

**Factors Influencing The Tasks Performed By Paraprofessionals
In Elementary Inclusive Classrooms**

by
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(Abstract)

Although there has been a phenomenal growth in the utilization of paraprofessionals in inclusive classrooms in recent years, few researchers have addressed key issues surrounding role changes. A review of the literature indicated a need for additional research in the areas of efficacy of utilization, identification of task assignments, and development of training programs for teachers and paraprofessionals.

Often special education and general education teachers are given the responsibility of determining what tasks will be performed by paraprofessionals without receiving guidelines or supervisory training. The purposes of this project were to determine what factors influenced the decisions made about task assignments for paraprofessionals and to ascertain what training programs would be appropriate and

helpful.

Subjects included in this study were the special education teachers, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals serving students in five, elementary inclusive classes in three school divisions in Virginia. Two observations were conducted in each class to identify the tasks performed by paraprofessionals. The general education teachers, the special education teachers, and the paraprofessionals working in each selected class were interviewed for information about their perceptions of paraprofessional task assignments. Other characteristics that might influence decision-making were examined by collecting demographic information on background, education, and training. Tasks performed by paraprofessionals were categorized by using a competency level checklist adapted from a list developed by Pickett (1994). Competency levels were : Level I (Teacher Aide), Level II (Instructional Assistant), and Level III (Assistant Teacher).

Observations conducted in the three school divisions revealed that paraprofessionals usually performed Level II tasks. These tasks involved providing assistance with mobility issues, self-help needs, on task behavior, and assisting with individual programs of study. During the interviews paraprofessionals stated that they did not receive credit for their abilities nor did they receive personal respect. Both teachers and paraprofessionals expressed a desire for more collaborative planning time; paraprofessionals desired more specific training, especially on medical and legal issues.

Dedication

To Andrew - a little intergenerational transfer of knowledge

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	viii
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW	1
Introduction	1
Development of the Problem	1
Significance of the Study	5
Research Questions	6
Clarification of Terms	7
Literature Review	11
Chapter Summary	26
METHODOLOGY	27
Introduction	27
Participants	28
Instrument	29
Objectives	30
Pilot Studies	30
Procedures	31
Data Analysis	33
Limitations	34
Chapter Summary	35
RESULTS	37
Introduction	37

School Division A Observations and General Questions	38
School Division B Observations and General Questions	47
School Division C Observations and General Questions	56
Cross-Case Analysis of the Three School Divisions	65
Similarities Among the Three School Divisions	71
Chapter Summary	76
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS	77
Conclusions	77
Recommendations To Educators	83
Recommendations For Further Study	86
Chapter Summary	87
REFERENCES	88
APPENDIXES	
A. Letters Requesting Permission to Conduct the Study	93
B. Informed Consent Form for Administrators, Teachers, and Paraprofessionals	94
C. Letter to Study Participants	99
D. Informed Consent Form for Parents	100
E. Informed Consent Form for Students	102
F. Application for Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects	103
G. Data Collection Instrument	106
VITA	111

LIST OF TABLES

Tasks Included On Each Level In the Data Collection Instrument		
1.	Level I	9
2.	Level II	9
3.	Level III	10
4.	Demographic Information School Division A	38
5.	Demographic information School Division B	47
6.	Demographic Information School Dvision C	56
7.	Demographic Information For School Divisions A, B, and C	70
8.	Paraprofessional Usage By Teacher Educational Level	73
9.	Number of Paraprofessional Tasks Performed At Each Level	74
10.	Observed and Perceived Paraprofessional Task Levels	74
11.	Matching and Nonmatching Perceptions	75

Chapter I INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter issues concerning the increased utilization of paraprofessionals to implement inclusion in the general education classroom are addressed. Research questions are developed from an analysis of issues surrounding the problem. Significance of the study emerges as lack of adequate role clarification and lack of paraprofessional supervision are documented through a review of the literature.

Development of the Problem

Although special educators have attended to many aspects of service delivery for students in inclusive classrooms, the phenomenal growth in the utilization of paraprofessionals has been overlooked until recently (Pickett, 1986; Jones & Bender, 1993; Pickett, 1994). A growing number of researchers are addressing the issues surrounding the new roles of the paraprofessional (McKenzie & Houk, 1986; Frank, Keith, & Steil, 1988; Moorehouse & Albright, 1991; Pickett, 1994). Such issues as utilization of paraprofessionals with inclusion, development of inservice training and

certification programs, and enhancement of student outcomes still do not have a solid research base (Jones & Bender, 1993). Lack of data becomes a serious issue when considering the movement of the paraprofessional away from the traditional role of “teacher’s helper” into a position of “assistant teacher”. Recommendations have been made to expand the roles even further to utilize paraprofessionals in formal assessment procedures and initial instruction (Jones & Bender, 1993). As these role changes emerge, more information on efficacy, training, and effective utilization of paraprofessionals in inclusive settings is needed.

Legal Issues

Due to the Congressional preference for general education placement with supplementary aids and services, circuit court decisions have supported the increased use of paraprofessionals to accommodate the individual needs of special education students. The 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act stated that removal of children with disabilities from the general education environment will occur “only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily”.

In Sacramento City Unified School District v. Holland (1992), the court ordered placement of a child with moderate mental retardation into a regular second

grade classroom with supplemental services from a special educator and an aide. It was established that a school, before making a placement decision about a student, must decide whether providing supplemental aids and services to a student will permit successful education to occur in the general education classroom (Greer v. Rome City School District, 1991). With Oberti v. Board of the Borough of Clementon School District (1993) the school district was informed that they must consider “the whole range of supplementary aids and services”.

Medically related services may have to be performed by paraprofessionals in the future. In Irving Independent School District v. Tatro (1984) the Supreme Court ruled that clean intermittent catheterization for one student was a required related service that could be performed by a layperson, such as a paraprofessional, with less than an hour of training. The Court determined that Congress “required schools to hire various specially trained personnel to help children with disabilities”.

Issues surrounding the need to provide paraprofessionals with specialized training surfaced recently in Virginia with Mark Hartmann et al. v. the Loudoun County Board of Education (1997). The full-time paraeducator was a member of the individualized education program team, attended seminars, and received specialized training to assist a special education student with autism receive appropriate educational services. The furnishing of specialized training was a key issue in the case dismissal. The issue of sufficient training for an instructional

assistant also surfaced in California recently with Conejo Valley Unified School District (1995). A student's parents requested a due process hearing to ensure that their son's instructional assistant had sufficient training to meet his educational needs. The hearing officer determined that the assistant must have knowledge of autism and of behavior modification techniques in order to implement a behavioral intervention plan and to provide assistance in academics.

Current Issues

Current issues confronting the field of education regarding the training and utilization of paraprofessionals include (Pickett, 1994, p. 2):

1. distinguishing between the roles and responsibilities of teachers and paraprofessionals.
2. analyzing the duties performed by paraprofessionals in various settings.
3. reviewing state of the art regulatory procedures and practices that have an impact on determining roles and functions of paraprofessionals, criteria for their employment and standards for training and career mobility.

Significance of the Study

Current special education service delivery models call for an examination of the effective use of paraprofessionals in inclusive classrooms. Specifically, proper training and supervision of paraprofessionals is necessary. If training and supervision are lacking, school systems may be involved in expensive, long term litigation. This study provides information on how paraprofessionals are utilized and suggests programs that might help improve the quality of service provided to special education students.

As utilization of paraprofessionals continues to become a standard in general practice the need to clarify roles and improve training will intensify. Further research to clarify paraprofessional roles and duties will lend support for differentiating staffing arrangements, designing job descriptions, reassessing paraprofessional skill levels, and developing new inservice and on-the-job training programs. Role distinctions can then be established to organize the hiring of qualified personnel, and regulatory procedures can be implemented to certify that paraprofessionals have mastered the skills necessary for their assignments (Pickett, 1994).

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study the observed and perceived tasks performed by paraprofessionals and subsequent training implications were identified. Data were collected to answer the following questions:

1. What are the actual tasks performed by paraprofessionals in elementary inclusive classrooms?
2. Do teacher characteristics influence the tasks performed by paraprofessionals?
3. Do paraprofessional characteristics influence the task assignments they receive?
4. What do general and special education teachers perceive to be the appropriate tasks to assign to paraprofessionals?
5. Do paraprofessionals perceive their task assignments to be appropriate?
6. Do paraprofessionals need more training to successfully accomplish the tasks assigned to them?
7. Do teachers need more training to successfully supervise and utilize paraprofessionals?

Clarification of Terms

In order to clarify specific terms utilized throughout the study, the following definitions are provided:

1. Paraprofessionals - support personnel who assist general and/or special education teachers with the inclusion of special education students into the general education classroom.
2. General Education Classroom Teachers - educators who collaborate with special education teachers and paraprofessionals to implement educational programs for students with special needs.
3. Special Education Teachers - specially trained teachers who plan, design, and oversee the implementation of individualized education programs for students with special needs.
4. Inclusive Classrooms - classrooms where any student may be included in the general education program when appropriate.
5. Paraeducators - title given to paraprofessionals who have assumed broader responsibilities while assisting general and special teachers with the inclusion of special education students into the general education classroom.
6. Paraprofessional Task Levels - define the extent of responsibility given to and the level of proficiency attained by a paraprofessional.

Level I - included in this level are such tasks as: (a) escorting and

supervising activities; (b) setting up, maintaining, and operating equipment; (c) performing clerical duties; (d) assisting with personal care; (e) preparing training materials and maintaining supplies; and (f) reinforcing lessons.

Level II - included in this level are such tasks as: (a) tutoring students, (b) assisting with programs of study on an individual basis or in small groups, (c) implementing behavior management plans, (d) assisting with the observing, recording, and charting of information, (e) administering and scoring assessment instruments, and (f) attending team meetings.

Level III - included in this level are such tasks as: (a) consulting with certified teachers, (b) selecting appropriate instructional techniques, (c) organizing and scheduling educational activities, (d) assisting with program design, (e) collecting and charting data on student levels, and (f) serving as a liaison between the school and the community. (Pickett, 1994).

Tables 1, 2, and 3 display the tasks included in Level I, II, and III on the data collection instrument.

Table 1: Level I

Level I	Tasks
	escort students to and from bus
	escort students to and from bathroom, classrooms, specials
	supervise playground, lunchroom, study hall
	operate audio-visual equipment, computer
	record attendance, maintain records, perform other clerical duties
	assist students with personal care/self-help, snack
	prepare training materials and maintain supplies
	set up and maintain classroom equipment
	reinforce lessons

Table 2: Level II

Level II	Tasks
	tutor students
	assist with supplementary/individual work, small group
	provide assistance with individualized program of study
	administer formal and informal assessment instruments
	score objective tests and/or written papers
	assist with observing, recording, and charting student information
	implement behavioral management plans
	assist with solving disciplinary problems
	assist with preparation of instructional materials
	attend IEP or other meeting

Table 3: Level III

Level III	Tasks
	record and/or maintain records on student performance/progress
	consult with certified teachers
	assist with program design
	collect and/or chart data determining student levels
	select and/or use appropriate instructional techniques
	organize and/or schedule classroom activities
	serve as a liaison between school and parents to access resources

Literature Review

Introduction

This historical overview highlights the numerous task assignments delegated to paraprofessionals in the past and in the present. Teacher shortages in the 1950s led to the use of paraprofessionals in general education classrooms. As alternative methods of providing educational services occurred in the late 1970s, teacher's aides were recruited to assist students with special needs. Although there is little research available on paraprofessionals from the 1980s, in the 1990s information on role expansion and specialized training programs began to surface. Today, acquiring basic competencies, learning about new credentialing procedures, and obtaining a license may be some of the challenges confronting future paraeducators.

Early History

1950s. According to Pickett (1994) paraprofessionals were introduced into the general education classroom over forty years ago. The recognition of their potential value began in the 1950s due to the post-war shortage of teachers. Use of paraprofessionals was considered as alternative methods for providing education services were being explored. During this era, the Ford Foundation in Bay City,

Michigan supported efforts to recruit and train teachers' aides to perform clerical, housekeeping, and monitoring chores (Pickett, 1994).

1960s. Federal programs in the 1960s and 1970s provided more support for the employment of paraprofessionals. Head Start, Title I, and other compensatory and support services began to rely on paraprofessionals. Many career development opportunities for paraprofessionals were provided at this time through federal initiatives (Pickett, 1994). In 1965, as a result of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, salaried paraprofessionals began to assist professional teachers with noninstructional duties (Greer, 1978). Reid and Reid (1974) classified those early duties as clerical, housekeeping, noninstructional, and instructional. Since most of the services in the past were restricted to custodial care of students with severe disabilities, the paraprofessional was often assigned to perform many undesirable duties.

New Issues

1970s and 1980s. With the passage of Public Law 94-142 (The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) to provide for the education of students with disabilities, increasing attention was focused on the utilization of the non-professional worker in the delivery of services (Boomer, 1980). According to Boomer (1980) one of

the more apparent needs at that time was the training of special education teachers to work effectively with paraprofessionals. A nationwide study of paraprofessionals, sponsored by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare), found that training of this nature was virtually nonexistent (New Career Training Laboratory, 1974). Reid and Reid (1974) recommended that teachers receive training on how to supervise paraprofessionals during their practicum teaching, but few other suggestions or training models were developed.

Another study conducted by May and Marozas (1981) looked at the actual and preferred responsibilities of paraprofessionals working with students with severe disabilities. Findings showed that paraprofessionals were involved in a wider variety of duties than previously cited in the literature. Many teacher responsibilities such as instructional planning, report writing, and testing were being performed by paraprofessionals without any special training. Paraprofessionals also provided more one-to-one instruction required by students with severe needs.

Frith and Kelly (1981) pointed out that paraprofessionals, as members of the educational team, may be assigned to work in the home with parents on an instructional program that was initiated at school. Many paraprofessionals must learn to design behavior modification programs, use task analysis and contingency contracting with children. A contingency contract based on the parent's rate of participation may need to be monitored and reinforced by the paraprofessional. In home-based or homebound programs, paraprofessionals often work with small

groups or individual students. To serve preschool children with severe needs, paraprofessionals must be able to: (a) provide orientation sessions for parents and children, (b) facilitate parental involvement in a child's training program, (c) gather informal diagnostic data, and (d) increase parental awareness of community resources (Frith and Kelly, 1981).

1990s. Although federal funds supporting the programs that relied on paraprofessionals were reduced during the 1980s, the use of paraprofessionals has continued into the 1990s (Pickett, 1994). Pickett (1986) reported that of the 400,000 paraprofessionals currently working nationwide 200,000 are employed in special education and related programs. The growing practice of employing special education paraprofessionals has been attributed to their low cost of employability and their ability to work with students with several disabilities across a wide range of educational settings (Frith, Lindsey, and Edwards, 1981).

Paraprofessionals according to Wadsworth and Knight (1996) have become an important part of the "new ideology of inclusion"; they have become facilitators of instruction rather than just clerical assistants. Amendments to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, extending services to infants and toddlers, have also created a greater demand for paraprofessional support. Today paraprofessionals must interact in different settings with teachers, administrators, parents, and children. In typical urban school districts 80 percent of the paraprofessionals hired will work in

special education or ancillary services (Blalock, 1991). Paraprofessionals, Blalock reported, have become the primary service providers in preschool, general and special education, community-based, work study, and adult service programs in rural, urban, and suburban areas.

Present Needs

Presently students with severe disabilities are receiving more educational services in the general education setting, allowing the paraprofessional the opportunity to perform a diversity of assignments. Pickett (1994) has developed an extensive list of possible assignments that may be delegated to paraprofessionals today. To meet the demands of these new roles paraprofessionals must possess the interpersonal skills necessary to collaborate with team members, implement classroom management plans, and assist students with various learning difficulties.

Improving Interpersonal Skills. Employing paraprofessionals without the proper training in interpersonal skills can create many problems according to Frith (1981). Interpersonal skill training should be offered to paraprofessionals by special education teachers, supervisory staff, state education agency consultants, or even other paraprofessionals. Training can be provided by local school systems, junior colleges, state education agencies, or senior colleges. Frith (1981) suggests that

these training programs should include use of role playing and viewing of learning videotapes in seminars or workshops. Providing paraprofessionals with interpersonal skills needed to maximize ability involves special training to develop “human interaction beyond that which normally exists in their personalities” (Frith, 1981). Formal training for teachers and administrators rarely stresses the supervisory skills needed to assist paraprofessional personnel with interpersonal relationships (Frith and Lindsey, 1980) or the cost involved in developing such programs.

In typical public school settings paraprofessionals communicate with children with or without disabilities, other general and special education paraprofessionals, general and special education teachers, parents, and administrative and supervisory personnel. The ability of the paraprofessional to contribute to the total instructional program depends partially on his/her interpersonal skills. Special education teachers may delegate additional responsibilities to paraprofessionals after considering the capability of the individual.

A study done by Kennedy and Lee (1995) revealed that the three most important communication skills needed by paraprofessionals to successfully perform their job included listening, expressing themselves, and asking questions. Many paraprofessionals in this study stated that they would like “support groups” established to promote effective communication skills.

Collaborating. Greer (1978) described the teacher and paraprofessional as an “instructional team”. The teacher was considered the program manager (Boomer, 1980). Effective teamwork according to Boomer (1982) “requires well defined, but different, levels of responsibility”. Conflicts arise when the responsibility assigned by the supervising teacher differs from the paraprofessional’s personal training and interests (Blalock, 1991). For this reason, channels of communication must be kept open to facilitate cooperation.

Since the paraprofessional has become an integral part of any team that serves students in an inclusive classroom, some collaborative training programs have been developed. Blalock (1991, p. 201) identified certain variables at the system level that may hinder these collaborative efforts: (a) absence of job descriptions, (b) inequitable job assignments, (c) excessive use as substitutes, (d) scarcity of joint planning time, and (e) lack of appreciation from administrators. Successful full inclusion requires special and general educators as well as paraprofessionals to be flexible and collaborative in instructional techniques. Wadsworth and Knight (1996) developed a checklist for fostering team collaboration that can be utilized by educators to strengthen inclusive programs and enhance paraprofessional training.

Teachers, administrators, and related service personnel need training with respect to proper utilization of special education paraprofessionals in the role of collaborator. To work effectively with parents, paraprofessionals must be trained to assume the role of member of the educational team. In this role the paraprofessional

supports the supervising teacher by contributing practical suggestions as to activities that have or might be used to help the student. He or she is often encouraged to make constructive comments when the appropriate opportunities arise. In another instance, the paraprofessional may be asked to monitor the classroom while the teacher meets with the parent at school or conducts a home visit (Frith and Kelly, 1981).

Paraprofessional training to interact with parents must cover such issues as assisting the social worker or teacher in gathering information or collecting diagnostic data from parents. Sometimes paraprofessionals accompany teachers in making home visits to obtain signatures or complete information forms. Paraprofessionals must foster parental involvement by writing notes, preparing informal progress reports, or sending home samples of students' work (Frith and Kelly, 1981).

Developing Classroom Management Techniques. A training program to improve paraprofessionals' effectiveness in classroom management was developed and implemented in 1990 by Pamela Strachan. Program participants concentrated on a specific skill or area of classroom management. Inservice training included planned workshops, observations, team activities, coaching, and evaluation. Observations were conducted specifically to identify skills that needed improvement. Participants, working in teams, took part in observational learning activities. Evaluation data indicated that paraprofessionals increased in knowledge and

application of behavior management skills. Materials available to educators include pre/post tests, an observation form, and surveys with results.

Janney and Hedeem (1989) developed a problem-solving approach to challenging behaviors. This inservice module was designed for use with paraprofessionals in educational programs for children with developmental disabilities. Their six-step process included: (1) identifying the problem behavior, (2) gathering information about when the behavior does or does not occur, (3) developing an idea about the purpose of the behavior, (4) making a plan that includes prevention, teaching, and reacting to the behavior, (5) using the plan and keeping records on behavior frequency, and (6) evaluating the plan and adjusting if needed.

A study was designed by Barresi (1993) to help special education teachers and paraprofessionals identify precursor behaviors and antecedent events eliciting maladaptive behaviors in children with developmental or behavioral disorders. Five inservices were given on management skills and behavior analysis. Analysis of the data indicated that although the training was successful, approaches trailed off after several weeks and staff reverted to their former methods. Results suggest that ongoing training activities are needed for paraprofessionals working with students with challenging behaviors.

Addressing Learning Difficulties. The Irving Paraprofessional Program (1995), developed by Ronald A. Kotkin, focused on the use of paraprofessionals to assist with the inclusion of students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder into the general education classroom. This new program provided inservice training to paraprofessionals on behavior modification, use of token economy, and social skills training to ensure success for students with this specific type of challenge.

Training and Supervision

Although reliance upon paraprofessionals to assist with the inclusive process has escalated, training and supervision have not kept pace (Boomer, 1982; Blalock, 1991; Pickett, 1994). Though paraprofessionals have expressed interest in enhancing their skills by taking college courses, training programs have not been well developed. Most training has been limited to on-the-job experiences. Training paraprofessionals to assist individuals with disabilities has become the responsibility of local school systems, which have often failed to provide collaborative, inservice programs for these personnel. Only a few community colleges or universities have provided specialized training programs for paraprofessionals like the one designed and implemented by Eiss and Dixon in 1989. State funding requested for additional paraprofessional training was denied at that time.

A Paraprofessional Training Manual (1990) was written by the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory in Portland, Oregon to assist teachers as they strive to form strong instructional teams with paraprofessionals. For those who do not have a clear notion on how to best utilize paraprofessional skills, respective roles are delineated and suggestions are provided on how to work together effectively. The manual is divided into two sections: (1) Through the Teacher's Eyes; (2) Through the Paraprofessional's Eyes. Emphasis is placed on the role of the paraprofessional as a liaison between the school and the community.

A Resource Guide For the Development of Policies and Practices in the Use of Paraprofessionals in Special Education, written by Vasa and others in 1986 for Nebraska's educational agencies, is available to help paraprofessional supervisors. It covers four major areas of concern: (a) recruitment, selection, and hiring of paraprofessionals, (b) policies for appropriate utilization, (c) training programs for both paraprofessionals and teachers, and (d) policies concerning the supervision and evaluation of paraprofessionals. Appendices in this guide include such valuable items as sample applications, interview questions, a list of roles and responsibilities, a training planning guide, a needs assessment, lists of contacts, and observation and self-evaluation forms.

Future Prospects

In the future, recruitment procedures may need revision to ensure that selection teams include not only administrators but also supervising teachers. A test for basic competencies can help determine what preservice, on-the-job, or inservice training a paraprofessional needs before assigning tasks. In some states professional growth plans for paraprofessionals may include provisions for licensing and credentialing. The Utah Education Association (1990) has prepared a document that addresses recruitment, selection, and evaluation of paraprofessionals. The association states that education, prior experience, and recommendations should all be part of the selection procedure. Interviews with the building administrator and the supervising teacher are recommended before employment. A test of competencies is suggested in the areas of work to be performed utilizing a short evaluation form. Licensure and credentialing requirements are in place in other states (Pickett, 1994).

Core Competencies. Since paraprofessionals must, in some instances, supplement or extend the instructional duties previously assigned to teachers, the term “paraeducator” has become a more appropriate title (Pickett, 1995, p. 1). With the development of these new responsibilities, core competencies for paraeducators have emerged. Pickett (1995, p.1) suggests that all paraprofessionals should be initially required to demonstrate such basic competencies as:

(a) understanding staffing patterns and distinctions between roles and responsibilities, (b) communicating with colleagues, (c) understanding about the legal and human rights of students, (d) practicing ethical and professional standards of conduct, (e) showing sensitivity to diversity, (f) understanding patterns of human development, (g) identifying risk factors that impede typical development, (h) motivating and assisting students to build self-esteem, (i) strengthening students' skills to control their own behavior, and (j) following health, safety, and emergency procedures.

Specific additional competencies needed by paraprofessionals working in inclusive general and special education classrooms include (Pickett, 1995, p. 2):

(a) understanding the value of serving students with disabilities in inclusive settings, (b) instructing students in academic subjects using lesson plans and instructional strategies, (c) gathering and maintaining data about performance and behavior, (d) conferring with general and special educators about schedules, instructional goals, progress, and performance, (e) using developmental and age appropriate instructional procedures and reinforcement techniques, and (f) operating computers and using assistive technology and adaptive equipment.

In 1991 Moorehouse and Albright suggested that, since few structured training programs for paraprofessionals existed, expansion of research in this area was warranted. Using questionnaires and personal interviews, data was collected and

analyzed, then consolidated into paraprofessional training program competencies. The study revealed that a need exists for establishment of basic competency levels for paraprofessionals as well as training in interpersonal skills. Identification of individual task assignments by program planners was recommended before implementation of training.

Preservice Training. Studies (Whitehead, 1987; Wadsworth & Knight, 1996) indicate that insufficient preservice training options are available to paraprofessionals seeking to upgrade their skills. As inclusive service delivery models have increased, paraprofessionals have become employed in a wider variety of public school and adult education agency settings. Therefore, programs are needed that include training for a diversity of broad-based personnel competencies that will readily transfer to different employment settings (Morehouse, Albright, & Hanson, 1989). According to Pickett (1986) course content should include fundamental, technical, and practical applications for competency in specific work settings.

In order to meet the educational needs of paraeducators, some community colleges are providing preservice training programs based on established performance competencies and certification enforced by the State Department of Special Education. Skills training through the First Start Program has been provided at the community college level for special education paraeducators in Kansas who work in integrated, cross-categorical, and early childhood classroom environments.

Interactive television courses are used in the program, and many media resources are available for loan from the State Department of Education (O'Rourke, 1991).

On-the-Job Training. Since on-the-job coaching is often overlooked by supervisory personnel, Pickett (1990) suggests that in the future paraprofessionals be provided with a chance to practice skills and receive constructive feedback to enhance both teacher and paraprofessional collaboration skills. These practice sessions could occur during on-the-job training periods, preferably as soon as possible after employment begins.

Inservice Training. In the future structured inservice training sessions should be provided to supplement on-the-job training. These sessions could include information on legal and ethical issues, communication skills, problem solving, team building, and addressing safety and emergency procedures. Additionally, paraprofessionals must be encouraged to evaluate their own professional goals and plan for advancement (Pickett, 1990).

Licensure and Credentialing. A survey was conducted by The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services in 1991 and updated in 1994 (Pickett, 1994), to determine which states had specific policies and procedures in place for paraprofessional employment. In Alaska, Georgia,

Kansas, and Maine preservice training programs were provided to paraprofessionals. Credentialing procedures existed in Alaska, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Mexico, New Hampshire, New York, Texas, and Wisconsin (Pickett, 1994). Paraprofessionals in some of these states were trained to work on Level I, Level II or Level III task assignments. Licensure criteria, requirements for permits to teach at different levels, and routine evaluation procedures may be required for future paraeducators to obtain employment.

Chapter Summary

The chapter introduced the problem of improperly supervised and trained paraprofessionals assisting in the inclusion of students into the general education classrooms. The evolution of paraprofessional to paraeducator was presented through a review of the literature. Early history emphasized noninstructional duties, while present utilization has expanded to necessitate the identification of instructional and other competency levels. Future prospects include credentialing and licensing to improve hiring, training, supervising, and evaluating of paraeducators. Further research into role clarification will provide data to promote the development of professional training programs for teachers as well as paraprofessionals.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The research methodology utilized in the study is presented in this chapter. Procedures for selection of paraprofessionals to observe in inclusive classrooms and procedures for interviewing participants are included. Development of the collection instrument and procedures for conducting the study are explained. Preparation for observations and interviews is included, followed by study limitations and data analysis.

In order to study the questions posed in Chapter 1, observations were carried out in selected school divisions in Virginia. Tasks performed by paraprofessionals working with special education students in elementary inclusive classrooms were recorded. Special education teachers and general education teachers working in these classrooms were interviewed to ascertain what tasks they perceived paraprofessionals to be performing. Paraprofessionals and teachers also responded to general questions about paraprofessional task assignments.

Participants

Obtaining Permissions

The investigator obtained permission to conduct the study from the Human Subjects Division of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Institutional Review Board. Permission forms were distributed to administrators, teachers, and parents of students to be observed. Written permission was obtained from students after study procedures were read orally to them.

Selecting Paraprofessionals and Classrooms

Three school divisions in Southwest Virginia were chosen to participate in the study. Special education directors, building principals, and special education teachers assisted the investigator in selecting the paraprofessionals to observe in inclusive classrooms. In two of the school divisions, selection was limited due to the small number of elementary inclusive classrooms. To provide opportunities for observing various task assignments performed by paraprofessionals, different grade level classrooms were selected. Two observations in each of the 15 classes were conducted. Whenever possible, the observations were completed before the interviews.

Selecting Interview Respondents

Teachers and paraprofessionals working together in inclusive classrooms were given a choice of possible times to be interviewed. Special education teachers, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals who volunteered to participate orally answered questions recorded by the investigator. Demographic information on education, training, and experience was collected, followed by general questions about the utilization of paraprofessionals. Also, a checklist was completed indicating perceived roles performed by paraprofessionals.

Instrument

The data collection instrument was developed by the investigator based on information from a report written by Pickett (1994). Paraprofessional assignments were divided into three levels according to the extent of responsibility and level of proficiency needed to perform the tasks (see Tables 1, 2, & 3). Modifications were made to the instrument after receiving suggestions from general and special education teachers and paraprofessionals. The general question section was left open-ended to encourage respondents to elaborate on answers. Changes to the interview checklist for teachers and paraprofessionals and to the observation checklist were made after the pilot study was conducted. Additional tasks observed

during the pilot studies were added to the instrument.

Objectives

The major objective of this study was to collect information on the utilization of paraprofessionals to clarify roles and to identify training needs of special and general education teachers and of paraprofessionals. The study focused on:

1. The observed tasks performed by paraprofessionals in elementary inclusive classrooms.
2. The relationship between paraprofessional characteristics and the tasks they performed in elementary inclusive classrooms.
3. The relationship between teacher characteristics and tasks performed by paraprofessionals in elementary inclusive classrooms.

Pilot Studies

Pilot studies were conducted in two school divisions to collect data through observations and interviews. The classrooms chosen for the pilots were not utilized for data collection in the actual study. The classrooms were chosen based on recommendations made by the special education directors and building principals.

The data collection instrument was tested during the pilot study to determine what changes were needed before conducting the actual study. After observing paraprofessionals and interviewing the general education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals working in inclusive classrooms, six minor changes were made to the data collection instrument based on suggestions from pilot study participants.

Procedures

Preparation For Observations and Interviews

In School Division A the special education director obtained permission from the principals at two elementary schools then chose a resource teacher at each school to (a) contact teachers, (b) distribute parent and student permission forms, (c) collect permission forms, and (d) schedule observations and interviews with teachers and paraprofessionals. An initial visit was made to one school to meet the principal and resource teacher.

On the day of the observations a schedule was presented to the investigator to expedite a smooth transition from Class a to Class b to Class c. Interviews with the teachers and paraprofessionals were scheduled before school, during lunchtime, or at planning times to minimize interruption of classroom activities. All data collection

and observations took place within a two day period of time.

In School Division B interviews and observations were scheduled with the assistance of principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers. Interviews were conducted on different days, usually after school had dismissed for the day or during scheduled breaks. Two special education teachers chose not to participate in the study, therefore their classrooms were not observed. One paraprofessional filled out the instrument herself and mailed it to the investigator. It took approximately one month to complete data collection in this school division.

Special education teachers helped plan observations in School Division C, then general and special education teachers individually selected times to be interviewed. One general education teacher, upon request, was given permission to fill out the data collection instrument on her own. Data collection was completed over a two week period of time.

Observations

Observations were conducted at scheduled times in all three school divisions. Two observations were conducted in each of the five classrooms in each school division. The classroom observation checklist section of the data collection instrument was used to record the number of times a task was observed, the time of each observation, and additional comments needed. An additional blank checklist

sheet was available for recording any tasks not listed.

Interviews

Demographic information was collected from all general education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals in the five elementary inclusive classrooms to determine present levels of background, training and education. Those special education teachers, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals involved in inclusion of special education students into the general education classroom were orally interviewed at scheduled times to clarify specific information on paraprofessional task assignments. In most cases questions were read orally to the participants while the investigator recorded the answers. One paraprofessional and one general education teacher each filled out the instrument on her own and returned it.

Data Analysis

The researcher reviewed the data collected from oral interviews and classroom observations. Data from each of the school divisions was collated in a series of specific matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using matrices from each case the researcher identified similarities and differences among the school divisions. Similarities and differences among cases were collated in a series of four matrices.

Cross-case analysis contained matrices on demographic information, observed and perceived task levels, paraprofessional usage by teacher educational level, and matching and nonmatching perceptions of paraprofessional task assignments. Conclusions drawn from the cross-case analysis were described in narrative format.

Limitations

How individual administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals perceived their roles may differ from those on the checklist; additional tasks may fall under Level I, II, and III or some tasks, for example, under Level I may be listed under Level II. Another issue in question was whether the checklist developed for this study provided a valid measure of what should be the minimum competencies expected of all paraprofessionals. Therefore, additional tasks were included upon suggestion of teachers and paraprofessionals after the pilot studies. Some school districts assigned paraprofessionals to individual students, this limited the types of duties that could be observed. The following limitations may restrict the generalizability of the study results:

1. Respondents included teachers and paraprofessionals from three school divisions in one state.
2. Other school divisions may utilize paraprofessionals differently.
3. One investigator collected the data and analyzed the results. The entire

study was designed and conducted by one person.

4. Information may be incomplete due to small number of observations.
5. Some teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents chose not to participate in the study.
6. Some schools were excluded from the study. One special education director decided which elementary schools would participate in the study. The superintendent in one school division specified that all participation should be on a voluntary basis. In another school division principals decided whether their schools would participate.
7. Special education directors were not asked what staff development offerings were available: Teachers and paraprofessionals choosing not to attend optional offerings is not the same as a school not providing training opportunities.
8. The job descriptions in each school division were not reviewed to determine whether policies restricted paraprofessional task assignments.

Chapter Summary

A summary of study methodology was presented in this chapter.

After explaining selection procedures, choice of classrooms to observe and respondents to be interviewed was established. Design of the data collection

instrument was explained, followed by procedures for data collection and analysis.

A list of study limitations was provided.

Chapter 3

RESULTS

Introduction

This section includes demographics and information recorded while the investigator observed inclusive classrooms in the three school divisions. Classroom observation data for each school division are displayed in Tables 4 through 6, followed by explanatory paragraphs. Answers to general questions posed to special education teachers, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals follow. Cross-case analyses of demographic information, paraprofessional usage by teacher educational level, observed and perceived task levels, and matching and nonmatching perceptions appear in Tables 7 through 9 with explanation.

Notes.

1. Unless otherwise identified, the term “paraprofessional” refers to special education paraprofessionals in this section.
2. The total number of general and special students present may differ between observation 1 and observation 2 depending on attendance and changes in class schedules.
3. Some paraprofessional tasks listed under each observation were performed repeatedly.

School Division A Observations and General Questions

Table 4: Demographic Information School Division A

School Division A	Grade	Total # Students	# Special Ed. Students	# of Paras.	# of Gen. Ed. Tchers.	# of Spec. Ed. Tchers	Other
A1a	5	15	3	2	1	0	1 (Student Tcher.)
A1b	4	11	1	1	1	0	0
A1c	4	20	4	1	1	0	0
A2a	K	15	1	2	1	0	0
A2b	4	19	1	2	1	0	0

Note. In the first column A = school division; 1 and 2 = schools within a school division; a, b, and c = classes within a school.

Class A1a Observations

Three special education students, one with a learning disability, one with mental retardation, and one with a behavioral disability, were in the class. Special Education and computer laboratory paraprofessionals were utilized. The following paraprofessional tasks were performed during observations one and two:

Level I (2 observed)

1. operate computer

Level II (3 observed)

1. assist with individual work
2. provide assistance with individualized plan of study

Level III (1 observed)

1. select appropriate instructional techniques

Observation 1 - Three Special Education Students Included In a Fifth Grade
Computer Laboratory Classroom With 15 Students Present

During the first day of observation the paraprofessional worked with the three special education students and with all general education students on individual mathematics assignments in the computer laboratory (Level I & Level II tasks). In addition, all students were assisted by a computer laboratory paraprofessional, a student teacher, a parent volunteer, and the general education classroom teacher (Level I & Level II tasks). The special education students were working on mathematics assignments similar to those of the general education students; the lesson had been modified by the special education teacher to meet individualized program instructions.

Observation 2 - Three Special Education Students Included In a General
Education Classroom With 15 Students Present

On the second day of observation, students were in their classroom working on a mathematics assignment, adding fractions with unlike denominators. One special

education student was receiving individualized instructions from the paraprofessional on fractions, a Level II task. The paraprofessional also selected the appropriate instructional techniques to use with the lesson, a Level III task. One special education student was capable of working independently; the other special education student was absent that day.

Class A1b Observations

One special education student with a learning disability was in the class. The following paraprofessional tasks were performed during observations one and two:

Level II (4 observed)

1. assist with individual work
2. provide assistance with individualized plan of study
3. assist with preparation of instructional materials

Observation 1 - One Special Education Student Included In a Fourth Grade General Education Classroom With 11 Students Present

On the first day the students were finding vocabulary words in their reading books to write and define in their notebooks. The one special education student received individual instruction, a Level II task, from the paraprofessional at a separate table located in the rear of the classroom. The special education student had his own list of vocabulary words to define and use in sentences. The paraprofessional stated

that she sometimes prepares the vocabulary sentences for the student to copy (Level II task), but the special education teacher has always prepared the rest of the lesson materials daily.

Observation 2 - One Special Education Student Included In a Fourth Grade
General Education Classroom With 11 Students Present

On the second day the special education student was working with the paraprofessional on spelling words and sentences he had previously typed in the computer laboratory (Level II task). When the class returned from the computer laboratory, general education students worked on their daily language sentences before leaving for the library. The special education student was able to participate without assistance in the library activities. If the librarian did a specific lesson on use of the encyclopedia, for example, the paraprofessional said that she would then provide individual assistance, a Level II task, to the special education student.

Class A1c Observations

Four special education students with learning disabilities were in the class.

The following paraprofessional tasks were performed during observations one and two:

Level II (3 observed)

1. tutor student
2. provide individual assistance with individual work

Observation 1 - Four Special Education Students Included In a Fourth Grade
General Education Classroom With 20 Students Present

During the first observation the paraprofessional provided individual assistance (Level II task) to the four special education students as they participated in the English grammar lesson presented by the general education teacher.

Observation 2 - Four Special Education Students Included In a Fourth Grade
General Education Classroom With 19 Students Present

The special education students were participating in a vocabulary lesson with a minimal amount of individual assistance (Level II task) from the paraprofessional. Some guidance (Level II task) was given with the alphabetizing of vocabulary words.

Class A2a Observations

One special education with multiple disabilities was in the class. Special education and kindergarten paraprofessionals were utilized. The following paraprofessional tasks were performed during observations one and two:

Level I (2 observed)

1. escort student to and from bathroom, classrooms, specials

Level II (7 observed)

1. provide assistance with individualized program of study
2. implement behavioral management plan
3. assist with solving disciplinary problems

Level III (1 observed)

1. record and/or maintain records on student performance/progress

Observation 1 - One Special Education Student Included In a Kindergarten
General Education Classroom With 15 Students Present

The paraprofessional escorted (Level I task) the special education student when he left the room with the physical therapist . Assistance was provided by the paraprofessional as he practiced walking around the school, up and down stairs, and into the gym. Sometimes, the paraprofessional reported, she does not go with the special education student so that he can develop independence. The paraprofessional said that she meets the student at the cafeteria doors in the mornings and takes him to breakfast, then they visit office personnel on the way to class to encourage the student to develop socialization skills, a Level II task. The paraprofessional kept a record of student performance on a daily basis in a specific notebook (Level III task).

The paraprofessional stayed near the special education student during circle time to assist with behavior management (Level II task); he still interrupted the general education teacher numerous times. A second paraprofessional, assigned to more than one kindergarten class, assisted with solving disciplinary problems of other challenging students, a Level II task. The paraprofessional encouraged the special education student to participate (Level II task) in the general education activity

of acting out a story. After the story the special education student continued the activity with paraprofessional guidance, a Level II task.

Observation 2- One Special Education Student Included In a Kindergarten
General Education Classroom With 15 Students Present

The paraprofessional was sitting in a chair next to the special education student to assist with behavior, a Level II task. When the special education student picked out a record he wanted to listen to, the paraprofessional helped him mimic the sounds and act them out, a Level II task. The paraprofessional monitored (Level I task) the special education student while he went to the bathroom at the rear of the classroom, then joined the other students at a table. With the assistance of the paraprofessional, he was able to participate with the general education students in sounding out words and adding them to his personal dictionary (Level II task).

Class A2b Observations

One special education student with a learning disability was in the class. Special education and remedial paraprofessionals were utilized. The following paraprofessional tasks were observed during observations one and two:

Level II (6 observed)

1. assist with individual work, small group

Observation 1 - One Special Education Student Included In a Fourth Grade

General Education Classroom With 19 Students Present

The paraprofessional sat beside the special education student to provide assistance, a Level II task, with the spelling assignment. The assignment had been modified to meet individualized program of study goals. The special education student dictated sentences to the paraprofessional while she wrote them on a sheet of paper for him, a Level II task. Four general education students joined the paraprofessional (Level II task) and special education student to read orally. The general education teacher and remedial paraprofessional each read with a small group of other students (Level II task).

Observation 2 - One Special Education Student Included In a Fourth Grade

General Education Classroom With 20 Students Present

Two special education students were working at a table in the rear of the classroom with a paraprofessional. Individual assistance, a Level II task, was being given to students as they worked on making sentences with their vocabulary words. Later the special education students joined the general education classroom activities while the paraprofessional provided individual help (Level II task) to them at their desks.

School Division A Responses To General Questions

In School Division A five general education teachers, two special education teachers, and six paraprofessionals were asked the General Questions. Everyone agreed that the observation days were typical to any given week. Duties performed by

paraprofessionals were also seen by all except one paraprofessional as varying according to the individual needs of the students, grade levels, or subjects being taught. Two paraprofessionals stated that support services needed to perform their job were not always adequate depending on the teachers with whom they were assigned to work. The other paraprofessionals and teachers felt that support services were adequate. All of the individuals interviewed agreed that paraprofessional skills were being utilized appropriately at present, except for one paraprofessional who said that it depended on circumstances. On-site training was viewed as adequate, with two paraprofessionals disagreeing.

Paraprofessionals and special education teachers said that a job description was given to paraprofessionals when hired; five paraprofessionals had copies. All but one respondent agreed that establishing competency levels would be beneficial, but only if they were specific and funding was available for paraprofessionals to pay for required courses.

School Division B Observations and General Questions

Table 5: Demographic Information School Division B

School Division B	Grade	Total # Gen. & Spec. Ed. Students	# Special Ed. Students	# of Paras.	# of Gen. Ed. Tchers.	# of Spec. Ed. Tchers.	Other
B1a	1	21	1	1	1	1	0
B1b	K-3	A.M. numerous (changing#)	Large Group	1	0	0	4 (Patrols) 1 (Lunchrm. person.)
B1c	2	19	3	1	1	0	0
B1d	2	19	3	1	1	0	0
B2a	4	22	2	2	1	1	0

Note. In the first column B = school division; 1 and 2 = schools within a school division; a, b, c, and d = classes within a school.

Class B1a Observations

One special education student with multiple disabilities was in the class.

The following paraprofessional tasks were performed during observations one and two:

Level I (2 observed)

1. supervise student

Level II (2 observed)

1. provide assistance with individualized program of study
2. implement behavioral management plan

Observation 1 - One Special Education Student Included In a First Grade Special Area Classroom With 21 Students Present

The special education student was supervised (Level I task) by the special education teacher, performing a Level I paraprofessional task, during an art activity. Only a minimal amount of assistance was necessary to keep the special education student on task (Level II task) and working with the general education students. No lesson modifications were necessary for this student except for the provision of a special easel to position the paper.

Observation 2 - One Special Education Student Included In an Assembly With All of the Kindergarten Through Third Grade General Education Classrooms Present

The general education students were attending an assembly honoring school volunteers. The special education student sat in the rear of the auditorium with the paraprofessional. She had to be reminded to pay attention to the speaker and stay seated a few times (Level II tasks); otherwise she participated in all activities with the other general education students. She was monitored, a Level I task, by the paraprofessional to respond appropriately while clapping at the end of the assembly.

Class B1b Observations

A number of special education students with different disabilities, including one with a health impairment, were in the class. The following paraprofessional tasks were performed during observations one and two:

Level I (3 observed)

1. supervise students
2. assist students with personal care/self-help

Observation 1 - One Paraprofessional Working With All the General and Special Education Students Present In the Multi-Purpose Room

The paraprofessional was responsible for monitoring students who arrived for school until the bell rang for class. She was assisted by one cafeteria employee and four student patrols from the fourth through sixth grade elementary school. Students eating breakfast were also in the room. The responsibility of monitoring the specific foods eaten at breakfast by two students with diabetes required additional supervision (Level I task) from the paraprofessional. Those students who misbehaved were sent into the hall to sit on a bench that was within sight of the paraprofessional who was monitoring the activities, a Level I task.

Observation 2 - One Paraprofessional Working With All the General and Special Education Students Present In the Multi-Purpose Room

The investigator observed the same activities during the second observation.

Activities of the students and job responsibilities of the paraprofessional were similar (Level I tasks).

Class B1c Observations.

Three special education students with learning disabilities were in the class.

The following paraprofessional tasks were observed during observations one and two:

Level I (1 observed)

1. supervise students

Level II (7 observed)

1. assist with individual work
2. implement behavioral management plan
3. assist with solving disciplinary problems

Observation 1 - Three Special Education Students Included In a Second Grade General Education Classroom With 19 Students Present

The three special education students were included in the general education classroom activity, listening to a speaker from a local bank present information on handling money. The paraprofessional had to remind the students to stay on task a numbers of times, a Level II task. One special education student answered two questions posed by the speaker to all students. All three special education students

remained actively involved in the lesson under the supervision of the paraprofessional for behavior management, a Level II task.

Observation 2- Three Special Education Students Included In a Second Grade General Education Classroom With 19 Students Present

The special education students participated in the general education classroom opening exercises, then the paraprofessional watched the class for a short time (Level I task) while the teacher took some information to the office. One special education student had to be reminded twice to stay on task, while another had to be taken out of the classroom to be talked to privately by the paraprofessional about his defiant behavior (Level II tasks). After the talk he did some of his mathematics assignment with the assistance of the paraprofessional (Level II task).

Both of the other special education students were able to complete the same mathematics assignment as the general education students with no special modifications, other than to be reminded to stay on task (Level II task). The paraprofessional had to move the one special education student's desk away from the others and sit next to him to help him complete the work (Level II task) before leaving for the resource room. The other two special education students had to be verbally reminded to stay on task a few more times (Level II task).

Class B1d Observations

Three special education students with learning disabilities were in the class. The following paraprofessional tasks were observed during observations one and two:

Level I (1 observed)

1. supervise students
2. prepare training materials and maintain supplies

Level II (7 observed)

1. assist with individual work
2. implement behavioral management plan

Observation 1 - Three Special Education Students Included In a Second Grade General Education Classroom With 19 Students Present

The general and special education students were working on mathematics problems; all of the special education students were able to do the same mathematics assignment. The general education teacher helped one special education student stay on task, a Level II task. While all the students worked on problems from the overhead projector, special education students were assisted individually, a Level II task, by the paraprofessional. The paraprofessional helped one student find and organize his school supplies (Level I task). The two other special education students had to be reminded to stay on task numerous times during the observation, Level II tasks.

Observation 2 - Three Special Education Students Included In a Second Grade General Education Classroom With 15 Students Present

The three special education students were participating in an oral mathematics lesson with the general education students. The paraprofessional provided one-to-one assistance, a Level II task, to the special education students at their desks, while the general education teacher worked problems on the chalkboard. While some general education students worked mathematics problems on the chalkboard, the paraprofessional provided assistance to others individually, a Level II task. A defiant student who refused to pay attention to the lesson, demanded individual attention from the paraprofessional, a Level II task. The paraprofessional checked and took up the mathematics sheet of one of the special education students to put it in the correct location for him, a Level II task. He continued to need paraprofessional attention to stay on task and concentrate on the lesson (Level II task).

Class B2a Observations

Two special education students, one with a learning disability and one with an emotional disability, were in the class. The following paraprofessional tasks were performed during observations one and two:

Level I (1 observed)

1. assist student with personal care

Level II (5 observed)

1. tutor students
2. assist with individual work
3. score objective tests
4. administer informal assessment
5. assist with solving disciplinary problems

Level III (1 observed)

1. select and/or use appropriate instructional techniques

Observation 1 - Two Special Education Students Included In a Fourth Grade
General Education Classroom With 22 Students Present

The paraprofessional sat beside the special education student to provide one-to-one assistance, a Level II task, as needed on the science lesson being presented by the general education teacher. The paraprofessional also provided individual help, a Level II task, to a general education student sitting next to her. Another paraprofessional was in the room to implement a behavioral management plan, a Level II task, for a different special education student. The paraprofessional selected a lesson check up section, a Level III task, to orally review for a test with the special education student. According to the paraprofessional, the special education student often goes to the resource room to take his science tests (Level II task).

Observation 2 - Two Special Education Students Included In a Fourth Grade
General Education Music Classroom With 22 Students Present

The paraprofessional assisted the special education students to keep them on task. When the students started to play the xylophone, the paraprofessional held the special education student's hand, a Level II task, as she played the notes. One special education student really enjoyed playing the instrument; the other one had to be reminded by the paraprofessional, a Level I task, to take a break since she was tired.

School Division B Responses To General Questions

Two general education teachers, five special education teachers, and five paraprofessionals were asked the General Questions. A special education teacher in this school division had written the job description for paraprofessionals. Only one participant, a paraprofessional, indicated that she had seen the job description. Everyone agreed that the observation days were typical to any given week. Although general education teachers and special education teachers stated that duties vary, two paraprofessionals reported that their duties were set. Everyone interviewed agreed that establishing competency levels for paraprofessionals was a good idea. While general and special education teachers felt that skills were utilized appropriately, paraprofessionals were evenly split on this issue. One paraprofessional said that teachers do not take the time necessary to learn what

tasks paraprofessionals are capable of performing. Both special education teachers and paraprofessionals reported that needed support services are adequate; 50% of the general education teachers disagreed. Even though a need for specific training on medical and general special education information was stated, paraprofessionals were generally satisfied with their training programs.

School Division C Observations and General Questions

Table 6: Demographic Information School Division C

School Division C	Grade	Total # Gen. & Spec. Ed. Students	# Special Ed. Students	# of Paras.	# of Gen. Ed. Tchers.	# of Spec. Ed. Tchers.	Other
C1a	1	21	1	1	1	0	0
C1b	1	9	1	2	0	0	0
C1c	1	21	1	1	1	0	0
C2a	K	17	1	1	1	0	0
C3a	2	20	1	3	1	0	0

Note. In the first column C = school division; 1, 2, and 3 = schools within a school division; a, b, and c = classes within a school.

Class C1a Observations

One special education student with multiple disabilities was in the class. The following paraprofessional tasks were performed during observations one and two:

Level I (4 observed)

1. supervise student
2. escort student to and from bathroom, classrooms, specials
3. assist student with personal care/self help, snack

Observation 1 - One Special Education Student Included In a First Grade General Education Classroom With 21 Students Present

The paraprofessional remained very busy during the entire observation time, helping the special education student move around the classroom, a Level I task, to engage in the general education activities. The special education student also needed help with opening his crackers and drink at snack time, a Level I task. The special education student was able to move himself around the room, to some extent, in a wheelchair without the help of the paraprofessional. As the general education students worked together in teams to perform mathematics operations, the special education student joined in the activities. The special education student remained actively involved in the general education activities under the supervision of the paraprofessional (Level I task).

Observation 2 - One Special Education Student Included In a First Grade General Education Classroom With 21 Students Present

The special education student was out of his wheelchair, working at a table with the other general education students on a mathematics assignment. Since the special education student was able to work independently for most of the reading time, the paraprofessional was able to help supervise (Level I task) other general education students. The general education teacher reviewed vocabulary words with a group of students that included the special education student. The general education teacher took the special education student's walker to him so he could get his snack at the rear of the classroom and return to the table (the paraprofessional was assisting another group of students). A small group of students, including the special education student, left with the paraprofessional to join a reading group in another room (Level I task).

Class C1b Observations

One special education student with physical disabilities was in the class. The following paraprofessional tasks were performed during observations one and two:

Level I (8 observed)

1. escort student to and from bathroom, classrooms, specials
2. supervise student
3. reinforce lesson

Level II (1 observed)

1. tutor student

Observation 1 - One Special Education Student Included In a First Grade
Combined Reading Group With 9 Students Present

When the special education student left the general education classroom, the paraprofessional accompanied the small group of students, a Level I task. One student carried the wheelchair tabletop, while the special education student wheeled himself to the reading classroom.

Students sat around a small table to read orally to two paraprofessionals to reinforce a lesson (Level I task) previously presented by the reading teacher. The special education student's wheelchair was pulled up close to the table, so he could participate in the activities with the group. The special education student was called upon first to read orally. When asked, the special education student found words ending in "ing" in his book and answered oral questions asked by the paraprofessional (Level I task). The special education student was able to participate in the lesson while supervised by the paraprofessional, a Level I task.

Observation 2 - One Special Education Student Included In a First Grade
Combined Reading Group With 8 Students Present

Five students, including the special education student, were escorted (Level I task) to the writing to read classroom. The special education student was able to

transport himself down the hall, to the bathroom, and then into the classroom. The paraprofessional waited outside the bathroom door for the students, then walked them to the room (Level I task). One of the other students brought the wheelchair, in case he needed it later. The special education student sat at the table with the other students while the reading books were distributed to everyone by the two paraprofessionals (Level I task). Students, including the special education student, took turns reading orally to the whole group under supervision of the paraprofessionals (Level I task). The paraprofessional helped the special education student create sentences orally before he started to write (Level I task). When the paraprofessional took the walker to the special education student, a Level I task, he moved over to the computer to type the story.

Class C1c Observations

One special education student with physical disabilities was in the class. The following paraprofessional tasks were performed during observations one and two:

Level I (4 observed)

1. escort student to and from bathroom, classrooms, specials
2. supervise student

Observation 1 - One Special Education Student Included In a First Grade General Education Group With 21 Present

Students were escorted from the reading group to join their class for lunch. The

special education student, after being helped into his wheelchair by the paraprofessional (Level I task), transported himself to the lunchroom. Another student brought the special education student's walker, in case it was needed later. The paraprofessional walked with the special education student to the lunchroom, a Level I task. After he was seated and the tray was delivered to him, the special education student was able to eat his lunch with the general education students under minimal paraprofessional supervision (Level I task).

Observation 2 - One Special Education Student Included In a First Grade General Education Group With 21 Present

During this observation the special education student needed help moving to the table and getting seated for lunch (Level I task). The paraprofessional gave him some choices about food items before leaving to enter the line to get the food tray (Level I tasks). Upon receiving the tray, the special education student joined the other general education students to eat lunch.

Class C2a Observations

One special education student with a visual impairment was in the class. The following paraprofessional tasks were performed during observations one and two:

Level I (6 observed)

1. escort student to and from bathroom, classrooms, specials
2. assist student with personal care/self-help

3. supervise student

Level II (1 observed)

1. implement behavioral management plan

Observation 1 - One Special Education Student Included In a Kindergarten
General Education Classroom With 17 Students Present

To avoid distracting the special education student, the paraprofessional sat at the back of the room during opening exercises. The special education student was very verbal so the paraprofessional had to remind her to pay attention, a Level II task. Since the special education student was intellectually capable of participating in the general education classroom activities, only minimal paraprofessional assistance was needed. A visual specialist consulted with the general education teacher to provide help with academic modifications.

When everyone left for physical education, the paraprofessional helped the special education student (Level I task), instructing her on the use of a cane, as she moved on the right and then the left side of the hall. The paraprofessional provided assistance during the physical education activities, staying close due to her visual limitations (Level I task).

Observation 2 - One Special Education Student Included In a Kindergarten
General Education Classroom With 17 Students Present

When the special education student entered the room, she joined the others in a

drawing and writing assignment. The paraprofessional who had accompanied her (Level I task), then left the student alone in the classroom with the general education teacher and other students. During this time the special education student worked without paraprofessional assistance to increase independence. As the general education students prepared to go to lunch, the special education student sat very close to the general education teacher, demanding attention and asking many questions.

Another paraprofessional joined the special education student as the class left for the lunchroom. Assistance was given to help guide her down the hall with the use of a cane, a Level I task. Then, the paraprofessional gave the special education student choices on food selections, brought the tray of food, and cut up some items for her, all Level I tasks.

Class C3a Observations

One special education student with mental retardation was in the class. One special education and two writing to read paraprofessionals were utilized. The following paraprofessional tasks were performed during observations one and two:

Level I (4 observed)

1. operate computer
2. supervise student
3. prepare training materials

4. reinforce lessons

Level II (1 observed)

1. implement behavioral management plan
2. assist with individual work

Observation 1 - One Special Education Student Included In a Second Grade
General Education Classroom With 16 Students Present

The special education student was writing sentences at the computer while the paraprofessional supervised (Level I task) from a distance, allowing him as much independence as possible. He only had to be reminded a few times by the paraprofessional, a Level II task, to stay on task. When he finished his work, he came over to the paraprofessional to receive permission to play a game on the computer. The two other paraprofessionals supervised the other students, a Level I task, as they worked individually at computers.

Observation 2 - One Special Education Student Included In a Second Grade
General Education Classroom With 20 Students Present

When the special education student joined the general education students, four different classrooms were working together on reading assignments. The special education student received remedial assistance, a Level I task, from the paraprofessional at his desk. Using a special raised board, the student matched words with pictures cards. The paraprofessionals had prepared the work sheets

being utilized in the lesson, a Level I task.

School Division C Responses To General Questions

Three general education teachers, four special education teachers, and four paraprofessionals were asked the General Questions. All but two people interviewed had copies of a handbook for paraprofessionals. Everyone agreed that the observation days were typical to any given week. General and special education teachers said that duties varied; 50% of the paraprofessionals reported that their assignments were set. Everyone agreed that it would be a good idea to establish competency levels for paraprofessionals, as long as financial assistance was provided for training programs. Two general education teachers and one paraprofessional did not feel that support services to perform job assignments were adequate. Teachers and paraprofessionals were split on whether appropriate training presently existed, especially on law issues and providing specific adaptations for students with severe needs. Everyone interviewed, except for one paraprofessional, felt that their skills were being utilized appropriately.

Cross-Case Analysis of the Three School Divisions

This section includes information derived from a cross-case analysis of the three school divisions in regard to the following topics: specific demographic information on

years of experience, educational level, and specialized training; paraprofessional usage by teacher educational level; observed and perceived task levels; and paraprofessionals' and teachers' perceptions of task performance.

Demographic Information

School Division A. The general title given to paraprofessionals in School Division A was "Teacher Assistant". These paraprofessionals were assigned to assist a teacher, not a particular student, for efficient utilization of staff in a number of possible assignments. Remedial and Chapter 1 paraprofessionals were also part of this delivery model. One special education teacher in the school division had an additional assignment of serving as a general education teacher for approximately three hours a day.

Although paraprofessionals indicated that they often received an introductory orientation when hired, special and general education teachers were not included in this training. Paraprofessionals in this school division reported that they had attended numerous inservices and workshops annually and received informative materials and journal articles from their special education department to keep them abreast of new issues surrounding competency requirements and credentialing. Workshops and inservices, during the year or in the summers, included medical, computer, and inclusion training sessions at the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, or New River

Community College. Extra paraprofessional assignments often included hall, cafeteria, school store, or supervisory duties. Additional pay was provided only for assignment to cafeteria duty.

School Division B. The title of “Special Education Aide” was given to paraprofessionals in this school division. Paraprofessionals were utilized to provide services for pull-out, resource, and inclusion models. Although most training was acquired on-the-job, special education lead teachers often provided inservices to paraprofessionals and to parents of students with special needs.

General and special education teachers were not clear on what specific duties paraprofessionals could perform legally. Paraprofessionals were concerned about receiving respect for their position from teachers and administrators. Inservices addressed such topics as medical needs, behavior management, and new math techniques for special students.

School Division C. “Instructional Aide/Assistant” was utilized to identify paraprofessionals in this school division. Paraprofessionals received an assignment to an individual student or to a specific program. Paraprofessionals stated that they were often “flipped” from one assignment to another. The school division operates on the belief that in order to prevent teacher burnout and over-attachment, it is best for paraprofessionals to serve students only half a day for approximately three years.

Special education teachers were responsible for the training of paraprofessionals to work in inclusive settings and provided education services, while paraprofessionals assisted students, especially with mobility issues, personal care, and behavior management. Inservices and workshops included training on medical issues, behavior management, school climate, crisis intervention, processing disorders, inclusion, learning disabilities, and reading.

Table 7 displays certain demographic information collected from teachers and paraprofessionals. In School Division A two special education and five general education teachers agreed to participate in the study. Six paraprofessionals working with these general and special education teachers also provided demographic information for this table. In some instances, the same paraprofessional worked with more than one teacher or class. One special education teacher supervised the instructional program of several special education students in different general education classrooms. In School Division B five special education and two general education teachers agreed to participate in the study. Five paraprofessionals working with these general and special education teachers also provided demographic information for this table. In School Division C four special education and three general education teachers agreed to participate in the study. Four paraprofessionals working with these general and special education teachers also provided demographic information for this table. Some paraprofessionals worked specifically

with Writing to Read programs.

Table 7: Demographic Information For School Divisions A, B, and C

Job Description	Special Ed. Teachers			General Ed. Teachers			Paraprofessionals		
	Division			Division			Division		
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
Years of Experience									
0-5	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	3	1
6-10	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	3
11-20	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	0	0
21-30	1	1	2	1	1	0	3	0	0
Educational Level									
High Sch./GED	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	3
Assoc. Degree	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
BA/BS	1	2	2	3	2	2	0	1	1
MAMS	1	3	2	2	0	1	0	1	0
Advan. Degree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Specialized Training									
Intro./Orient.	1	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	2
Competencies	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Inservices	2	4	4	4	1	2	5	2	2
Workshop	2	4	4	5	2	0	5	2	2

Notes Regarding Missing Or Multiple Response Data

In School Division A one paraprofessional elected not to respond to the years of experience question. One general education teacher reported that she had received an introductory/orientation, inservices, and workshops; one had workshops only; three had inservices and workshops. Two paraprofessionals reported that they had

received an introductory/orientation, competency training, inservices, and workshops; two had inservices and workshops; one had an introductory/orientation, inservices, and workshops. In School Division B one special education teacher elected not to respond to the years of experience question; one paraprofessional did not respond to the years of experience question. Under specialized training one special education teacher recorded that she only had training on competencies required. Three paraprofessionals reported that they had had no specialized training. In School Division C one general education teacher reported that she had not received any specialized training. One paraprofessional had received an introductory/orientation, inservices, and workshops; one had an introductory/orientation; one had inservices; one had workshops.

Similarities Among the Three School Divisions

Similarities among the three school divisions are presented in table format, starting with demographic information on special education teachers, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals. In School Divisions B and C more special education teachers had earned a Masters Degree than had the general education teachers. Most of the paraprofessionals had received a high school diploma; three had earned an Associate Degree. Special education teachers in all three school divisions had received more inservices and workshops than had the

general education teachers. Paraprofessionals in School Division A reported that they had attended more inservices and workshops than those in School Divisions B or C. General education teachers in all three school divisions said they did not attend introductory orientations on working with special education students or information on basic competencies needed by paraprofessionals (see table 7).

No relationship can be seen between the educational level of teachers and paraprofessional task assignments. Paraprofessionals indicated that task assignments depended more upon the personality of the teacher with whom they worked.

Paraprofessional Usage By Teacher Educational Level

Demographic information was collected from special education teachers, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals in an effort to determine whether more educated teachers utilized paraprofessionals differently. Table 8 contains this information. No relationship could be seen between teacher educational level and paraprofessional task assignments. Teachers with more education did not necessarily utilize paraprofessionals at higher task levels. During the observations teachers in all three school divisions utilized paraprofessionals to perform mainly Level I or Level II task assignments.

Table 8: Paraprofessional Usage By Teacher Educational Level

School Division	BA/BS	MA/MS	Advanced Degree
A	Level II	Level I & II	none
B	Level II	Level II	none
C	Level I & II	Level II	none

Observed and Perceived Paraprofessional Task Levels

Information presented in tables 9 and 10 on observed and perceived task levels was gathered from the data collection instrument, interview checklist for teachers and paraprofessionals and classroom observation checklist (See Appendix G). In School Divisions A and B observed tasks usually were at a Level II. In contrast, School Division C observed tasks typically were from the Level I category.

Table 9: Number of Paraprofessional Tasks Observed At Each Level

School Division	Level I	Level II	Level III
A	4	23	1
B	8	21	1
C	26	3	0

Table 10: Observed and Perceived Paraprofessional Task Levels

School Division	Observed Tasks	Perceived Tasks Special Ed. Teachers	Perceived Tasks General Ed. Teachers	Perceived Tasks Paraprofessionals
A	Level II	Level I	Level II	Level II
B	Level II	Level I	Level II	Level II
C	Level I	Level I	Level II	Level II

Note. In table 10 column one = school division; column two = the paraprofessional level observed by the investigator; column three = the level perceived by special education teachers to be performed by paraprofessionals; column four = the level perceived by general education teachers to be performed by paraprofessionals; column five = the level paraprofessionals perceived that they performed.

Matching and Nonmatching Perceptions

The degree to which teachers' and paraprofessionals' perceptions of the tasks being performed by paraprofessionals was in agreement with the observations of the investigator is displayed in Table 11.

Table 11: Matching and Nonmatching Perceptions

School Divisions	Perceptions	Matching or Nonmatching
A	Level II - observed by investigator Level I - perceived by special education teachers Level II - perceived by general education teachers Level II - perceived by paraprofessionals	- nonmatching - matching - matching
B	Level II - observed by investigator Level I - perceived by special education teachers Level II - perceived by general education teachers Level II - perceived by paraprofessionals	- nonmatching - matching - matching
C	Level I - observed by investigator Level I - perceived by special education teachers Level II - perceived by general education teachers Level II - perceived by paraprofessionals	- matching - nonmatching - nonmatching

Chapter Summary

Data collected by the investigator in the three school divisions through observations and interviews were provided in table and written summary format. The number of observations and levels of task performance were included. A cross-case analysis was presented on tasks performed and tasks perceived to be performed by teachers and paraprofessionals to identify similarities and differences. The relationship between teacher educational level and duties performed by paraprofessionals was considered.

Chapter 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Data concerning paraprofessional task performance were obtained from observations and personal interviews in three school divisions. The results tended to corroborate research findings previously reported in the professional literature. Conclusions drawn from the data analysis identified the levels and variety of tasks performed by paraprofessionals, indicated whether certain teacher or paraprofessional characteristics influenced task assignments, and revealed the appropriateness of such task assignments. Conclusions were drawn in regard to the training and supervision of paraprofessionals. Following is a summary of those conclusions with an indication of previous research that was supported by the findings.

Conclusion 1 - Task Levels and Their Perception By Teachers

Paraprofessionals working in elementary inclusive classrooms usually performed Level II tasks. Included in this level were such tasks as: (a) tutoring students, (b) assisting with programs of study on an individual basis or in small groups, and (c) implementing behavior management plans. Pickett (1990, p.4)

included the same Level II tasks in a list of expanding duties for paraprofessionals as they “support the programmatic and classroom functions of teachers”. Findings from a 1988 study by Frank, Keith, and Steil suggested that paraprofessionals needed to have different competencies depending on the type of educational setting in which they were employed.

General education teachers were more aware of the actual tasks being performed by paraprofessionals when they were included in educational team meetings. Special education teachers who took a more active role in inclusive programs were more aware of actual paraprofessional task performance.

Conclusion 2 - Paraprofessional Training Related To the Tasks To Be Performed

Paraprofessionals were utilized to perform a variety of tasks, depending on the students and/or teachers to whom they were assigned. The specific training needed to perform task assignments was desired, but not always provided to the paraprofessionals. Wadsworth and Knight (1996) reported that in a middle school setting one paraprofessional found it difficult to determine what her role should be from one period to the next. “The teachers’ expectations are different. Another part of the problem is being expected by one of the regular education teachers to assist all students with disabilities, whether they are assigned to me or not” (p. 168). Moorehouse and Albright’s (1991) study indicated that a majority of paraprofessionals were interested in professional development through university courses.

Conclusion 3 - Influence Of Teacher Characteristics

Teacher characteristics did not influence decisions concerning the tasks performed by paraprofessionals in the three school divisions. In many instances teachers were not given the authority to make task assignments. Although teacher educational level did not have an apparent influence, more experienced general education teachers assigned tasks to paraprofessionals based on demonstration of individual abilities. Experienced teachers indicated that they could be more creative with paraprofessional assignments when given the authority to do so.

Conclusion 4 - Influence Of Paraprofessional Characteristics

Paraprofessional characteristics did influence the task assignments they received. Personal talents and individual ability to communicate with and work successfully with students did have an influence on how teachers assigned paraprofessionals to specific tasks. Teachers considered some paraprofessionals capable of modifying lesson plans for specific student needs, administering standardized tests, and attending individualized education program meetings to gain insight into students' educational needs.

Frith and Kelly (1981, p. 233) said that “it is important to consider each paraprofessionals interpersonal skills to communicate and relate”. According to Blalock (1991, p. 201) “inadequate communication readily results in interpersonal conflicts, sabotaged behavioral management systems, and/or failure to accomplish

program objectives and activities”.

Conclusion 5 - Appropriateness Of Paraprofessional Task Assignments

Any assistance needed to successfully educate students with special needs in inclusive classrooms was, to most teachers, an appropriate task assignment for a paraprofessional. As Pickett (1990, p. 3) states, “paraprofessionals now participate in all phases of the instructional process.” Teachers were convinced that paraprofessionals were given appropriate task assignments. Both general and special education teachers viewed paraprofessionals as indispensable players in the inclusion process.

Conclusion 6 - Respect and Understanding Of the Individual Paraprofessionals' Role

Paraprofessionals did not feel that task assignments were always appropriate or that their skills and training were fully utilized. Teachers did not always know what tasks paraprofessionals could perform, nor were they aware of their individual talents. College educated paraprofessionals were often bored if they performed only Level I assignments. One paraprofessional said that she did not want “to be treated as just an object moving with the student”. Paraprofessionals in all three school divisions said they lacked respect from teachers and administrators for the jobs they performed.

May and Marozas (1981), while studying actual and desired responsibilities,

found that the variation in background of different paraprofessionals must be examined and planned for in order to deliver effective programs. An evaluation of their skills and preferred responsibilities was recommended. Blalock (1991) stressed the importance of supervisors expressing appreciation to paraprofessionals for their instructional support.

Conclusion 7 - Paraprofessional Training Needs

Paraprofessionals did need more training to successfully perform some Level I assignments and did express a desire for more training to perform Level II and Level III tasks. Most of the paraprofessionals interviewed were experienced, having taken college courses or obtained degrees at their own expense to further their knowledge of general and special education. The new levels of job expertise required motivated paraprofessionals to further their education.

Special education teachers felt that training programs should address such issues as professionalism and appropriate appearance at work. The teachers believed that paraprofessionals needed to improve their communication skills to adequately act as a liaison between the school and the community. General education teachers expected training to occur before work assignments began. Special education teachers reported that they often trained paraprofessionals in their school division.

While the training needed to successfully accomplish task assignments was

usually provided on-the-job by the three school divisions, paraprofessionals wanted an introductory special education course to help them understand how educational programs are designed and how individual needs are determined. The need for information on assisting special education students with specific behavioral disabilities was also expressed. Paraprofessionals in all three school divisions requested more training on medical and legal issues.

Pickett's (1993) core curriculum for paraprofessionals includes training on legal and human rights issues of children and youth with disabilities, components of the instructional process, and behavior management. The program developed by Eiss and Dixon (1989) provided an introductory course on teaching children with special needs, a course on educational techniques for special needs children, and a course on behavior management techniques for use with developmental disabilities.

Conclusion 8 - Paraprofessionals' Emerging Roles In Inclusive Settings

Teachers could successfully supervise paraprofessionals in inclusive classrooms. Although the desire for additional training on how to utilize paraeducators in new roles was expressed, many teachers noted that it would first be necessary for special education administrators to initiate policy changes on this issue. General education teachers were not sure what paraprofessionals were actually permitted to do in the general education classroom; no job description was given to the general education teacher. Paraprofessionals felt that supervising

teachers needed training to analyze present skill levels and to work collaboratively with paraprofessionals. Teachers and paraprofessionals desired more collaborative training and planning time to accomplish task assignments efficiently or effectively.

With the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act the individualized education program (IEP) team must include general education teachers as well as special education teachers. Paraprofessionals working with special education students may also participate on occasion. Frawley's (1995) research found collaboration to be a necessary support component for general education teachers in inclusive classrooms. Team planning and careful preparation, Blalock (1991) reported, can provide optimal benefits to individual with disabilities. According to Wadsworth and Knight (1996) planning time is critical to successful classroom operations.

Recommendations To Educators

Recommendations drawn from the study conclusions may be valuable to teachers and administrators who are striving to improve inclusive program delivery models. These recommendations are:

1. Paraprofessionals must possess different competencies depending on the type of educational setting in which they were employed. Since paraprofessionals working in elementary inclusive classrooms usually perform such Level II tasks as:

(a) tutoring students, (b) assisting with programs of study on an individual basis or in small groups, or (c) implementing behavior management plans, these topics should be addressed in preservice, inservice, and on-the-job training.

2. A handbook clarifying roles and task assignments should be made available to teachers and paraprofessionals working together in inclusive classrooms. Since paraprofessionals are often utilized to perform a variety of tasks, depending on the students and/or teachers to whom they are assigned, paraprofessional training must cover all competency levels.

3. General education teachers should be included in any paraprofessional task assignment decisions made by special education directors or special education teachers. Since general education teachers are often more aware of the actual tasks being performed in their general education classrooms, they can suggest efficient and effective ways to utilize paraprofessionals.

4. Workshops and inservices provided to paraprofessionals should emphasize the development of strong interpersonal relationship skills necessary for working in inclusive classrooms. The personal talents of paraprofessionals should be identified and properly utilized. The personalities of both the teacher and the paraprofessional should be considered when forming collaborative teams.

5. Paraprofessionals should be prepared to assist teachers with Level I, II, or III task assignments in inclusive classrooms. If paraprofessionals take time off from work to acquire college degrees or attend training programs, general education

teachers must be assured that replacements will be provided in the interim.

6. Paraprofessional task assignments should be based on tests of basic competencies and documentation of specific training. To prevent boredom when working with students on Level 1 or Level II tasks, at least two paraprofessionals should share daily assignments. To encourage student independence a two to three year limit should be placed on paraprofessional assignment to one student. Administrators and teachers should show appreciation to paraprofessionals for the important tasks they perform.

7. Training on legal issues and individualized program design, especially to meet behavioral and medical needs, should be provided to paraprofessionals by the employing agency. In some instances specific training to perform Level II and III tasks will be needed. Financial assistance through grants (Eiss and Dixon, 1989) can sometimes be provided to paraprofessionals to obtain the specific training needed to perform task assignments.

8. Administrators must plan more collaborative planning time for general education teachers and special education teachers working with paraprofessionals in inclusive classrooms. Administrators, according to Pickett (1994), should also be prepared to modify policies, when necessary, to support expanding paraprofessional responsibilities. If a paraprofessional obtains a permit, according to Pickett (1994, p. 29), this is an indication “that the school district is providing the necessary training for the skills needed”, similar to a teaching license.

Recommendations For Further Study

Since paraprofessional roles continue to expand, and utilization is increasing, further research into this topic is warranted. Study participants asked for paraprofessional role clarification, collaborative training opportunities, and better supervision. The following is a list of recommendations for further research:

1. Replication of the study at the beginning of the school year would present a different perspective on not only how paraprofessionals are utilized, but also how decisions are made about task assignments.
2. Replication of the study in more school divisions would broaden the perspective on the changing roles of paraprofessionals.
3. Research is needed on how to build strong interpersonal relationship skills between teachers and paraprofessionals working collaboratively in inclusive classrooms.
4. Research is needed to determine what programs will effectively train teachers to supervise and prepare paraprofessionals to assume broader responsibilities in the future.
5. Research is needed to determine whether more experienced general education teachers, when given the authority, utilize paraprofessionals more efficiently and effectively.

Chapter Summary

The conclusions drawn from the study, with support from previous research, were presented. Recommendations that may be of value to teachers and administrators were considered. Recommendations for further study centered around training supervisory teachers to build strong collaborative relationships with paraeducators as they face future role expansion leading to licensure and credentialing.

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Appendix A

Letters Requesting Permission to Conduct the Study

January, 1997

Dr./Mr./Ms. _____, Superintendent
_____ Public Schools
_____ Street
_____, VA 24060

Dear Dr. _____:

I am presently a doctoral student in the field of Administration and Supervision of Special Education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. My dissertation topic is "Factors Influencing the Tasks Performed By Paraprofessionals In Elementary Inclusive Classrooms".

I would like to request permission to conduct one part of the data collection for my study in _____ County Public Schools. I would be researching the actual and perceived roles of paraprofessionals in elementary inclusive classrooms to determine what modifications may be appropriate as roles are clarified through observation and personal interviews and training needs are implicated from demographic data.

All information will be kept confidential and schools and individuals will remain anonymous.

The proposed study has been approved by my Doctoral Dissertation Committee and is currently under review by the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Human Subject Research Division. A letter of support from _____ is enclosed. I will contact you by phone within one week to respond to any questions or concerns you may have about the study and to inquire about possible permission to conduct the study in _____ County Public Schools.

Thank you,

Margaret M. Cramer
2873 Walls Branch Road
Blacksburg, VA 24060

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form for Administrators, Teachers, and Paraprofessionals

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: Factors Influencing The Tasks Performed By
Paraprofessionals In Elementary Inclusive Classrooms

Investigator: Margaret M. Cramer, Doctoral Student
Department of Special Education
Division of Ed. Leadership and Policy Studies
College of Education

I. The Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research project on the roles of paraprofessionals in elementary inclusive classrooms in three divisions in Virginia. General education and special education teachers as well as paraprofessionals working in five elementary inclusive classrooms in each division will be interviewed to obtain demographic and general information. Then, two observations will be conducted in each classroom without interrupting the regular learning activities. Information collected will be utilized to determine whether paraprofessional task assignments are appropriate and whether additional training programs may be needed for teachers and paraprofessionals.

II. Procedures

General education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals working in five elementary inclusive classrooms in each of the three selected school divisions in Virginia will be interviewed. Then, two observations of each of the five classrooms will be conducted by the investigator without interrupting the regular learning activities.

Interviews will take approximately 30 minutes, with the investigator doing all of the recording of oral responses. The two 60 minute classroom observations will not require any extra work by administrators, teachers, or paraprofessionals.

A pilot study will be conducted in one classroom in School District A and B to determine what observation procedures may need to be changed before beginning the actual study. General education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals will answer questions orally to test the data collection instrument. Also, activities performed by paraprofessionals in the general education classroom will be observed and recorded to create a realistic check list for the study.

III. Risks

There will not be any risks to the participants in the study.

IV. Benefits of the Project

No promise of compensation can be made to encourage you to participate, but information obtained may help to enhance the services offered by paraprofessionals to students in general education classrooms by:

1. Clarifying paraprofessionals roles in the general education classroom.
2. Determining whether the tasks assigned to paraprofessionals are appropriate.
3. Identifying what additional training programs may be needed for teachers as well as paraprofessionals.

A summary of research results may be obtained, upon request, at the completion of the study.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The results of the study will be kept confidential. School districts, classrooms, teachers, and paraprofessionals will be referred to by subject numbers and/or letters (e.g., School District A, Classroom 1, Teacher 1A). Names of schools or individuals will not appear in any publication related to the study. All data collected will be reviewed and analyzed only by the Project Investigator, Margaret Cramer.

VI. Compensation

No compensation will be given for participation in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Also, you do not have to respond to all the questions asked during the interview. You may choose to answer only certain questions and not others.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Special Education Administration, Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the College of Education. Permission to conduct the study has also been granted by the superintendent of each of the participating school divisions.

IX. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. The following is a list of participants and their responsibilities:

Superintendents	consent, in writing, to the school division's participation in the study.
Teachers	answer oral interview questions. allow the investigator to do two observations of paraprofessionals assisting students to learn in their classroom.
Paraprofessionals	answer oral interview questions. allow the investigator to observe them, at two different times in three different classrooms, as they assist students to learn.

X. Subject's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

_____	_____
Signature	Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Margaret M. Cramer	540-951-2970
--------------------	--------------

_____	_____
Investigator	Phone

Dr. Harold McGrady	703-698-4734
--------------------	--------------

_____	_____
Faculty Advisor	Phone

Mr. Tom Hurd	540-231-6077
--------------	--------------

_____	_____
Chair, IRB Research Division	Phone

Biographical Sketches:

Margaret M. Cramer, Investigator

Margaret Cramer is a doctoral student in Administration and Supervision of Special Education. She entered the program with a Master of Education in Special Education and over 10 years of experience in general and special education classrooms. After working with students in inclusive classrooms, she became interested in the tasks assigned to paraprofessionals and training needed to properly supervise them. Her dissertation topic addresses this specific topic. Skills required to conduct the study have been obtained during the past two years of classroom studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Dr. Harold McGrady, Faculty Advisor

Until recently, Dr. Harold McGrady has been the acting director of the program of Administration and Supervision of Special Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. He taught many of the special education courses Margaret Cramer was required to take, as well as supervised the development of her plan of study. Presently, he is advising doctoral students and assisting them with their dissertation topics at the Virginia Tech, Northern Virginia campus. His extensive background in special education administration and supervision qualifies him for this advisory position. Having been Margaret Cramer's sole advisor at the university and now dissertation chairperson, Dr. McGrady has actively participated in the development of the study topic.

Appendix C

Letter to Study Participants

Dear Participants,

This study is being conducted to learn more about how paraprofessionals are utilized in general education classrooms to assist students in the learning process. Please continue with the regularly scheduled events of the day. No special preparation is necessary.

Responsibilities of participants include:

1. Teachers answer oral interview questions.

allow the investigator to do two observations of paraprofessionals assisting students to learn in their classroom.
2. Paraprofessionals answer oral interview questions.

allow the investigator to observe them, at two different times in three different classrooms, as they assist students to learn.

Every effort will be made to prevent the interruption of student learning during classroom observations. Interviews can be done in person with recording done for you by the investigator. No names of individuals, schools, or school districts will be used at any time during the study. Results will be made available to anyone interested at the completion of the study.

I want to take the opportunity to thank you for helping me with this study. If there is anything that I can do to make it easier for you to participate, please let me know. If at any time you have questions about your part in this process, feel free to call me at 540-951-2970.

Sincerely,

Peggy Cramer, Investigator

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form for Parents

**Request for Parental Permission
for
Student Participation in Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Research Study**

Dear Parents,

I am a doctoral student in the area of Special Education Administration at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. At present, I am beginning the research for my dissertation, entitled "Factor Influencing the Tasks Performed By Paraprofessionals in Elementary Inclusive Classrooms".

My research involves observing paraprofessionals working with students in inclusive classrooms. Then, I will interview general and special education teachers, as well as paraprofessionals working in the same classrooms. Information collected will be utilized to determine whether paraprofessional task assignments are appropriate and whether additional training programs may be needed for teachers and paraprofessionals.

In order to conduct my research, I need your permission to observe paraprofessionals working in your child's classroom.

Thank you for considering this request for permission to observe in your child's classroom. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at 540-951-2970.

Parental Permission Form

Permission to participate in the study: Please check one.

_____ Yes, I give permission for my child,
_____, to be observed, without interruption,
two times while participating in the daily, learning activities of the general education
classroom.

_____ No, I do not give permission for my child,
_____, to be observed, without interruption,
two times while participating in the daily, learning activities of the general education
classroom.

Thank you.

Date

Parent/Guardian Signature

Appendix E

Informed Consent Form for Students

To Be Read Aloud To Students By the Investigator:

I am doing a study to learn more about how paraprofessionals help students in the classroom. Your parent or guardian gave me permission to observe in your classroom. I would like to observe paraprofessionals working with students at two different times in your classroom. You do not have to take part in this study, if you do not want to. I would like you to give permission below, or sign that you do not want to take part.

Do you have any questions?

Permission To Participate In the Study:

Please check either "Yes" or "No", then write in the date and sign your name. Thank you for helping me.

_____ Yes, I give permission for two observations of paraprofessionals working with students in my classroom.

_____ No, I do not give permission for two observations of paraprofessionals working with students in my classroom.

Date

Student Signature

Appendix F

Application for Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Title of Project: Factors Influencing The Tasks Performed By
Paraprofessionals In Elementary Inclusive Classrooms

Investigator: Margaret M. Cramer, Doctoral Student
Department of Special Education
Division of Ed. Leadership and Policy Studies
College of Education

I. Justification of Project

Although there has been a phenomenal growth in the utilization of paraprofessionals in inclusive classrooms in recent years, few researchers have addressed key issues surrounding role changes. A review of the literature indicates a need for additional research in the areas of efficacy of utilization, identification of task assignments, and development of training programs for teachers and paraprofessionals.

Information collected in this study will be utilized to determine whether paraprofessional task assignments are appropriate and whether additional training programs may be needed for teachers and paraprofessionals.

II. Procedures

General education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals working in five elementary inclusive classrooms in each of the three selected school divisions in Virginia will be interviewed. Then, two observations of each of the five classrooms will be conducted by the investigator without interrupting the regular learning activities.

Interviews will take approximately 30 minutes, with the investigator doing all of the recording of oral responses. The two 60 minute classroom observations will not require any extra work by administrators, teachers, or paraprofessionals.

A pilot study will be conducted in one classroom in School District A and B to determine what observation procedures may need to be changed before beginning the actual study. General education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals will answer questions orally to test the data collection instrument. Also, activities performed by paraprofessionals in the general education classroom will be observed and recorded to create a realistic check list for the study.

III. Risks

There will not be any risks to the participants in the study.

IV. Benefits of the Project

No promise of compensation will be made to encourage participation, but information obtained may help to enhance the services offered by paraprofessionals to students in general education classrooms by:

1. Clarifying paraprofessionals' roles in the general education classroom.
2. Determining whether the tasks assigned to paraprofessionals are appropriate.
3. Identifying what additional training programs may be needed for teachers as well as paraprofessionals.

A summary of research results will be made available, upon request, at the completion of the study.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The results of the study will be kept confidential. School districts, classrooms, teachers, and paraprofessionals will be referred to by subject numbers and/or letters (e.g., School District A, Classroom 1, Teacher 1A). Names of schools or individuals will not appear in any publication related to the study. All data collected will be reviewed and analyzed only by the Project Investigator, Margaret Cramer.

Biographical Sketches:

Margaret M. Cramer, Investigator

Margaret Cramer is a doctoral student in Administration and Supervision of Special Education. She entered the program with a Master of Education in Special Education and over 10 years of experience in general and special education classrooms. After working with students in inclusive classrooms, she became interested in the tasks assigned to paraprofessionals and training needed to properly supervise them. Her dissertation topic addresses this specific topic. Skills required to conduct the study have been obtained during the past two years of classroom studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Dr. Harold McGrady, Faculty Advisor

Until recently, Dr. Harold McGrady has been the acting director of the program of Administration and Supervision of Special Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. He taught many of the special education courses Margaret Cramer was required to take, as well as supervised the development of her plan of study. Presently, he is advising doctoral students and assisting them with their dissertation topics at the Virginia Tech, Northern Virginia campus. His extensive background in special education administration and supervision qualifies him for this advisory position. Having been Margaret Cramer's sole advisor at the university and now dissertation chairperson, Dr. McGrady has actively participated in the development of the study topic.

Appendix G

Data Collection Instrument

Background Information	
Date: ____ District: ____ School: ____ Class: ____	
Job Description:	
<input type="checkbox"/> General Education Teacher	
<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Teacher	
<input type="checkbox"/> Paraprofessional	
Years of Experience: ____	
Educational Level:	
<input type="checkbox"/> High School Diploma or GED	
<input type="checkbox"/> Associate Degree	
<input type="checkbox"/> BA/BS	
<input type="checkbox"/> MA/MS	
<input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Degree	
Specialized Training:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Introductory/Orientation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Required Competencies	
<input type="checkbox"/> Inservices ____ Number of Hours ____ Ongoing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Workshops ____ Number	

General Questions

1. Are paraprofessionals given a specific job description when hired? Do you have a copy of this job description?

2. Do paraprofessionals receive the appropriate training to successfully perform their assignments?
If not, what additional training do you think is needed?

3. Should competency levels be established to certify paraprofessionals for specific responsibilities? Please explain.

4. Do paraprofessionals receive the needed support services to adequately perform their job?
If not, what additional services do you think are needed?

5. Do you think paraprofessional skills are being utilized appropriately at present? Explain.

6. Did the observations represent typical situations? If not, why?

Interview Checklist For Teachers and Paraprofessionals

Level	Tasks	Con't	Daily	Weekly	As Needed	Never	Com'nts
I	escort students to and from bus						
	escort students to and from bathroom, classrooms, specials						
	supervise playground, lunchroom, study hall						
	operate audio-visual equipment, computer						
	record attendance, maintain records, perform clerical duties						
	assist students with personal care/self-help, snack						
	prepare training materials and maintain supplies						
	set up and maintain classroom equipment						
	reinforce lessons						
	II	tutor students					
assist with supplmt./indiv. work, small groups							
provide assist. with indiv. program of study							
admin. formal & informal assessmt. instrumt.							
score objective tests and/or written papers							
assist with observing, recording, & charting student information							
implement behavioral management plans							
assist with solving disciplinary problems							
assist with preparation of instructional materials							
attend IEP or other meetings							
III	record &/or maintain records on student performance/progress						
	consult with certified teachers						
	assist with program design						
	collect &/or chart data determ. student levels						
	select &/or use approp. instruct. techniques						
	organize &/or schedule classroom activities						
	serve as a liaison between school & parents to access resources						

Classroom Observation Checklist

Date: ____ District: ____ School: ____ Class: ____

Level	Tasks	# of Observations	Times	Comments
I	escort students to and from bus			
	escort students to and from bathroom, classrooms, specials			
	supervise playground, lunchroom, study hall			
	operate audio-visual equipment, computer			
	record attendance, maintain records, perform clerical duties			
	assist students with personal care/self-help, snack			
	prepare training materials and maintain supplies			
	set up and maintain classroom equipment			
	reinforce lessons			
	II	tutor students		
assist with supplmt./indiv. work, small groups				
provide assist. with indiv. program of study				
admin. formal & informal assessmt. instrumt.				
score objective tests and/or written papers				
assist with observing, recording, & charting student information				
implement behavioral management plans				
assist with solving disciplinary problems				
assist with preparation of instructional materials				
attend IEP or other meetings				
III	record &/or maintain records on student performance/progress			
	consult with certified teachers			
	assist with program design			
	collect &/or chart data determ. student levels			
	select &/or use approp. instruct. techniques			
	organize &/or schedule classroom activities			
	serve as a liaison between school & parents to access resources			

Classroom Observation Checklist

Date: ____ District: ____ School: ____ Class: ____

Level	Tasks	# of Observations	Times	Comments
I				
II				
III				

Margaret M. Cramer
2873 Walls Branch Road
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(H) 540-951-2970

VITA

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

1994 to 1996	Senior Graduate Assistant, Admin. and Super. of Spec. Ed., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State Univ., Blacksburg, VA.
1993 to 1994	Teacher, Special Education, Moyock Elementary School, Currituck, NC.
1993 (summer)	Director, Chamber of Commerce, Kremmling, CO.
1992 to 1993	Teacher, Special Education, Garnet Mesa Elementary Delta, CO.
1991 to 1992	Assistant to student with hearing disability, Special Education Dept., West Grand High School, Kremmling, CO.
1984 to 1991	Teacher, Special Education, E. A. Burns Elementary School, Charleston, SC.
1983 to 1984	Tutor, The Bridge Educational Consulting Center, Charleston, SC.
1983 to 1984	Tutor, Trident Technical College, North Charleston, SC.

- 1982 to 1984 Graduate Assistant, Education Department,
College of Charleston,
Charleston, SC.
- 1981 to 1982 Permanent Substitute, grades K-12,
Beaufort County Public Schools,
Beaufort, SC.
- 1980 to 1981 Teacher, Math, grades 4-8,
First Colonial Christian School,
Virginia Beach, VA.
- 1979 to 1980 Permanent Substitute, grades 7-12,
Denver Christian Schools,
Denver, CO.

ACADEMIC STATUS

- 1994 to 1997 Doctoral Student, Doctor of Philosophy,
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Dept.,
Admin. and Super. of Spec. Ed. Program,
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State Univ.,
Blacksburg, VA, completed August 29, 1997.
- 1990 Completion of course work for Orthopedically
Challenged Certification,
University of South Carolina,
Beaufort, SC.
- 1986 Completion of Learning Disabilities Certification,
College of Charleston,
Charleston, SC.
- 1983 to 1984 Master of Education,
Certification in Elementary and Special Education,
College of Charleston,
Charleston, SC.

- 1978 to 1980 Undergraduate work in Elementary Education, Psychology Minor, Metropolitan State College, Denver, CO.
- 1977 to 1978 Bachelor of Arts, Elementary Education Major, Colorado Christian University (Rockmont College), Denver, CO.
- 1973 to 1976 Undergraduate work in Elementary Education Biblical Studies Minor, Northeastern Bible College, Essex Fells, NJ.

RELATED EXPERIENCE

- 1996 to Present Radford City Schools, Elementary Principal Internship, Radford, VA.
- 1995 (summer) Internship in Administration, With Director of Special Ed. and Superintendents, Goals 2000 assignment, Steamboat Springs and Grand County, CO.
- 1995 (fall) Consultant/Internship in Administration, Academic Affairs, Special Services Dept., Project UNITE, Grant for restructuring of program, Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia.
- 1989 Practicum, Emotionally Handicapped, E. A. Burns Elementary School, Charleston, SC.
- 1983 Practicum, Trainable Mentally Handicapped, Albemarle Elementary School, Charleston, SC.

- 1983 Preparation/Presentation "Proposed Changes to Public Law 94-142",
The Council of Exceptional Children Convention,
Hilton Head, SC.
- 1983 Recorder, Thirteenth Southeast Regional Institute
on Deafness, For Jean Campbell,
Special Ed. Coordinator, Chas. Cty. Public Schools,
Charleston, SC.
- 1983 Special Education Consultant and Data Collector,
Project Omni, Title IV-C Innovative Grant,
Alternative prog. model, Mild /Mod. Disabilities,
Berkeley County Public Schools, SC.
- 1982 to 1983 Interviewer and Data Collector, Project Share,
Low Incident Consortium (vision, hearing, and
orthopedic), Charles L. Smith, Director,
Florence, SC.
- 1982 Practicum, Educable Mentally Handicapped,
Shell Point Elementary School,
Beaufort County Public Schools, Burton, SC.
- 1978 Student Teacher, Grade 3, Coal Creek Elem. School,
Jefferson County Public Schools, Golden, CO.
- 1974 Practicum, Grade 4, Elementary Education,
Timothy Christian Day School, NJ.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Present	Council of Exceptional Children.
1996 to Present	CASE (Council of Admin. of Special Education).
1995 to Present	Phi Delta Kappa, professional ed. fraternity.