

Collaborative Relationships with Paraprofessionals

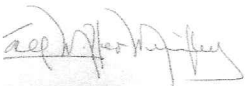
Crystal F. Bennett

Submitted to the
Graduate School of Education
City University of Seattle
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master in Teaching

I give permission to City University to store and use this MIT Project for teaching purposes.

Submitted by CBennett 3-20-2020
Crystal F. Bennett Date

Approved by

| | |
|--|---------------|
|  | |
| Corll Miller Morrissey, M.Ed. | March 6, 2020 |

Approved by Vicki Butler
Vicki Butler, Ed.D. March 12, 2020

Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Acknowledgements..... | 2 |
| Abstract..... | 3 |
| Introduction..... | 4 |
| Opportunity for Improvement..... | 4 |
| Rationale..... | 5 |
| Literature Review..... | 6 |
| Question..... | 13 |
| Objective..... | 13 |
| Methodology..... | 13 |
| Intervention..... | 14 |
| Assessment..... | 15 |
| Conclusion..... | 15 |
| Findings..... | 16 |
| Analysis..... | 23 |
| References..... | 25 |

Acknowledgements

I would like to pay special regards to my research advisor, Corll Morrissey. Your help developing, planning, and implementing this research not only supported me academically, but enabled me to build an educational team that is unrivaled. I would also like to express gratitude to my administrative team, particularly Lillian and Pam, who not only permitted this research within the classroom but gave encouragement and a listening ear to my reflections. I am indebted to my biggest supporter and spouse, Lonnie. Without you, I would have never been able to complete this work.

Finally, I cannot express my gratitude enough to my paraprofessional team that willingly engaged in this research, helped me dig out when I was getting buried, and cheered me on when I felt like I was . I am so proud that I get to be part of this amazing team. Danica, Karen, Kelly, Sherrie, Bill, Bob, Guy, and Elliot – I thank you.

Abstract

Given the important and long-term role that paraprofessionals play in a self-contained special education environment, this research questions if the implementation of collaborative practices, specifically those often applied in co-teaching environments, support a positive and high-quality instructional environment where paraprofessionals work in collaboration with the lead teacher as part of an effective educational team with strong levels of personal engagement and professional satisfaction. This study found key co-teaching strategies that could be effectively used to improve delivery of instructional content, increase paraprofessional engagement, and build a more positive classroom climate. Further reflection and research will provide additional insight into strategies to maximize the benefits of the selected co-teaching strategies.

Introduction

The city of Port Angeles is a small community of approximately 20,000 residents. According to the 2010 census, 90% of the population are white, 4% are Hispanic/Latino, and 3% are Native American. The median household income is \$41,450 and 13.2% of the population is below the poverty line. The Port Angeles School District was brought under new superintendent leadership at the beginning of the 2018/2019 school year. The superintendent continues to make many structural and procedural changes within the district. Several of the buildings in the district are greater than 30 years old and are in need of renovation or rebuilding. The last 4 levy attempts to address capital improvements have not been successful. The Port Angeles High School has maintained consistent leadership with few administrative changes. The Port Angeles High School campus is the oldest collection of buildings in the school district. The special education department of the Port Angeles High School has had significant turnover within the past 5 years and is undergoing a targeted restructuring of the Life Skills program.

Opportunity for Improvement

When students are served in a self-contained, or dominantly self-contained, classroom environment such as the Life Skills program addressed in this study, there are in almost every situation a team of individuals providing educational support. Special education and general education teachers have a long history of working together to educate students with special education needs, with varying degrees of effective collaboration. The collaborative process is less foundational in regards to the role that paraprofessionals play in the special education classroom. Far too often, paraprofessionals are viewed merely for their supportive roles and not as a source for valuable input, meaningful insight, and strategic planning. Paraprofessionals are

rarely considered part of a collaborative team that works together to build an educational plan for students.

In the specific Life Skills classroom that this research was conducted in, paraprofessionals have been routinely treated with disrespect under a managerial hierarchy. They were not fully utilized nor were their talents and interest leveraged to the benefit of the students. When beginning the year in the classroom, the administrative team approached the teacher researcher to communicate that a task of primary importance was to build a cohesive team that could effectively deliver an instructional model. The idea emerged that paraprofessionals who were more deeply engaged and invested in the learning would in turn lead to a more cohesive and high-functioning team.

In this action-based research, the primary question was how collaborative practices, specifically those often applied in co-teaching environments, can be utilized to support a positive and high-quality instructional environment where paraprofessionals work in collaboration with the lead teacher as a highly effective team with strong levels of personal engagement and satisfaction.

Rationale

It is worth considering that in many self-contained special education classrooms students spend three to four years in the environment. Conversely, paraprofessional staff may spend an entire career in a given classroom. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that focusing attention to the practices of the educational team will have a long-term benefit that impacts student learning much more broadly than a focused intervention directed at a single student or even a particular cohort of students.

Literature Review

Co-Teaching and Collaboration with Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals play a vital role in the education of students with special needs. When first utilized in a demonstration project at Syracuse University in the 1950's, paraprofessionals were asked to perform tasks that required no professional training such as duplicating materials, housekeeping chores, and playground supervision (Boomer, 1982). Today, the role of paraprofessionals requires much more direct instruction of students. The specific duties are often determined by the professional roles established by the supervisory teacher.

Professional Roles

Many special education classrooms operate as an instructional team (Boomer, 1982) with special education teachers designing an instructional program and the paraprofessional works under supervision to carry out the instruction. Other special education classrooms operate as a managerial hierarchy with certificated teachers planning and designing instruction and the paraprofessional working to make instruction effective by the implementation of delegated tasks (Causton-Theoharis, 2007). While this may seem a minute distinction, the implementation shows a large variance between a classroom where paraprofessionals are part of an instruction team carrying out instruction versus a managerial hierarchy where they are completing individually delegated tasks. Both operational models can be effective in varying situations, but in either situation the duty of supervision falls to the special education teacher.

Research shows that paraprofessionals perform their duties most effectively when they are appropriately supervised, when their roles are clearly defined, when they are trained for assigned tasks, and when they participate in regularly scheduled planning meetings (French, 2001). Despite extensive research and agreement that the supervision of paraprofessionals by

special education teachers is vital to the efficacy of the instruction being presented, very little preservice training regarding the supervision of paraprofessionals is included in special education certification or endorsement programs (French, 2001). Teachers are left relying on instinct or outside managerial experience to supervise and lead paraprofessionals, often in highly detailed tasks such as the implementation of discrete trial instruction.

Discrete Trial Implementation

Discrete Trial Training (DTT) or Discrete Trial Instruction (DTI) are frequently found in intensive behavioral or instructional programs. Discrete Trial Training is a method of teaching where the trainer presents an instruction, the student provides a response, and the trainer gives immediate feedback (Pratt, 2018). The intensive, direct instruction approach has been found to be successful in facilitating learning in students with disabilities. However, the 1:1 nature of the instruction often necessitates the instruction be performed by paraprofessionals who have received minimal training in the appropriate implementation of DTT.

One method of training paraprofessionals in the implementation of Discrete Trial Teaching was Abbreviated Performance Feedback (LeBlanc, 2005). The study of Abbreviated Performance Feedback was conducted with three paraprofessionals who were relatively new to the school and had not previously conducted Discrete Trial Teaching. Each paraprofessional was assigned an individual student for the duration of the study who had received Discrete Trial Teaching from a different staff member previously. At the beginning of the study (baseline), the paraprofessionals were asked to provide Discrete Trial Training according to the program with their assigned student without any formal training or being given a checklist of instructor skills. Baseline data showed the paraprofessionals displayed effective skills in less than 50% of the instances. During the intervention stage, paraprofessionals were shown the checklist of instructor

skills prior to the Discrete Trial Training session and then were given targeted feedback at the end of the session. Positive feedback was given when a paraprofessional demonstrated a skill correctly 100% of the session and clarification and instruction was given when a skill was not correctly demonstrated 100% of the time during instruction. The trainer took approximately 8-10 minutes to provide Abbreviated Performance Feedback after each session. Each paraprofessional was able to reach 90% proficiency for two consecutive session in all 10 areas of instructor skills within 5 total Abbreviated Performance Feedback sessions. When paraprofessionals were observed 11 weeks following the termination of the feedback sessions, all participants maintained 90-100% skill accuracy in all 10 skill areas. This study shows that brief but targeted performance feedback can provide substantial skill increase that is maintained over time by paraprofessionals implementing highly detailed interventions such as Discrete Trial Training.

Counter arguments to this method of training paraprofessionals for detailed tasks include the lack of time that special education teachers have to observe and provide performance feedback to individual staff members. An alternate study was conducted at the University of Manitoba implementing a self-instructional manual for training paraprofessionals to conduct Discrete Trial Training. After being given 4.5 hours to master the training manual, paraprofessional performance in Discrete Trial Training improved from 52% on the baseline assessment to 88% performance, maintained at 77% performance in subsequent sessions. This broader participant study shows that training can be done to improve Discrete Trial Training performance by paraprofessionals through the use of self-instructional manuals. However, the loss of performance over time indicates that DTT instruction would fall in quality over time.

Both self-instructional manuals and Abbreviated Performance Feedback are potentially effective ways to provide training to paraprofessionals in the implementation of detailed

strategies such as Discrete Trial Training. More difficult to provide training on to paraprofessionals are the interpersonal skills necessary to build a trusting, positive relationship with students that encourages learning.

Student Relationships with 1:1 Paraprofessionals

When researchers study paraprofessionals and other elements of special education, rarely are the perspectives of the student with disabilities included (Doyle, 2005). However, one study has been done focusing solely on the perspective of the student. The study found that paraprofessionals were viewed in four interrelated themes: mother, friend, protector, and primary teacher (Broer, 2005). **Mother.** Students in the study reported feeling that the paraprofessional acted in a parental role such as a mother. For some students that was a positive description of the caring role the paraprofessional filled. For other students, the students expressed the negative connotations of always having an adult nearby that interfered with opportunities to develop friendships. While the idea of a mothering and nurturing relationship is somewhat intriguing, one wonders if that is the best relationship model for students and paraprofessionals. **Friend.** Many students expressed feelings of the paraprofessional assigned to work with them as their closest friend while other students expressed feelings of frustration that the paraprofessional inhibited their ability to interact with peers (Broer, 2005). Both groups contained individuals who continued to struggle with peer relationships and feelings of isolation into adulthood. **Protector.** The majority of individuals involved in the study experienced bullying while they were students (Broer, 2005). Those students reported that the proximity of the paraprofessional acted as a shield to provide temporary, situational reprieve from mistreatment. Most reported that other adults were either unaware of the mistreatment or refused to act to stop it while the paraprofessionals would advocate for the student's safety or confront the perpetrator directly.

Primary Teacher. Participants reported that when in general education classes the paraprofessional generally acted as their primary teacher rather than the classroom teacher (Broer, 2005). Students reported that this often led to inconsistencies between the paraprofessional and the classroom teacher as well as a feeling that the classroom teacher was not invested in their learning.

Each perception of the relationship between paraprofessional and student has both positive and negative elements. What is most clear is that paraprofessionals play a central role in the minds of students. If students view paraprofessionals in such primary roles, it seems logical to engage paraprofessionals more actively in the teaching process such as in a co-teaching model of instructional teaming.

Co-Teaching in a Self-Contained Classroom

Co-teaching can be defined in many ways, but the most researched and widely accepted definition of co-teaching requires several essential elements. In order for an arrangement to constitute co-teaching, all parties must share instructional responsibility as equivalent professionals in a shared workspace (Friend, 2016). Therefore, an instructional strategy involving paraprofessionals is not truly co-teaching as paraprofessionals do not carry equivalent licensure or hold instructional responsibility. Yet the six primary co-teaching approaches could be used effectively in an instructional partnership with paraprofessionals working under the supervision of a special education teacher.

One Teach, One Observe. One Teach, One Observe is a co-teaching approach where one teacher is presenting instruction while the other is gathering observational information (Friend, 2016). Paraprofessionals could be utilized to gather observational data from students while the

teacher is providing instruction. This strategy would allow the teacher to focus on student engagement and learning without the distraction of recording data.

Station Teaching. In Station Teaching, teachers divide content and students (Friend, 2016). This model could be effective with paraprofessionals who can deliver a specific piece of instruction pre-designed by the teacher. For example, during an interactive science lesson, the paraprofessional may teach the background information to one group of students while the teacher leads students in the experiential learning activity and ensures that students meet the learning target for the activity.

Parallel Teaching. Parallel Teaching is where students are divided and receive the same information in smaller groups (Friend, 2016). This model would require extensive preparation and training to ensure the paraprofessional is capable of delivering the necessary information to students. Additionally, because the teacher maintains educational responsibility, students might require assessment by the teacher to ensure that the learning target was met.

Alternative Teaching. Alternative teaching allows for one teacher to teach the main group while the other instructor works with a small group (Friend, 2016). In a special education environment where students are performing at many different levels, this model allows for students to receive instruction at their level in a way that is specifically tailored to their needs. This could be a powerful model but would require data-driven identification of groups needing specialized support.

Teaming. When Teaming, both teachers are delivering the same instruction at the same time (Friend, 2016). This complex method of co-teaching involves teachers “taking turns” throughout the presentation of materials. This method would require significant preparation and high levels of rapport between the instruction team.

One Teach, One Assist. One Teach, One Assist is a model where one person keeps primary responsibility for teaching while the other circulates around the room providing assistance to students as needed (Friend, 2016). This model is most similar to that observed in general education classrooms where push-in support is being provided by paraprofessionals. The concern with this model is that the paraprofessional is often given no training or guidance other than to “see who needs help”.

Reflection

Research is clear that paraprofessionals are beneficial, even vital, to the education of students with disabilities and new research is suggesting that paraprofessionals also play a complex emotional support role for students. Strategies have been developed and successfully implemented to utilize paraprofessionals in discrete trial instruction. However, special education teachers must be trained in how to appropriately manage and train paraprofessionals in the implementation of the specially-designed instruction. Special education teachers seeking to build

a more robust collaborative team may find a co-teaching model that is appropriate to implement with their paraprofessional team. Co-teaching methods, while generally used with two certificated instructors, can be modified to more closely integrate paraprofessionals into other roles of active instruction beyond discrete trial activities. When considering the most beneficial special education experience for students, one must question what strategies are most effective in utilizing paraprofessionals as a key member of the instructional team. Collaborative practices, specifically those often applied in co-teaching environments, could be utilized to support a positive and high-quality instructional experience for students receiving self-contained special education instruction.

Question

If collaborative practices, specifically those often applied in co-teaching, were implemented would that support a positive and high-quality instructional environment where paraprofessionals work in collaboration with the lead teacher as an effective educational team with strong levels of personal engagement and satisfaction?

Objective

Following the implementation of co-teaching strategies, the instructional environment will improve: (1) by observation of paraprofessional confidence and competence in implementing the co-teaching strategy with fidelity; (2) by paraprofessional engagement in personal growth; and (3) by paraprofessional survey indicating improved levels of satisfaction in work experiences.

Methodology

Much research has been done on the importance of paraprofessionals to the education of students with special needs. In this study, targeted focus was placed on leveraging the

interpersonal relationships and low student-to-staff ratios in a self-contained special education classroom and engaging paraprofessionals into a more collaborative instructional team environment.

Intervention

Six specific strategies of co-teaching were implemented with a team of paraprofessionals in a self-contained special education classroom. The strategies were implemented individually and evaluated based on paraprofessional implementation, engagement of paraprofessionals in personal growth, and by paraprofessional survey indicating improved levels of satisfaction in work experiences.

Paraprofessionals were asked to select as a team a co-teaching strategy that they feel will be effective in the self-contained classroom. Strategies they could choose from included: (1) One Teach, One Observe; (2) Station Teaching; (3) Parallel Teaching; (4) Alternative Teaching; (5) Teaming; and (6) One Teach, One Assist. Once selected, a unit of instruction was designed to implement the strategy containing at least 5 individual lesson segments. After implementing the selected strategy, the data was evaluated with the instructional team to assess the overall effectiveness and determine alternate approaches that would be implemented. Data was collected via weekly surveys given to paraprofessionals that indicated a rating scale that reflected the key targets of the study. The results of these anonymous surveys were presented to the team for informational purposes when meeting to determine the next stage in the research process. The instructional team could decide to embrace the current co-teaching strategy as a classroom norm, modify the current co-teaching strategy, or reject the current co-teaching strategy entirely. The instructional team then made a decision of whether they were ready to implement a new co-teaching strategy into the classroom.

Assessment

The effectiveness of the co-teaching strategies were evaluated based on three areas of assessment. The assessments give indicators of paraprofessional implementation, engagement of paraprofessionals in personal growth, and paraprofessional levels of satisfaction in work experiences. Given the nature of specialized education, mastery of content area is not expected following brief instructional periods, therefore student performance is not measured as an indicator of the effectiveness of a co-teaching strategy.

Assessment #1: Paraprofessional Implementation. To measure paraprofessional implementation, observational data was taken on the level of fidelity with which a teaching strategy was implemented by a paraprofessional after direct instruction was given to them by the lead teacher.

Assessment #2: Engagement of Paraprofessionals in Personal Growth. This assessment measured paraprofessional engagement in personal growth through data collected as part of the satisfaction survey where paraprofessionals indicated their interest in learning more about the instructional strategy on a rating scale.

Assessment #3: Paraprofessional satisfaction. This assessment measured the degree to which the paraprofessional team was satisfied with the quality and nature of the instructional period. Surveys were conducted to rate the overall satisfaction and perception of successful instruction as viewed by the paraprofessional team.

Results

Over the course of the research study, all six co-teaching techniques were implemented with varying results and unique data to consider. Each co-teaching technique displayed a measure of both positive benefits and challenges to consider for future implementation.

Findings

Assessment #1: Paraprofessional Implementation. The first area of assessment centered on the fidelity with which each co-teaching strategy was implemented according to observational data taken by the teacher/researcher. Observational data was collected in the form of a narrative with each co-teaching occurrence. A ranking was then assigned to the teaching event ranging from 1 to 5. While the fidelity of the instructional implementation was the primary focus, student engagement and educational efficacy were also a component in the assignment of a score rating.

Assessment 1: Fidelity of Implementation

| | Lesson 1 | Lesson 2 | Lesson 3 | Lesson 4 | Lesson 5 | Composite Score |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| One Teach, One Observe | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4.0 (20/25) |
| Station Teaching | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2.4 (12/25) |
| Parallel Teaching | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2.8 (14/25) |
| Alternative Teaching | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4.0 (20/25) |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| Teaming | 4 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3.2 (16/25) |
| One Teach, One Assist | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3.8 (19/25) |

A cursory review of the composite scores indicate that One Teach, One Observe and Alternative Teaching were the most effective methods of co-teaching strategies. The One Teach, One Assist strategy showed strong growth across the implementation period. Station Teaching, Parallel Teaching, and Teaming all appear to be non-viable strategies within the special education classroom. However, if one looks more carefully at the individual data points, they would find data points within Teaming that showed strong scores. Similarly, Parallel Teaching had a large disparity among the individual data points. These anomalies lead to a deeper look into the observational narrative.

One Teach, One Observe was implemented within the classroom for activities related to IEP (Individual Education Plan) goals and WA-AIM (Washington Alternative Assessment and Instructional Measurement) testing. The narrative data indicates a high fidelity rate in all trials except for one. In that one trial, the paraprofessional acting as the observer was unclear about the importance of their role and left the instructional area during the observation period. The role the paraprofessional played while engaged in the trial was well-performed. The scope of their duties was simply not clearly understood. Repeat trials produced higher performance rates and an indication of long-term viability.

Station Teaching was implemented within the classroom for instructional activities of a routine nature where the paraprofessional observed the teacher performing the activity over multiple occurrences, with follow-up direct training given to the paraprofessional on the theory and purpose for the given activities. As soon as the teacher/researcher removed direct observation, the fidelity of implementation drastically declined. The paraprofessional repeatedly failed to follow the protocol even after additional modeling and written instructions were provided. Narrative data indicates that specific portions of the protocol that “resonated” or were perceived to be of greater importance to the paraprofessional were implemented with more fidelity than portions of the protocol where the paraprofessional had not achieved theoretical understanding or perceived the task to be incapable of producing student learning (for example, too advanced or too remedial for the student).

Parallel Teaching was implemented in the classroom for students needing a greater level of direct instruction than could be gleaned even in a small group setting. Parallel Teaching shows a puzzling level of disparity between trials with some trials showing below standard and others exceeding standard. A review of the narrative data associated with the Parallel Teaching trials indicated the disparity was directly related to the paraprofessional that had implemented the instructional trial. More specifically, two paraprofessionals engaged in the Parallel Teaching strategy and one consistently showed high levels of fidelity while the other consistently showed low levels of fidelity. The paraprofessional who showed low levels of fidelity also participated in the trials of other strategies where they showed high levels of fidelity and instructional efficacy.

Alternative Teaching was implemented in areas of the curriculum where students showed a great disparity in current levels of academic progress. Paraprofessionals were asked to work with small groups of students to provide targeted instruction at the group’s academic level.

Activities were designed by the teacher/researcher and a brief training was given to the paraprofessional on the implementation and instructional reasoning for the activity. The Alternative Teaching strategy was highly successful with minimal training or modeling required by the teacher/researcher. In one trial, the paraprofessional mistakenly implemented an activity intended for a different sub-group of students, however it is worth noting that the activity was still implemented with a high level of fidelity simply at a lower instructional level than the sub-group of students were currently performing at. The paraprofessional realized the error during the activity but remained calm and focused with the students. During a later de-brief, the paraprofessional indicated their decision to continue with the activity as a “review” as it would have taken the remainder of the allotted time to clean up the incorrect activity and prepare the correct activity for student use. The decision reflected a level of professional judgement that was appropriate and valuable in a complex special education classroom environment.

Teaming was attempted in a variety of classroom scenarios with high disparate results. In two trials, the lessons taught with Teaming were highly successful. In three other trials, the lessons taught with Teaming were painfully ineffective. A review of the narrative data indicates all trials were done based on an area of personal interest and significant background knowledge or training to the paraeducator. The two trials that were most successful were implemented by the same paraeducator. The three trials that were less successful were each implemented by different paraeducators.

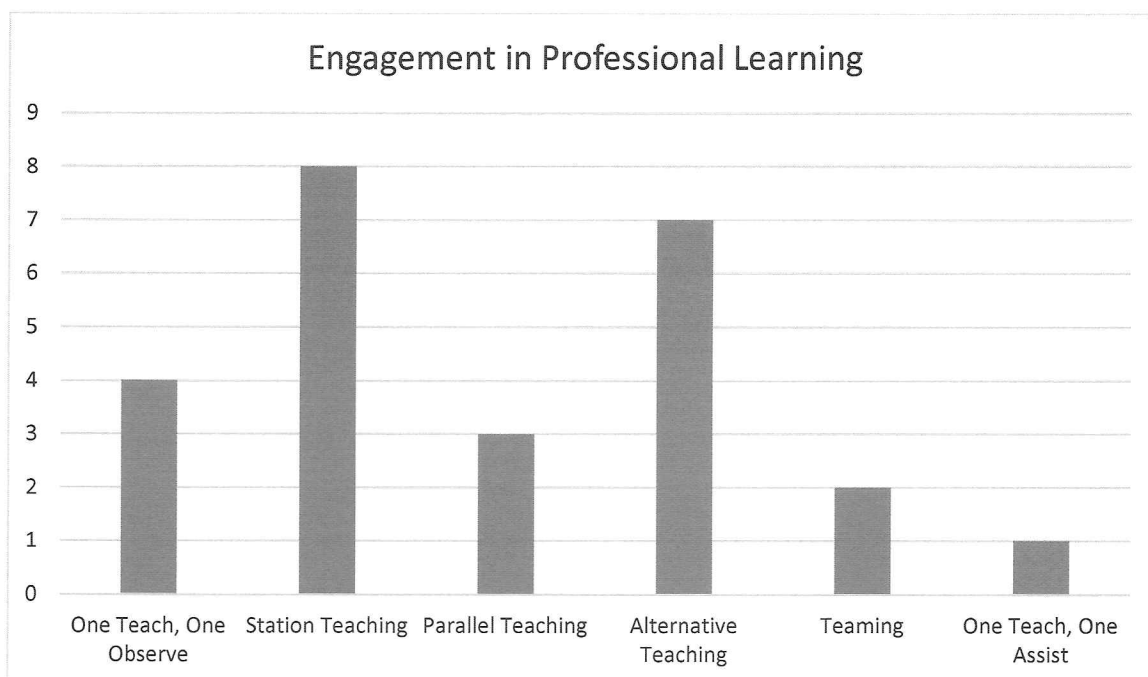
One Teach, One Assist was the strategy most easily implemented. Paraprofessionals on the team most closely identified with the One Teach, One Assist strategy as the “norm” of their role. The initial trial was disappointing in that paraprofessionals failed to autonomously engage in classroom activity. The second trial was more successful with direct tasks being assigned to

paraprofessionals which were well implemented. During the third trial, the paraprofessionals again waited for direction rather than engaging in tasks similar to those assigned during the second trial. Over the course of the fourth and fifth trial, it became apparent that One Teach, One Assist is a directive-reliant strategy that requires the teacher/researcher to continuously give directives to the paraprofessional. Without directives, the paraprofessional will often remain idle but with directives can be an effective and valuable resource within the classroom.

The data drawn from the observational narrative provide deep insight into the implementation of the identified instructional strategies from the perspectives and goals of the teacher/researcher. However, they do not give an indication of the engagement or personal satisfaction of the paraprofessionals.

Assessment #2: Engagement of Paraprofessionals in Personal Growth. The second area of assessment was a tracking of how engaged the paraprofessionals were in personal growth. Paraprofessionals were asked during the weekly surveys to indicate if they were interested in additional information (professional development) surrounding the instructional strategy. All participants declined additional information in all opportunities. However, a similar and related phenomenon began to occur which was recorded in the observational narrative. After certain instructional trials, paraprofessionals would approach the teacher/researcher to inquire about the instructional theory that prompting a particular teaching practice. For example, after modeling a lesson for the paraprofessionals to implement during station teaching, multiple paraprofessionals would approach the teacher/researcher individually to inquire about why a particular activity was utilized, if the order of the activity was relevant, or what the long-range goal was in relation to the individual activity. Data drawn from the observational narrative

indicates that paraprofessionals engaged in inquiry on instructional theory to varying degrees based on the instructional strategy that was being implemented.



Station Teaching, Alternative Teaching, and One Teach, One Observe were all areas of high inquiry for paraprofessionals to deepen their understanding of the instructional theory being utilized. Station Teaching, representing the least successful of the instructional strategies by fidelity of implementation standards, produced the highest level of inquiry of instructional theory, suggesting that the observational indications that implementation was tied to understanding of theory and “buy in” may be accurate. Alternative Teaching was highly successful and produced a high level of inquiry leading to the consideration of if the strategy was more successful due to the inquiry or if there were more inquiries due to the success of the strategy. Parallel Teaching showed moderate interest which mirrors the moderate success of the instructional strategy. One Teach, One Assist showed very low rates of inquiry in instructional theory which reflects the low level of engagement the paraprofessionals intrinsically had with the teaching strategy.

While no paraeducator expressed an interest in gaining a better understanding of the principles of co-teaching that were being explored throughout this study, the rate at which paraeducators sought to increase their understanding of instructional theory was significant.

Assessment #3: Paraprofessional satisfaction. The final area of assessment was in reported paraprofessional satisfaction. This area of assessment was the most challenging to collect data to support. Paraprofessionals responded to weekly surveys, informal inquiries, and team discussions regarding professional satisfaction with responses that led the teacher/researcher to question the validity of the responses. When given a survey asking for the paraprofessional to rate their overall job satisfaction on a scale of 1 – 10, responses were universally all 10's. If asked if the paraprofessional felt fulfilled or satisfied with their position, the response was always "it's great" or "I love it". During team meetings, paraprofessionals were asked what they would like to see changed within their positions. The responses were consistently "nothing" or "everything is great". While it is the hope that the strategies implemented would lead to increased professional satisfaction, the validity of responses so consistently positive is unlikely. More likely, the paraprofessionals are reticent to express truthful responses to questions they feel may jeopardize their standing in the classroom or are hesitant to potentially cause offense. The lack of viable data in this area gives a clear indication that there is more work to be done within this classroom to achieve the purpose of this research study: to build a positive and high-quality instructional environment where paraprofessionals work in collaboration with the lead teacher as an effective educational team with strong levels of personal engagement and satisfaction.

Analysis

As indicated by the inconclusive data collected in Assessment #3, much work remains to be done to build a Life Skills classroom that provides high-quality instruction to every student. In fact, this clearly is work that will never be complete. As members of the team are added or change, there will always be work to be done to build cohesion and collaboration. Training in the instructional strategies utilized within the classroom will be ongoing. However, this research has shown that it is possible to create a positive and high-quality instructional environment by engaging paraprofessionals in a more collaborative and rigorous manner.

Moving forward, several of the co-teaching strategies will continue to be a part of the regular classroom procedure. One Teach, One Observe has shown itself to be invaluable to the collection of highly accurate data that can be used to further inform instruction. Station Teaching, while the most challenging to implement during the trials, was the most engaging for the paraprofessionals indicating that it could prove to be a valuable tool within the classroom with further modeling, direct training, and practice with the strategy. Parallel Teaching and Teaming have a valuable role to play but require identifying paraprofessionals that are well-suited to each of those strategies. Alternative teaching has a powerful role to play in meeting the unique needs of individual and small groups of learners and will form a foundational strategy within the classroom in the future. One Teach, One Assist was the strategy that required the most effort from the teacher/researcher, presented the least level of professional inquiry, and failed to fit the vision of a high-quality instructional environment. While it is necessary at times to give specific directives to paraprofessionals, One Teach, One Assist is not an instructional strategy that will hold a key role in the classroom environment.

The Life Skills classroom that this study was conducted in began the year in distress. Frequent staff changes, a culture of managerial hierarchy from less than benign leaders, and a pervading feeling of dissatisfaction set the stage for a fundamental change in the way the program operated. This research study worked to find a way to build a culture and community where paraprofessionals were respected and worked in a collaborative relationship with the lead teacher. With an improved culture, the educational team could then build a positive and high-quality instructional environment. While we have not yet achieved that perfect environment, this study has taught us strategies and, more importantly, given us an opportunity to build relationships that will continue to bring us closer to that positive, collaborative classroom that will benefit students for many years to come.

References

- Boomer, L. W. (1982). The paraprofessional: A valued resource for special children and their teachers. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 14(5), 194-197.
- Broer, S. M., Doyle, M. B., & Giangreco, M. F. (2005). Perspectives of students with intellectual disabilities about their experiences with paraprofessional support. *Exceptional Children*, 71(4), 415-430. Retrieved from <http://proxy.cityu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.cityu.edu/docview/201094344?accountid=1230>
- Browder, D. M., Jimenez, B. A., Spooner, F., Saunders, A., Hudson, M., & Bethune, K. S. (2012). Early numeracy instruction for students with moderate and severe developmental disabilities. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 37(4), 308-320.
- Causton-Theoharis, J. N., Giangreco, M. F., Doyle, M. B., & Vadasy, P. F. (2007). The “sous-chefs” of literacy instruction. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 40(1), 56-62.
- French, N. K. (2001). Supervising paraprofessionals: A survey of teacher practices. *The Journal of Special Education*, 35(1), 41-53.
- Friend, M. (2016). Co-Teaching: Creating Success for ALL Learners. Retrieved from <https://www.cec.sped.org/~media/Files/Professional%20Development/HTW/2016%20HTW/Handouts/MFriendPresentationSanMateo92416.pdf>.
- Giangreco, M. F., Broer, S. M., & Edelman, S. W. (2001). Teacher engagement with students with disabilities: Differences between paraprofessional service delivery models. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 26(2), 75-86.
- Gilligan, K. T., Luiselli, J. K., & Pace, G. M. (2007). Training paraprofessional staff to implement discrete trial instruction: Evaluation of a practical performance feedback

intervention. *The Behavior Therapist*

Leblanc, M. P., Ricciardi, J. N., & Luiselli, J. K. (2005). Improving discrete trial instruction by paraprofessional staff through an abbreviated performance feedback intervention. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 76 - 82.

Pratt, C., & Steward, L. (2018). Discrete Trial Training: What is it? Retrieved from <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/discrete-trial-teaching-what-is-it>

Solis, M., Vaughn, S., Swanson, E. and McCulley, L. (2012). Collaborative models of instruction: The empirical foundations of inclusion and co-teaching. *Psychol.Schs.*, 49:498-510. doi:10.1002/pits.21606

