of students with disabilities in the inclusive setting, the secondary populations likely provides the most appropriate population when conducting interviews with students for perspectives regarding paraprofessional support.

Additionally, the researcher would recommend changing select items on both the interview protocol and observation tool. During classroom observations, special education paraprofessionals were not observed collecting their assigned student data. An

additional question such as, “What means of data collection do you take with your students?” may provide information regarding the role/responsibility of collection of student data by the general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional. An additional question such as, “How did the IEP team determine the student required special education paraprofessional support and how often is the need for the paraprofessional reviewed?” would assist in providing background and rationale for the assignment of a special education paraprofessional to his or her student requiring support in the general education setting. Additionally it is recommended to add an interview question regarding the student’s IEP asking, “Is adult support documented in the student’s IEP. If so, what is written?” This question may provide additional insight into the thoughts and rationale of the IEP team when determining the allocation of a paraprofessional to support an individual student.

Additional changes are recommended for the observation tool including removal of three of four items not observed during observations: assist therapists and implement procedures designed by therapists, general school duties, and team member. For the purposes of this study no student specific information was obtained, however, for future studies attempting to observe the role and responsibility of assisting therapists and implementing their procedures, additional information would need to be collected prior to observations with regards to student IEP goals and/or objectives. General school duties such as cafeteria/lunch duty, playground duty, etc. may not require observation but information could be collected regarding the paraprofessionals level of participation in these duties given specific daily or weekly staff schedules. The team member component of the observation tool may only be utilized if information is obtained during the

interview process indicating the paraprofessional attends team meetings and assists the team in daily and weekly planning. If the paraprofessional participates in these activities it could provide for an observation of the collaborative process between paraprofessional and teacher level staff. Though monitoring performance (assist in maintaining student records; check and grade homework) was not noted in this study conducted at the elementary level, it is recommended to maintain the item as it may be observed more often at the secondary level.

Conclusion

The literature provides several concerns associated with the use of paraprofessionals to support the needs of students with disabilities. Often paraprofessionals are the least qualified personnel available to support students and yet they are often given primary instructional responsibilities (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). Paraprofessionals face a number of challenges in their efforts to support students including a lack of defined roles and responsibilities, appropriate supervision, and professional development opportunities (Brown et al., 1999). Student independence and limited social interaction opportunities with peers are a few of the concerns identified in the literature regarding the excessive use of individually assigned paraprofessional support for students with disabilities (Giangreco & Broer, 2005).

The researcher designed the current study to address a growing concern in her area of educational supervision regarding the assignment of special education paraprofessionals to students with disabilities so they may access their general education curriculum. There are several forces which drive the request for special education paraprofessional support for students in the inclusive setting including the following:

general education teacher need, building administration need, parent request, and student need. In the researcher's area of educational supervision educational teams (general education teacher, special education teacher, and special education paraprofessional) were not meeting collaboratively on a frequent basis to review paraprofessional supports provided to their assigned student in the general education setting. The lack of team communication presented the researcher with a concern regarding the various team members understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the special education paraprofessional assigned to a student. The concern led the researcher to question if team members did not frequently communicate about the roles and responsibilities of the special education paraprofessional would they differ in their perceptions of roles and responsibilities?

Analysis of quantitative data collected in this research through both the ANOVA and Chi-Square Goodness of Fit found members of the education team did not differ significantly in their views of the roles and responsibilities of specific paraprofessionals assigned to a student with a disability in the inclusive/general education setting. However, qualitative analysis of data including individual interviews and observations provided evidence to conclude all participating educational teams differed in their perceptions of the majority of roles/responsibilities of their assigned special education paraprofessional. It is the researcher's belief that differences in perceptions may lead to uncoordinated team efforts to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities in the inclusive setting.

It is also the researcher's belief that uncoordinated team efforts may have negative academic and/or social consequences for students with disabilities accessing the general

education classroom. Research has found teachers may experience some frustration when working with paraprofessionals as these skills are rarely taught in university programs (Giangreco et al., 2001). Therefore, fostering collaboration requires the teacher to have skills in recognizing what the paraprofessional does well and then determine how to match their strengths to needed student supports. It is recommended that teachers utilize a systematic approach when collaborating with paraprofessionals which includes shared planning opportunities and a clear overview of the expectations, goals, objectives, and teaching methods to use during specific learning activities (Carnahan et al., 2009).

It is recommended that educational administrators assist teams' collaborative efforts by providing opportunities for team planning time, creating a checklist or survey to assist teams in the alignment of paraprofessional roles/responsibilities, and creation of a timeline in which teams would meet periodically throughout the year with parents to specifically discuss paraprofessional support. Teams should consider utilizing a planning process and instrument to assist IEP teams as they determine paraprofessional supports for students with disabilities (Mueller & Murphy, 2001). Conducting an intensive needs checklist and matrix which focuses on what students with disabilities can or cannot do and what type of assistance is needed during various portions of the student's day (Mueller & Murphy, 2001) could prove to be an effective process.

The assignment of a special education paraprofessional to a student with a disability in the inclusive setting is one of the most restrictive educational supports provided for students and should be carefully considered as one of many options to support student access to the least restrictive environment. Utilization of a paraprofessional staff member to support students with disabilities provides a number of

potentially restrictive outcomes including: adult dependence, limiting social opportunities with peers, and decreased interactions with the general education teacher (Giangreco & Broer, 2009). Concerns remain that paraprofessionals are the least qualified personnel available to support students and yet they are often given primary instructional responsibilities (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). While one-to-one paraprofessional support assists students with potential repetition of academic materials, facilitation of social skills, and personal care assistance (bathroom use, eating, dressing, etc.) the support may also interfere with peer interaction and create over reliance on the paraprofessional to complete tasks, (Blacher, 2007).

It is recommended that educational administrators continue to explore inclusionary programming alternatives for students with disabilities and to strongly consider student perspectives when considering one-to-one paraprofessional supports. Students with disabilities report both positive and negative perspectives regarding the assignment of a paraprofessional to themselves (Tews & Lupart, 2008). Students who have received paraprofessional support throughout their education reported that during their inclusive programming opportunities their academic and non-academic adult interactions occurred primarily with the paraprofessional and the majority of participants expressed their concerns of embarrassment, loneliness, rejection, and stigmatization as a result of having paraprofessional support (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005). Classroom observations conducted for this study found students primarily interacted with the paraprofessional supporting the student and social interactions with other students were facilitated by the paraprofessional.

Giangreco, et al. (2006) state, “The use of paraprofessionals has emerged as *the way* rather than *a way* to operationalize inclusive education for students with disabilities” (p. 216). It is the researcher’s experience when attempting to create inclusive programming for students with special needs that the program includes paraprofessional support. Though often requested with the best of intentions, paraprofessional support requests that are received and provided to students in the early stages of their educational careers, often lead to years of continued paraprofessional support. In the researcher’s experience, once paraprofessional support has been provided to a student, the support is not reviewed on a frequent basis which often results in the student maintaining paraprofessional support for potentially longer than required. As students with disabilities continue to access the general education environment it is critical that educational teams review alternatives to adult supports for the successful inclusion of students. Some of those alternatives may include accommodations and modifications to the classroom setting and curriculum paired with peer supports and supports from the general education classroom teacher.

It is the researcher’s belief that continued utilization of paraprofessional supports in the inclusive setting creates significant dependence concerns for the student and limits their ability to access their educational environment, curriculum, and peers. There is also research to support that teacher level staff may become less involved with the student assigned to the paraprofessional resulting in the paraprofessional providing the majority of the instruction to the student (Blacher, 2007). It is with this thought in mind that the decision to provide paraprofessional support to a student should be considered after examining all potential supports which do not require adult assistance. Teams require

training and an opportunity to obtain data regarding the effectiveness of alternatives to adult support.

As educational teams continue to utilize paraprofessional supports, teams must collaborate to ensure all team members agree upon the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional. Collaboration will require an opportunity for teams to meet with the paraprofessional to discuss specific student data and effective instructional interventions and strategies. Educational administrators may support team's collaborative efforts by providing regularly scheduled opportunities for teams to meet and providing substitute coverage for the paraprofessional to attend meetings while ensuring appropriate support and coverage for students. The information discussed at these meetings must be shared with families of students with disabilities to ensure the entire IEP team has been provided with the necessary information to make appropriate decisions regarding the use of the paraprofessional.

In the researcher's experience, families of students with disabilities are passionate regarding the need for their child to receive adult support, expressing not only the type of support needed for their child but also the desired characteristics of the adult providing them. Educational teams who provide families with specific intervention data effectiveness and alternatives to adult support may find greater success in developing action plans to fade paraprofessional support. It is the researcher's opinion that teams must strongly consider an action plan to fade the level of paraprofessional support to increase the student's level of independence. This action plan should be reviewed multiple times throughout the school year to allow an opportunity to make changes and redirect efforts as needed.

The researcher believes the results of this study are significant to school districts utilizing paraprofessional supports for students with disabilities in the inclusive setting, because they provide an in-depth look into the current practices of educational teams and how they perceive the roles and responsibilities of special education paraprofessionals. This study provides a survey, interview tool, and observation tool which can be utilized by school administrators to review current team practices and potentially determine what, if any, changes should be facilitated in an effort to ensure appropriate supports for students with disabilities in the inclusive setting. Educational teams must agree not only on the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals but also on the setting in which a student may receive their primary instruction from a teacher level staff member as opposed to paraprofessional staff. As educators, we are responsible for the education of all students and must work collaboratively to create differentiated programming opportunities for students with and without an educational disability.

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Appendix A – Classroom Observation Tool

Classroom Observation

(Adapted from Minondo, S., Meyer, L., & Xin, J. F. survey instrument)

Staff Member Name: _____

Staff Member Role: _____

Date: _____

1 – Observed

2 – Not observed

Paraprofessional observed role and responsibilities	Score	Note
Personal care: feeding, lifting/carrying, positioning, grooming; toileting; bus loading		
One-to-one in-class: one-to-one support for student in classroom, assist student movement		
Therapy objectives: assist therapists and implement procedures designed by therapists		
Material adaptation: modify materials and equipment: follow-up based on procedures designed by teacher		
Assist with entire class: meet needs of student with disability(s) while also assisting others; provide support role		
Peer facilitator: support and encourage relationship between students with and without disabilities; intervene in positive ways		
Classroom support: do “gopher” errands, copying for classroom and teachers		
General school duties: cafeteria/lunch duty; playground		
Team member: attend team meeting; assist team daily and weekly planning		
Monitor performance: assist in maintaining student records; check and grade homework		
Emotional support: support emotional needs; be a motivator; model/praise		
Take on student’s role: help students do work; physically assist student to do work; do work for the student		

Appendix B – District Permission

MEMORANDUM—Research Request

November, 2009

Ms. Carmen Harris
SSD Area Coordinator
Rockwood School District

RE: Request for Research within the Rockwood School District

I have reviewed your research request, and I see no harm in your project. You are aware of the student, parent and staff confidentiality issues, and you have taken precautions to protect student/staff/school privacy. There is little to no interference with the normal instructional time offered student participants, and all students/parents/staff will be informed that the project is strictly voluntary.

Please contact the principals of each of the schools you will be working with to explain to them the purpose of the research and to inform them of your intent to conduct the research.

As always we would be very interested in your research results. Your research may be helpful in illuminating areas for improvement for our students. If I can be of further assistance, please let me know. Good luck in your research investigation.

Sincerely,
Erik Graham
Director of Data Analysis and Quality Management

c: Dr. Carrie Luttrell, Executive Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Title of Proposal	The Perceptual Difference in Role and Responsibilities of Special Education Paraprofessionals
Reviewer Name	Baldwin, Bauer, Weingaertner-Hartke
Date Reviewed	October

SUMMARY OF CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

<p>Comments/Concerns</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Methodology section does not include data analysis plan 2. Generalizability - Based on 3 schools in 1 district. How will this benefit SSD? 3. Passive voice 4. Confidentiality of students during observations 5. Some interview answers may be contrary to district's official position. Litigation issues? 6. Will researcher be recruiting those she supervises? Evaluative issues? Honesty in responses? 7. Cover letter for survey indicates by submitting survey they are consenting to participate. Need to utilize the informed consent form for consent. 8. There is already a presumption there is a difference in perceptions. Concern that perceptions will bias results. 9. Study benefit should look beyond professional development for special education staff

Recommendations to Address Concerns

Required:

1. Explain how data will be analyzed in methods section (i.e., procedures, tests, analysis plan, etc.).
2. Explain in more detail how this study will benefit SSD.
3. Obtain Rockwood permission.
4. Edit cover letter for survey due to language about consenting to participate by completing the survey.
5. Classroom observations are understood to involve the teacher and the paraprofessional. Students in the classroom are not research participants and no student data/information will be collected. Must sign SSD Observation Agreement.
6. Include disclaimer that individual participant responses are not indicative of an official school district opinion or position.
7. Researcher may not recruit those staff she directly supervises due to potential role conflict and related issues.

Suggested:

1. Edit for passive voice
2. Would encourage researcher to work outside her district due to potential bias
3. Contact Dr. Nancy French, Dr. Ritu Chopra, Dr. Michael Giangreco, Dr. Kent Gerlach
4. Consider interviewing parents as their insights on this topic are compelling
5. Focus on elementary, middle or high school

Appendix C – Participant Written Permission

LINDENWOOD CONSENT FORM
Lindenwood University

School of Education
209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

The Perceptual Difference in Roles and Responsibilities of Special Education
Paraprofessionals

Principal Investigator Carmen Harris
Telephone: 314-989-8226 E-mail: crharris@ssdmo.org

Participant _____ Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Carmen Harris and Dr. Lynda Leavitt. The purpose of this research is to better understand how special education teachers, general education teachers and special education paraprofessionals work together to meet the needs of students in the inclusive/general education setting.
2. a) Your participation will involve
 - Completion of an electronic survey which takes approximately three minutes to complete.
 - Participation in a face-to-face interview which is audiotaped.
 - Three observations of the special education paraprofessional working in the inclusive/general education setting.

b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be three minutes for electronic survey and 30 minutes for face-to-face interview.

Approximately 15 subjects will be involved in this research.
3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.
4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about how education staff work together to meet the needs of special education students in the inclusive/general education setting.
5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.
7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Carmen Harris at 314-989-8226 or their Faculty Advisor, Dr. Lynda Leavitt at 636-949-4756. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4846.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

Participant's Signature

Date Participant's Printed Name

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date Investigator Printed Name

Appendix D – Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions
(General Education Teacher/Special Education Teacher/Special Education
Paraprofessional)

1. How long have you been in education?
2. What type of professional development have you participated in to assist you with working with students with special needs?
3. What type of assistance does your student require in the classroom?
4. What type of support do you provide for your student?
5. What are the greatest needs of your student?
6. How do you identify the needs of your student?

7. How do you continually assess the needs of your student?
8. How often do you meet and collaborate as a team (special education teacher, general education teacher, teacher assistant)?
9. What type of additional classroom support such as running errands, copying, etc. is provided by the paraprofessional?
10. Do you participate in community based instruction? If so, what type of assistance is provided for your student?
11. What type of communication do you have with the family of your student?

Appendix E

SURVEY COVER LETTER

Date

Dear Colleague:

My name is Carmen Harris and I am a Special School District Area Coordinator in the Rockwood School District. I am currently completing research as a Doctoral student at Lindenwood University to better understand the perceptual differences between special education teachers, general education teachers, and special education paraprofessionals working with students in the inclusive setting. This research may help school teams to better understand how to meet the educational needs of students with special needs in the most effective and efficient way.

I would greatly appreciate your completing the attached 15 item, electronic survey. The survey takes approximately three minutes to complete. Since the validity of the results depend on obtaining a high response rate, your participation is crucial to the success of this study.

Your submission of the attached electronic survey indicates your consent to participate in this study. Please be assured that your responses will be held in the strictest confidence. As soon as I receive your completed survey, it will be stored electronically with a code to only identify your staff role (general education teacher, special education teacher, special education paraprofessional). All electronic surveys will be stored for 5 years after the data is recorded. If the results of this study were to be written for publication, no identifying information would be used. If you have any questions or would like to receive feedback regarding this study, please contact:

Carmen Harris
 Special School District Area Coordinator
 Rockwood School District
 12110 Clayton Road
 Town & Country, MO 63131
 314-989-8226
crharris@ssdmo.org
harriscarmen@rockwood.k12.mo.us

This study has been reviewed and approved by Lindenwood University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies.

Thank you for your participation in the study.

Sincerely,
 Carmen Harris

Appendix F – Electronic Survey

SURVEY
 Minondo, S., Meyer, L., & Xin, J. F. (2001)

ROLE/RESPONSIBILITY	Appropriate						
	Not						Most
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Personal care: feeding, lifting/carrying, grooming, toileting, bus loading	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
One-to-one in-class: one-to-one support for student in classroom, assist student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

movement

Therapy objectives: assist therapists and implement procedures designed by teacher 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Material adaptation: modify written materials and equipment; follow-up based on procedures designed by teacher 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Assist with entire class: meet needs of student with disability(s) while also assisting others; provide support role 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Peer facilitator: support and encourage relationship between students with and without disabilities; intervene in positive ways 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Classroom support: complete errands, xeroxing for classroom and teacher(s) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

ROLE/RESPONSIBLITIY

Not

Appropriate

Most

Community instruction: carry out community based instruction and/or job training 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

General school duties: cafeteria/lunch duty; playground; nurse's office 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Family liaison: serve as liaison between home and school 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

following guidelines established
by teacher

Team member: attend team meeting; assist team with daily and weekly planning

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appendix G – Raw Survey Data

	Team 1			Team 2			Team 3			Team 4			Team 5		
	G T	S T	S P	G T	S T	S P	G T	S T	S P	G T	S T	S P	G T	S T	S P
Personal Care	7	7	7	6	7	1	7	2	7	2	1	7	3	7	1
1:1 In Class	7	7	7	7	7	5	7	7	7	6	4	7	7	7	3
Therapy Objectives	6	6	1	7	7	4	7	4	7	5	4	6	7	7	2
Material Adaptation	4	6	4	7	6	7	7	6	7	3	3	7	7	7	2
Assist with Entire Class	1	6	2	2	7	6	7	7	7	4	4	7	7	3	3
Peer Facilitator	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	5	7	6	7	7	3
Classroom Support	1	1	1	1	7	4	4	6	3	1	1	6	1	1	1

Community Instruction	2	5	1	5	7	2	3	1	6	2	6	7	1	6	1
General School Duties	1	1	1	1	7	3	7	6	3	1	1	7	1	1	1
Family Liaison	6	2	2	6	1	1	7	3	7	3	1	2	1	5	1
Team Member	5	2	2	7	7	7	7	2	7	1	6	3	4	5	1
Monitor Performance	2	2	3	1	7	5	6	1	6	2	1	1	1	5	1
Emotional Support	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	2	7	5	3
Staff Development	7	6	7	7	5	5	7	7	7	2	4	6	6	5	2
Take on Student's Role	3	2	3	5	6	6	1	6	3	3	2	5	7	1	2

*Scale (1-not appropriate / 7 – most appropriate)

GT – General Education Teacher

ST – Special Education Teacher

SP – Special Education Paraprofessional

Vitae

Carmen Harris was born in Kansas City, Missouri and moved to the St. Louis Metro area in 1982. She graduated from Missouri State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders in 1998. Upon completion of her degree she attended St. Louis University where she received a Master of Arts in Research degree in Communication Disorders. In 2000, Carmen began work with Special School District of St. Louis County as a speech-language pathologist assigned to

the Rockwood School District. In 2006, Carmen moved into an administrative position with Special School District of St. Louis County as a Special Education Area Coordinator. She completed her Educational Specialist Degree from Lindenwood University in 2010 and plans to complete her Doctorate in Educational Administration from Lindenwood University in 2012.