



## AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Rebecca R. Bryan for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Exercise and Sport Science presented on April 17, 2009.

Title: The Role of the Paraeducator in the General Physical Education Environment

Abstract approved:

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The use of paraeducators has increased as a main mechanism to include more students with disabilities in multiple settings in the public schools in the U.S. Research has examined the use of paraeducators in typical classroom settings but little is known about their role in physical education. Although the utilization of paraeducators is intended to be a supportive service delivery option, many concerns and challenges have resulted. The purpose of this study was to explore the particular realities of paraeducators in general physical education as experienced by the teachers and the paraeducators. The paraeducator role in physical education, standards surrounding the role, supervision, and training were all examined. Data were collected from questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Results indicate concern about the clarity of the role, the supervision and training of both paraeducators and teachers in physical education.

The Role of the Paraeducator in the General Physical Education Environment

by  
Rebecca R. Bryan

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Rebecca R. Bryan, Author

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# THE ROLE OF THE PARAEDUCATOR IN THE GENERAL PHYSICAL EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

## 1 Introduction

In the past decade the use of paraeducators in education has grown tremendously as more students with disabilities are integrated into general education classrooms (Giangreco, Edelman, Boer, & Doyle, 2001). The need to extend the support of the special education teachers to multiple general educational settings has grown including the physical education environment (Walsh & Jones, 2004).

The increased use of paraeducators has raised important questions such as, are they trained for their roles? Are the roles appropriate? What effects do they have on the students they work with (Giangreco, Edelman, Boer, & Doyle, 2001)? Other concerns from the literature have included an over-reliance on paraeducators and the double standard this creates for students with disabilities to access trained “highly qualified teachers” a term linked to No Child Left Behind, NCLB (2001). Professionals and parents have been concerned about the amount of time special education students spend with a paraeducator receiving the majority of their instruction. The double standard is that of students with the greatest educational needs are being educated primarily by the least trained and lowest status staff thus having less access to trained teachers than the general education student (Giangreco, Halvorsen, Doyle, & Broer, 2004; French & Chopra, 1999). Another concern has been defining if paraeducators are assistants of students or if they are assistants of teachers (French, 1998; Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000).

As a result of many of these concerns the federal government placed standards on paraeducators (IDEA 1997, & NCLB, 2001). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001) defined the role of the paraeducator as an individual who is employed in an educational environment under the supervision of a certified or licensed teacher. The NCLB Act put minimum requirements on paraeducator positions for example those with instructional duties must have completed two years of college, an associates degree, or they must pass a rigorous state or local assessment demonstrating their ability to assist instruction in writing, reading and math. All paraeducators must have a high school diploma or its equivalent (Ashbaker, 2004).

The requirements made under the Individuals with Disabilities Act, known as IDEA (1997) are similar and both have left it up to the states and local education agencies (LEA) to provide their own standards for the training of paraeducators. However, few states have done more than use the NCLB requirements as their own (Pickett, Likins, & Wallace, 2003).

### **1.1 Multiple Roles of Paraeducators**

Paraeducators are known to have many roles in educating students with disabilities. Not all the roles they take on are appropriate and are oftentimes detrimental to students. French and Chopra (1999) described four primary roles that parents reported for paraeducators. The four roles were connector, team member, instructor, and caregiver/health service provider. The role of connector was described by parents as the most important and powerful role of the paraeducator. The role was primarily described as keeping the parents linked with the school.

Parents often reported that they were more likely to be in contact with their child's paraeducator than with the teacher. However, some parents also mentioned how the role of connector failed because of the paraeducator being a barrier to their child with peers and general education teachers.

The second role parents described was team members. Parents felt that paraeducators needed to be an equal part of the team because their input was valuable. A few parents mentioned the paraeducators role as being more valuable than the teacher's role because of the amount of time the paraeducator spent with their child and how the paraeducator should be more respected as a team member. Role three was described as instructor. Although parents knew that their child was being instructed by paraeducators, they were comfortable when they perceived the paraeducator was doing a good job, being supervised by the teacher, and lessons reflected the IEP goals. On the other hand several parents were concerned that paraeducators were the ones adapting curriculum without supervision.

The fourth role of caregiver had similar concerns stated by parents in that paraeducators were often doing things they were not trained to do. With the caregiver role parents also had concerns in regards to dignity and privacy for their children. The roles parents defined are similar and with similar concerns to the roles students have described for themselves especially in regard to friend and primary teacher.

Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco (2005) found in interviews of students with intellectual disabilities that paraeducators take on the roles of mother, friend, protector, and primary teacher which included themes of exclusion from peer

relationships (friend), embarrassment (mother), stigma and bullying (protector) and invisible to general education teachers (primary teacher). Overwhelmingly present in the interviews was the denial of opportunity to develop peer relationships creating the role of friend in the paraeducator due to a necessity.

Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren (2005a) looked more closely at the unintended consequences of the increased social isolation of students with disabilities and acknowledged the fact that paraeducators were considered to be a physical barrier to peer interactions. Teachers and educational team members have also reported similar concerns in the proximity and overuse of paraeducator support. However, they did find that through intervention and training, paraeducators were able to facilitate and increase interactions among students with and without disabilities dissolving the inappropriate role of friend in the paraeducator (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005b).

In a qualitative study examining the proximity of paraeducators through the observations and interviews of 134 instructional team members, eight themes emerged (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli & MacFarland 1997). The themes included; interference with ownership and responsibility by general educators, separation from classmates, dependence on adults, impact on peer interactions, limitations on receiving competent instruction, loss of personal control, loss of gender identity, and interference with instruction of other students. These eight themes are examples of the issues relating to the “hovering” of paraeducators and the importance of examining the policies regarding paraeducator support, teacher supervision and the collaboration of educational teams.

Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, Aragon, Bernal, Berg De Balderas, & Carroll (2004) studied how paraeducators perceived their role as a connector to the community through interviews. They found that the role of the paraeducator is often to connect the parties involved. The paraeducators felt they were the connector of students to teachers, parents to teachers, parents to students, and students to peers. As a connector they also described their role as problematic in the areas of respect, trust and appreciation (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001). They also stated that often times their roles were unclear or undefined.

## **1.2 Collaboration**

Inclusion is an educational philosophy about acceptance that advocates for the placement of students with disabilities to be part of the general education classroom with their non disabled peers with all support services necessary. In order for inclusion to be successful the following conditions need to be in place, a) positive attitudes and commitment to change, b) honoring of individual differences, c) collaborative planning, and d) administrative support (Block, 1999).

From the very beginning of the inclusion movement collaborative planning was described as a process that must take place. However, many teachers were not trained to work with other adults, they were trained to be in charge of their own classrooms. Therefore, many “inclusive” programs have lacked planning between general education teachers, special education teachers, paraeducators, and administrators. Most educators have been trained in a segregated model creating a need for information about a) purposes and benefits of inclusive placements, b)

description of what their new roles look like, and c) what types of supports are available to them (Givner & Haager, 1995).

Issues relating to training deal with the role of the paraeducator to be a “jack of all trades”. They often accompany students to assist in Math, English, Reading, and Physical Education. More and more, paraeducators have multiple roles across all curricular areas to provide support for students in areas without sufficient training. To complicate the lack of training for paraeducators in different academic areas teachers often report being unprepared to collaborate with paraeducators. This often results in a lack of communication between adult parties, and an inappropriate shift of responsibility for the students with disabilities.

According to NCLB (2001) paraeducators are supposed to be under direct supervision of the special education teacher when providing instruction, Yet it is not understood how this takes place in the physical education environment. Therefore, it is important to examine the role of the paraeducator in physical education from the perspectives of the physical education teacher, the special education teacher and the paraeducator to determine where in lays the “conundrum” in this collaborative relationship (Giangreco & Broer, 2003). An examination of what is happening in the physical education environment regarding the paraeducator support of students with disabilities will help determine the needs for future training to increase effective collaboration between teachers and paraeducators.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

The procedures used to answer the research questions proposed in this study were qualitative in nature and based on the theoretical perspective of phenomenology.

The phenomenological perspective seeks to determine the structure and fundamental nature of particular phenomena for people. The phenomenological approach is explained by Spinelli (2005) in three steps. The first step is known as the rule of Epoché which asks the researcher to set aside his/her biases, and suspends assumptions and expectations in order to have a more open mind, and to focus on the immediate data of one's experiences. The second step is the rule of description. Spinelli (2005) says the essence of this rule is to describe not explain, and not make speculations or theoretical explanations, but simply describe the intentional variables that make up the experience. Third is the equalization rule that further urges the researcher to avoid placing initial significance to items, but instead asks that each description initially have equal value (Spinelli, 2005).

According to Patton (2002) phenomenology focuses on exploring how individuals make sense of experience and exchange experience into consciousness, both as individual and shared meaning.

Phenomenology can be further described as,

...the attempt to understand more adequately the human condition as it manifests itself in lived, concrete, experience. This includes not only the observable behavioral outcomes of experience but also the entire range of inter-relationally interpreted states of being including such instances as moments of joy, absurdity, anxiety, confusion, indifferences and so forth. In other words, phenomenological investigation includes all possible experiences available to human reflection. Phenomenology attempts to establish a more adequate set of criteria for the investigation of phenomena as we actually live them out and experience them. (Spinelli, 2005, pg. 131)

The focus of the study was to examine how each participant described the role, supervision and standards for the paraeducator as they relate to delivering physical education to students with disabilities. Each participant held his/her own

reality about the role of the paraeducator. In order to understand the paraeducators' role in physical education as a whole, the phenomenological approach was used to obtain the reflections and perspectives specific to their daily interactions and to guide the observable events as they took place. The intention of the phenomenological approach was to identify and describe the subjective experiences (Patton, 2002) of the teachers and paraeducators who participated in the study.

The phenomenological approach is concerned with examining things from many perspectives (Moustakas, 1994) as in this case the paraeducator, the special education teacher, the general physical education teacher and the adapted physical education specialist. The approach is also committed to the description of experiences and in which the researcher has a personal interest to sustain inquiry for future interest and concern (Moustakas, 1994) for example, to provide more adequate training for teachers and paraeducators surrounding physical education.

#### **1.4 Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the paraeducator in the physical education environment and to explore the standards of supervision from the perspectives of special education teachers, physical education teachers, adapted physical education teachers, and paraeducators. The significance of the role of the paraeducator is related to legislation in No Child Left Behind NCLB (2001) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act IDEA (1997). As more students with disabilities are being educated in the general education environment, more support services are needed. Paraeducators are such personnel providing extra support, however much of the current research has shown detrimental effects in the over

reliance on paraeducators, along with a lack of support, supervision, and clear role definition. Their role is even more unclear as it relates to the physical education environment. There has been little to no research regarding the role of the paraeducator in physical education.

In the following two manuscripts, descriptive information about the paraeducators role in the general physical education environment, the standards of supervision, and training needs are provided. The project is important for at least two reasons. First, it is critical to understand the role of the paraeducator in physical education from the perspective of all team members to gain greater insight into what standards and supervision exist for staff, and what possible training needs are described. Second, results of this project are of importance to Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) and school districts to more effectively prepare teachers and paraeducators to ensure better support for students included into general physical education environments.

### **1.5 Understanding the Study Design**

A qualitative design approach method was used. The research questions warranted the use of qualitative methods. The description of the paraeducators role, the standards for supervision and training needs can begin to be understood by using the phenomenological perspective. A variety of data sources were used to understand the realities of the paraeducator role in the general physical education environment and for triangulation.

The intent was to see how the role of the paraeducator in the general physical education environment was described by educational team members and what standards for supervision and training needs were expressed. The findings from the study are presented in the two following manuscripts. The manuscripts were written with the intent to publish separately.

## **2 The Role of the Paraeducator in the General Physical Education Environment**

Over the past decade the need to extend the support of special education teachers to multiple general education settings has grown tremendously as students with disabilities are integrated into general education settings (Walsh & Jones, 2004). As a result the use of paraeducators has increased as a main mechanism for such support. Many of the demands placed on paraeducators are considered to be unrealistic and burdensome particularly on untrained individuals (Beale, 2001). Many of the demands include assisting students in different educational curricula, personal care, as well as in implementing different behavior management strategies (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). Paraeducators often receive very little reinforcement for the many roles they fill and are often underappreciated. For a paraeducator the realities of their frequently undefined roles, inappropriate responsibilities, lack of appreciation and reinforcement by others affects their perceived competence in their abilities to assist students with disabilities in all areas (Giangreco, Edelman, and Broer, 2001). The role of the paraeducator has expanded inappropriately in large part as a result of a decrease in special education teachers. This decrease can be attributed to the high turnover rates due to adverse working conditions including

large caseloads, paperwork, and lack of administrative support (Giangreco, Edelman, Boer, & Doyle, 2001). These issues also highlight a breakdown in communication and collaboration among teachers and paraeducators which are essential in the current delivery models of special education where students are integrated into the general education environment more often (French & Chopra, 2006), especially in environments such as physical education. As more students are included more support personnel and collaborative practices are needed. However, the specific roles and responsibility of the paraeducator in different classes, especially the physical education environment remains unclear.

The roles of the paraeducator have not always transferred to the physical education environment. Often paraeducators have seen physical education as a time for a break or a planning period (Block, 2000). This has been due to a lack of expectation to assist in general physical education, and undefined roles when positions of employment were accepted (Silliman-French & Fullerton, 1998). There is extremely limited research literature regarding physical education and the paraeducator. In one study Bolen and Thomas (1997) surveyed paraeducators working in the physical education environment. They found that none of the paraeducators met the minimal 3-day orientation recommendations. Sixty six percent also reported having received no in-service training, 97% reported a need for more feedback and suggestions, 93% expressed inadequacies in being provided weekly conferences, while 90% wanted closer supervision by their supervising teacher. O'Connor and French (1998) found significant correlations on scores of expressed feelings about inclusion and the number of course credits in college,

ratings of in-service experiences, and perception of inclusion. Other significant differences were found between average knowledge about inclusion by time worked in general physical education, between men and women for years of education and for years of experience as a paraeducator. Other literature in physical education regarding paraeducators is anecdotal with strategies in how to best utilize and work with paraeducators in physical education. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the particular realities of paraeducators in general physical education as experienced by the teachers and the paraeducators within two school districts.

## **2.1 Methodology**

### **2.1.1 Participants**

The participants in the study were from two school districts, one rural (n=7) and one suburban (n=8). Two middle schools were used from the suburban school district and one from the rural district. The districts and particular schools were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) students with disabilities were included in general physical education classes; (b) the school used paraeducators to help support students with disabilities in the district; and (c) had an adapted physical education specialist for the district. The participants from both districts composed of paraeducators (n=4), special education teachers (n=3), general physical education teachers (n=4), and adapted physical education teachers (n=4) working at the middle school level. The middle school level was examined because physical education was offered at least 3 to 5 days a week with students with disabilities included in the physical education environment by certified physical education teachers.

Paraeducators included three females and one male, while the special education teachers included two females and one male. The general physical education teacher group consisted of three females and one male, while the adapted physical education teachers included one female and three males. Participation in the study was voluntary and IRB approval and informed consent were obtained.

The participants, schools, and school districts were given pseudonyms to conceal their identity. One of the paraeducators worked one on one with a student throughout the school day while the other three paraeducators worked with groups of students in various capacities. All the adapted physical education specialists were itinerant and worked at a number of schools with all age levels; elementary, middle and high school within their district. Two physical education teachers worked full time, while two worked three quarter time. The special education teachers were all full time. One special education teacher and one physical education teacher were taking graduate college courses at the time of the study. One adapted physical education teacher was taking coursework towards a MS degree in health. The participants spanned a wide spectrum of experience and education that can be seen in tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Table 1  
Years Experience

	Years experience	Years at placement	Years @ Elem	Years @ MS	Years @ HS
<b>Paraeducators</b>					
Lauren	4	2	0	4	0
Megan	14	14	0	14	0
Jack	8	2	3	3	2
Tammy	2	1.5	0.5	1.5	0.5
<b>SPED Teachers</b>					
Rachel	7	6	0	6	1
Mary	11	6	0	6	0
Greg	27	4	3	4	20
<b>PE Teachers</b>					
Judy	22	2	0	-	-
Nicole	25	6	0	25	0
Janice	20	5	7	5	8
Matt	35	31	0	35	0
<b>APE Teachers</b>					
Mark	30	28	28	30	30
Colin	8	4	8	8	8
James	24	21	24	21	21
Paige	20	3	20	20	20

*Note.* Elem = Elementary School; MS = Middle School; HS = High School; SPED = Special Education; PE = Physical Education; APE = Adapted Physical Education.

Table 2.  
Level of Education

	Degree earned	APE CW	Undergrad	Graduate	SPED CW	Undergrad	Graduate
<b>Paraeducators</b>							
Lauren	BS	N	0	0	N	0	0
Megan	BS	N	0	0	N	0	0
Jack	AS	N	0	0	N	0	0
Tammy	None	N	0	0	N	0	0
<b>SPED Teachers</b>							
Rachel	MA	N	0	0	Y	Degree	MAT
Mary	BA	N	0	0	Y	80	0
Greg	BA	Y	6	0	Y	BA+121	0
<b>PE Teachers</b>							
Judy	BA	N	0	0	N	0	0
Nicole	MA	Y	6	0	Y	0	6
Janice	BA	N	0	0	N	0	0
Matt	BA +75	N	0	0	N	0	0
<b>APE Teachers</b>							
Mark	MA & 2 BA's	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Colin	BS	N	N	N	Y	0	9
James	MA	Y	BA	MA	Y	30	15
Paige	BS	Y	0	30	Y	0	15

*Note.* APE CW = Adapted Physical Education Coursework; SPED CW = Special Education Coursework; SPED = Special Education; PE = Physical Education; APE = Adapted Physical Education; BS = Bachelor of Science; AS = Associates Degree; MA= Master of Arts.

## 2.1.2 Apparatus

The Olympus DS-4000 Digital voice recorder was utilized for the interviews during this project. The digital voice recorder was used for recording all 15

interviews which were transcribed directly to a PC by a professional and reviewed by the researcher for accuracy.

The systematic observation sheet, demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions were created by the researcher. Interview notes were also taken throughout the duration of the project by the researcher. Transcripts and observation notes were coded by hand and stored and organized in Max QDA (VERBI Software, 2001) a qualitative coding software tool.

### **2.1.3 Data Collection**

A timeline of study events can be found in Appendix B. After receiving district approval a script email was sent to teachers and paraeducators (Appendix C). Once participants agreed and consent forms were signed (Appendix D), full day observations were set up with the paraeducators and following observation dates and interviews were scheduled. All participants were interviewed and the paraeducators were observed for a total of four sessions; one full day observation and three 1 hour observations surrounding the students with disabilities physical education time.

Full day observations of the paraeducators were completed prior to handing out questionnaires (Appendix E), or interviewing participants (Appendix F) so questions could not potentially change behavior of participants.

After a full day observation with paraeducators one on one interviews were scheduled with adapted physical and general physical education teachers, special education teachers and paraeducators. During this period of time one hour observations (Appendix G) surrounding the physical education time were also scheduled with the paraeducators. Interviews were not conducted in any particular

order, they just followed the full day observation and fit into the participants' schedules. Data collection in two middle schools within the suburban school district took about 7 weeks. The rural school district with one participating school took two weeks to collect data.

### **2.1.4 Data Analysis**

Data analysis included three strategies to ensure data trustworthiness: (a) triangulation of multiple sources; (b) the use of two individuals to code and develop themes; and (c) member checks involving study participants. The transcription of interviews was done by a professional and the primary researcher. Transcripts of interviews, observation notes, and journal entries were coded by hand and stored and organized in Max QDA (VERBI Software, 2001) analysis software and analyzed for specific themes and sub-themes by the primary researcher and a research assistant. The codes (Appendix H) were continuously compared and refined based on discussions between the researcher and the research assistant and the seven steps to data analysis using the phenomenological approach described by Patton (2002) which included:

1. Epoché, the process of examining one's own bias to gain clarity about preconceptions in order to understand the researcher's view of the subject matter.
2. Phenomenological reduction or bracketing is explained in five steps, which includes:
  - a. Locate within the personal experience, or self-story, key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question.
  - b. Interpret the meanings of these phrases, as an informed reader.

- c. Obtain the subject's interpretations of these phrases, if possible.
  - d. Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon being studied.
  - e. Offer a tentative statement, or definition, of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified in step 4. (Patton, 2002, p. 485- 486)
3. Organize data into meaningful clusters.
  4. Delimitation process. This involves eliminating irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping data.
  5. Invariant themes are identified.
  6. Structural description. Content is extracted from the data for textural portrayals of each theme.
  7. Last, a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience or phenomena are revealed.

These seven phenomenological steps were used by the researcher to ensure that assumptions and biases were set aside so that the participants' phenomena, as they described it, were the focus of the study.

During the first step, the researcher wrote in a journal personal expectations and assumptions about what would be happening in the schools surrounding the issue of the paraeducator in physical education. By keeping a journal, the researcher continuously kept track of potential preconceptions and bias. The rule of epoché was an on-going process and not a single event in data analysis. Epoché is also described as establishing rigor by looking differently at the experience being investigated to allow the voice of the participants speak about the phenomenon in question (Patton, 2002).

During the second stage known as reduction, the researcher located statements and phrases regarding the role of the paraeducator in physical education within the participants' interview data,. The researcher read and re-read the transcripts and interview questions multiple times before initially developing a code book. Once the initial codes were developed the researcher and research assistant coded all the transcripts and observation notes line by line and met to evaluate the codes and adjust the code book. After adjustments were made to the codes the researcher and research assistant would recode the data. After the final adjustments to the code book were made the researcher then inserted the data into Max QDA (VERBI Software, 2001) to manage and store the data. Statements were then highlighted within data so that interpretations of the phrases could take place. During that stage, phrases from the teacher and paraeducator interviews were interpreted by the researcher and later checked by participants. Once the interpretations made by the researcher had been checked for accuracy reoccurring themes and meanings were examined for what was revealed about the role of the paraeducator in general physical education environment. Those themes were then given tentative definitions.

After the data had been reduced and tentative definitions had been given, the researcher organized data into clusters that were meaningful and provided further clarification about the phenomena of the paraeducator role. Data were then reduced furthermore by eliminating data within clusters that were repetitive, overlapping, or irrelevant to the role of the paraeducator. After irrelevant data were eliminated from the clusters, themes were identified. Themes are the content and illustration of the

experiences described by teachers and paraeducators, but not the essence of the phenomena.

The fundamental nature or essence of the phenomena took shape during the structural description. During the stage of structural description, the researcher sought to understand how the individual participants experienced the role of the paraeducator as a whole. Last, the researcher triangulated the different data sources and synthesized the meaning and revealed the phenomena surrounding the role of the paraeducator in general physical education.

Triangulation is a way to test for consistency within the data by using several methods or types of data (Patton, 2002) and a validation of findings. Different ways to triangulate data in a qualitative inquiry include; using a variety of data sources, using several researchers, using multiple theories to interpret, mixing different types of purposeful samples or using multiple methods (Patton, 2002).

## **2.2 Results**

### **2.2.1 One-on-One Interviews Analyses & Findings**

Based on the data analyses, individual participants' comments fell into four main themes surrounding the paraeducator role. They included protection and support, individual characteristics, expectations and acceptance, and ambiguity of role.

#### **2.2.1.1 Protection and Backup**

The participants described the paraeducator role mostly in relation to student and teacher support, safety and managing behavior. When discussing the

overall job position, not specific to physical education, the paraeducators themselves described their role as “just being their aide and helping the teacher, with everything” (Tammy, Para White Oak MS). Megan a one-on-one paraeducator at Sycamore Middle School described her role specific to supporting her student, “basically, I believe I have to modify and explain the course task in a simple way, an understandable way that he would be able to do his, you know his work”. The paraeducators also mentioned supporting the teacher with different tasks such as documentation as noted by Lauren from Maple Middle School, “I kind of feel like I’m the undercover cop reporting back to my teacher. I take notes regularly all through the day on kids’ behavior and usually review it with her at the end of the day.” The paraeducators not only mention support for teachers and students but some mentioned being advocates for the students. Jack (para, White Oak MS) discussed his role in relation to the difficulties of his position, “it’s trying to get everybody to accept them and to treat them as human beings. You know, I think that’s my biggest role, just to make sure that they’re all treated with respect”.

When the special education, physical education and adapted physical education teachers described the overall role of the paraeducator they described it much the same as the paraeducators in regards to one on one and small group support as well as being record keepers and role models. Such description by Greg, a special education teacher from White Oak MS follows,

Well to work with students in small group instruction or one to one instruction, to follow lesson plans, to do any kind of bookkeeping that I ask them to do or charting that I ask them to do, or record keeping however you want to call it, to be a positive role model in class, to be a positive role model outside of class on campus.

The two other special education teachers and two of the physical education teachers also described the paraeducators role in relation to being fellow teachers assisting with the class and described them as “co-teachers”.

When the paraeducators and teachers described the role of the paraeducator in the general physical education environment it was typically described in relation to keeping students safe and dealing with behavior issues. The special education teachers struggled more with answering questions specific to physical education most likely due to there lack of collaboration and knowledge about what was actually going on in the gym because the dynamics of conversations were either between the physical education teacher and paraeducator, paraeducator and special education teacher, or more rarely physical education teacher and special education teacher but not typically between all three together. Their comments were more in relation to specific students or groups and would answer by saying things like, “it depends on the students that I have” (Mary, special education teacher, Sycamore MS).

The adapted physical education teachers tended to be more in depth about the overall role of the paraeducator in physical education likely due to the many different environments in which they provide services to students and work collaboratively with physical education teachers, special education teachers and paraeducators. The physical education teachers were similar to the responses of the adapted physical education teachers but also would mention a responsibility over the students.

Megan (paraeducator, Sycamore MS) reported in regards to physical education, “ The first thing is safety. My role is safety”. Tammy (paraeducator,

White Oak MS) also reports safety as being a priority by describing her role as “mostly watching and making sure that they’re not getting hurt”. The paraeducators also describe their role in relation to the physical education teachers. For example Lauren (paraeducator, Maple MS) said “the mainstream PE teacher, she’s got a class full of kids she’s got to work with and so those kind of outbursts of behavior are not part of what she is there for”. Greg (special education teacher), James (adapted physical education teacher) and Jack (paraeducator) from White Oak MS described the dynamic of the male physical education environment very differently than the other two middle schools or the female physical environment within the same Middle School as will be seen throughout.

Jack (paraeducator, White Oak MS) felt that he had no role in physical education. He specifically described his situation by saying, “I’m a fly on the wall”. After observing and interviewing the teachers and paraeducators at White Oak Middle School it was apparent that the two physical education teachers were very different, and the students with disabilities were treated very differently depending on which teacher they had. White Oak Middle School practiced segregated physical education which alone created class size issues for the teachers and very different environments for the adapted physical education teacher and the female and male paraeducators to serve. The students integrated in physical education also had very different experiences depending if they were in a male or female physical education class.

Greg (special education teacher, White Oak MS) described the paraeducator role in general physical education as very difficult due to their specific situation

while the other special education teachers did not describe it much at all when asked except to say it depends on the student. On the other hand, the adapted physical education teachers described the role of the paraeducator in physical education with detail about safety, behavior, and overall management such as getting students from class to physical education and helping them dress for class. The adapted physical education teachers saw the paraeducators as one of the many “tools involved in education” (Mark, adapted physical education, Maple MS) as they, the adapted physical education teachers are. Colin (adapted physical education, Sycamore MS) described the role as to “always foster independence and independent learning. I think that never changes and everything else that covers that whether it’s behavior and safety or changing and everything else that’s relatively related to fostering independent learning in my opinion.” Similarly James (adapted physical education, White Oak MS) responded with,

That assistant is there for safety reasons, make sure kids socially behaving, following directions, acting appropriate, following through with whatever task is asked and then if those things are a challenge then that’s when the paraeducator should step in and manage what needs to be done.

Physical Education teachers described the role of the paraeducators that assisted in their classrooms much the same as the adapted physical education teachers described them. They felt it was the paraeducators’ job to keep students on task and organized. Janice from White Oak Middle School described the paraeducator as an anchor for the students that provided guidance and assisted in the development of a relationship between the special education students and the teacher. She said in the beginning of the year her most important role was to be “the

go-between” until a relationship was developed between the students and the teacher. Matt from White Oak said, “Basically his job is to make sure they’re dressed out. They have problems with their locks, it’s his job to get that organized”. Nicole, a physical education teacher from Sycamore Middle School also stated that the role of the paraeducator she works with is to “make sure he was doing what he was supposed to do”. In general, the physical education teachers looked to the paraeducators to take responsibility for the students they came to class with.

To understand the dynamics of the paraeducator role as described by themselves and in relation to others it was important to also understand how the special education, physical and adapted physical education teachers described their role in integrating students with disabilities into the general physical education environment. They described their role in regards to physical education differently from one another. The special education teachers described their role as a support person and also to help with behavior and modifications. The physical education teachers described their role as providing a positive environment for special education students to interact act and experience, except for Matt (physical education, White Oak MS) who responded with,

To be quite honest with you very little. I’m not authorized in that area. It’s not my expertise and I always try to explain to special ed teachers that I don’t send my 50 students down to them and say here deal with them and yours. Vice versa, I have no expertise other than I treat them as closely as I can to the every day student. I don’t make special situations for them.... I don’t grade them, because I don’t know how to grade them.... My input is minimal and my contact with them is just to the class itself through role call and getting on teams, but whoever comes with them, that’s their job not mine.

Unlike her male counterpart Janice (physical education, White Oak MS) responded

by saying “I want to integrate them totally into the class”. Her response is different from the other two teachers in the sense that she takes responsibility for the students integrated in her class. Judy (physical education, Maple MS) on the other hand responded by saying “it’s hard for me to differentiate for them because I have so many kids so I think that my role is to give them the most positive and interactive experience they possibly can have.” Her reply shows a lack of responsibility for the students and their physical education needs.

The adapted physical educators described their role in integrating students as providing teachers with suggestions on modifications, equipment, and even in staff development. They really talked about consulting with the teachers and being available for questions and suggestions. Their responses were very similar and can best be described by Mark (adapted physical education, Maple MS),

I try to provide a modest level of support as possible so that the efforts and the ownership of the program will be by the home supervising teacher. I may do the paperwork, I may provide special equipment, I may provide background or suggestions varying on the situation.

### **2.2.1.2 Individual Characteristics**

The teachers and paraeducators were asked to describe their own strengths and weaknesses, and the teachers were asked to describe the strength and weaknesses of the paraeducators. The paraeducators described their own strengths often in reflection to the students, the teachers also described the paraeducators strengths this way. Weaknesses tended to be explained in relation to individual personality.

Most of the paraeducators described their strengths as being patient,

compassionate, and encouraging to students. Jack (paraeducator, White Oak MS) responded with “I’m not judgmental of them and I’m just really open and I try to push them, have patience and try to give them the encouragement to let them know that they can do this”. His female counterpart, Tammy mentioned being a good listener and loving to work with all the students even the tough ones. She also said compassion was her strength and her weakness. Megan (paraeducator, Sycamore MS) described her strength as being encouraging, and did not mention a weakness. Lauren (paraeducator, Maple MS) described her strength as loving to connect to the students and show interest in them and described issues with boundaries as her weakness. She mentioned having a hard time dealing with students invading her personal space. The special education teachers described the paraeducators strengths as being flexible, well organized, and always willing to work hard. Greg (special education, White Oak MS) responded by saying “I think they just really care about the kids. They work hard and they want to do a good job.” Mary (special education, Sycamore MS) simply mentioned that the paraeducators she worked with are very well organized. Rachel (special education, Maple MS) described her paraeducators strengths by saying their extremely flexible and “always willing to do the extra thing, always willing to do the work.”

When they described the weaknesses of the paraeducators they struggled and wanted to be sure to convey how much they appreciate them. Mary mentioned the paraeducator she worked with was very quiet. When Rachel discussed her paraeducators weakness she mentioned one being more reactive to behaviors. Greg (special education, White Oak) mentioned a number of things that he felt his

paraeducators could work on. He stated, “Confidentiality is probably a problem, making decisions at times when they probably should have asked the teacher, asked me... they could probably have some improvement in terms of disciplining behavior.” Overall, the teachers felt that the paraeducators could improve on how they dealt with disciplining and managing behaviors, the very thing they described as being the paraeducators main role.

The physical education teachers and adapted physical education teachers went into greater detail about the strengths and weaknesses of the paraeducators they worked with. When discussing the strengths of the paraeducators the physical education teachers worked with they mentioned kindness, knowledge of and rapport with the students and overall awareness as their strengths. Only two of the four physical education teachers mentioned weaknesses. The weaknesses mentioned included discomfort with physical education setting, lack of content knowledge and knowing when to step in and when to step back. Janice (physical education, White Oak MS) mentioned being non-assertive and a lack of boundaries specifically in regards to the paraeducator in her class. Her assessment of the paraeducator she worked with was similar to Tammy’s (paraeducator, White Oak) self assessment of her own weaknesses.

The adapted physical education teachers described the paraeducators’ strengths as being very organized, knowing the students well in the assistance of behavior and safety, and “having good mommy skills” (Paige, adapted physical education, White Oak MS). A response from Mark (adapted physical education, Maple MS) exemplifies what was said;

They are often very attentive and available to the kids. They come in with knowledge of where the kids have been that day emotionally or physically. They know any behavior program for communication, language issues that the kids have, know when there's a warning sign or when something's unacceptable and respond in something consistent with what's been happening the rest of the week.

Overall the adapted physical education teachers really felt that the paraeducators knew the students well and assisted in communicating where the students were behaviorally, physically and emotionally on the days the adapted physical education teacher worked with them.

When discussing the weaknesses of the paraeducators two of the adapted physical education teachers mentioned it more as being a weakness in the system and not an individual weakness. Paige (adapted physical education, White Oak MS) said,

A general weakness, I think is that they're limited because of their hours, and unfortunately some of them would do more, but it's not within the spectrum of their job. They are limited and so I see that as more of a weakness of the system rather than of an individual or a group of people. Sometimes, you know, I think the system just tries to get a warm body and then don't find out until later that it wasn't a good fit.

The adapted physical education teachers go on to mention weaknesses in areas of peer assistance and issues specific to the physical education environment. Colin (adapted physical education, Sycamore MS) mentioned

I think it probably starts with them not knowing what to do and then that can lead to chatting and doing nothing. Or the other extreme is they're way too involved, too much constant verbal commands and hand over hand or excessive concern with safety.

Colin also mentioned that the paraeducators will often give instructions towards the goal of an activity when he is really trying to see how they are going about it or

looking at form. For example if students are working on throwing a ball at a target the paraeducator may be focused on the student hitting the target while Colin wants them to be working on how to throw it, the form and does not care as much about hitting the target.

The other area mentioned as a weakness related to the paraeducators working with general education students. Although their strengths included knowing the special education students they worked with, the adapted physical education teachers did not feel that they were strong in facilitating interactions with general education students. James (adapted physical education, White Oak MS) commented,

I think the biggest weakness at the junior high and high school level is not knowing how to get other regular ed students to work with my special ed students so that it's a peer to peer teaching. They know what to do with my students, but they don't always know what to do to facilitate team work, interaction, communication and social growth.

This was an area of concern for teachers when mentioning knowing when to step in and when to fade to allow and facilitate social interactions among classmates.

### **2.2.1.3 Expectations and Acceptance**

During the interviews the participants were asked to discuss the challenges they face in their role integrating students with disabilities. The main themes for paraeducators were student behavior and acceptance. It was important to ask about each teacher and paraeducators' challenges individually and collectively as they are part of school teams and districts working with each other and students with disabilities. The paraeducators and special education teachers described their greatest challenge mostly within student behavior. However, in White Oak Middle School acceptance by others was also a resonating challenge for the paraeducators

not only surrounding the male physical education classes but other areas as well. The physical education teachers discussed the very nature of the students they have coming to them and other issues surrounding management issues such as class size and behavior. The adapted physical education teachers really described their challenges in relation to the specific nature of their itinerant positions such as time and traveling.

The paraeducators described the challenges of their role residing within the type of students they work with, and the expectations they have for students, and expectations others have of them in their position. Megan and Lauren both described the challenges specific to the students they worked with. Megan (paraeducator, Sycamore MS) responded by saying,

The challenges I think, I guess is basically the nature of the students. You know being special needs. They have so much problem to be focused, to keep them focused in the mainstream. This is the main thing and to follow the teacher and know everything that the rest of the class is doing at the time and another challenge is the socializing. With our kids socializing is a big thing so they can't go there and start a conversation. Basically people don't understand them very well.

On the other hand, Jack (paraeducator, White Oak) felt that the biggest challenge for him in relation to the students he worked with was realizing that some of the students had more extreme behavior issues than he expected. He really felt that dealing with the behavior of students was his greatest challenge in his position. Tammy on the other hand described the challenges in her position related to her expectations of students. She described it as being, "hard because sometimes you forget what their limitations are and you want to be able to show them more than they can really take

on". She went on to describe the opposite of "not expecting enough" being just as difficult.

Challenges beyond the students were described by the paraeducators as the expectations of others. The paraeducators mentioned not only issues regarding expectations of students, but also the expectations teachers had of both the students and the paraeducators. The greatest challenge for paraeducators was in really knowing what was expected and what they could or should be doing in class with students. Lauren (paraeducator, Maple MS) began by describing the beginning of the year when she would go into classes that the students with autism she worked with were being included. She mentioned how difficult it was because the teacher seemed nervous and "not knowing what to expect" from the students or her as a paraeducator. Tammy (paraeducator, White Oak MS) had similar responses in relation to the expectation of the teachers and herself. She found it difficult at times supporting students because she said she often was "learning right along with the rest when they showed up to class". Tammy also felt she did not know what she was "allowed to do" and not to do when wanting to be more involved in physical education. Jack's (paraeducator, White Oak MS) challenges outside of the students were very different. He had many difficulties getting teachers to accept the students and value his knowledge about the students he supported. This was very clear in the physical education environment but he also described other instances this took place.

I think, at least at this level they think that you're just there to sit in on the class and that these kids aren't going to really participate or be part because they're not getting, most of them don't get a grade from that class, they get a pass or fail. And they're just sitting in there which is sad because you know a

lot of them can really function if they had the right tools and the right help.  
Jack (paraeducator, White Oak)

Jack went on to describe specific situations and challenges he had faced during the year such as even getting a textbook for a student and proving to the teacher that the student was good at history and could be a contributing part of the class even if not the brightest in the class with a few minor adjustments. It was clear that Jack noticed many barriers due to the preconceptions the teachers held about the students coming into their classes. Specific to physical education at White Oak Middle School the challenges were clear. Students were not even allowed in the physical education class without a paraeducator or special education teacher and the physical education teacher refused to grade the students. The physical education teacher, Matt, was very open about how he felt about special education students coming to his class and how it was not his responsibility to work with them, he stated “it’s their job to deal with them in the classroom.... I turn to the Special Ed instructor, whether it be the aide or teacher and say, hey you deal with it, I don’t have time.”

The special education teacher (Greg) at White Oak Middle school mentioned many of the same challenges in regards to physical education and teachers not being accepting of his students. He clearly stated “sometimes I have some frustrations with regular teachers not being open and willing to kind of have their kids welcome my kids in their classroom.” This included the physical education teacher in which Greg said was “very closed shop”. He also mentioned frustrations with parents and being part of a district he did not feel was very progressive.

The two other special education teachers really felt that the greatest challenges were dealing with student behavior and managing the amount of paperwork and curriculum they have. Rachel (special education, Maple MS) responded by saying;

The behaviors when I don't feel I have a handle on it, there times there's so much, and the paperwork, the hoops we have to jump through for special ed gets very tiresome and they just add every year, they seem to add a couple more layers.

Mary (special education) from Sycamore Middle School mentioned the same issues dealing student behavior and the large amount of curriculum she had to plan for and manage. She did not have a class period throughout the day without students in her classroom. All the special education teachers including adapted physical education teachers mentioned being overwhelmed with the amount of paperwork they had to contend with in their positions.

The adapted physical education teachers not only discussed paperwork, meetings, and time as a challenge but really discussed these issues in relation to the very nature of being itinerant teachers traveling to many different sites. James and Paige being from a rural district mentioned traveling specifically where as the two other APE teachers from the suburban districts did not, but they all mentioned the difficulties in relation to having to be at a number of different sites. Colin (adapted physical education, Sycamore MS) said,

In the course of my job a lot of the challenge is since I'm not based in a school is staying in touch with six different schools and administrations and making sure everybody knows who I am and what I do and being able to have space to do... And juggling all the different schedules and when I can see them and when I can not. Putting schedules together is like a giant jigsaw

puzzle and there's different ways you can put together but it won't have many combinations that will work.

All the teachers discussed the difficulties related to providing services under special education. James' (adapted physical education, White Oak MS) response emulated the responses of the adapted physical education professionals.

There's definitely not enough, there's not enough adapted pe time. So there's not enough teachers hired and it...but it's not just adapted pe, it's speech, it's every, I mean everybody's, everybody's cup runneth over with numbers of kids, numbers of jobs, numbers of IEP's, numbers of paperwork and everybody's maxed out.

The general physical education teachers also responded in regards to the very nature of their job. All the physical education teachers mentioned class size, number of students, and student behavior. The teachers really felt that the students with behavior issues took up to much of the time they wanted to be giving to the students doing a good job and ready to learn. They also felt that time was an issue, the teachers in the rural district mentioned class periods being to short, whereas the teachers in the suburban district mentioned time in relation to seeing students every over day due to A/B day schedules. Overall the physical education teachers really felt that the challenges were in working with the current generation of students. The following statement by Janice (physical education, White Oak MS) really sums up how the seasoned physical education teachers felt about the students they were trying teach.

The kids that come to us that are not prepared to learn. You know over the years I've been doing this for a long time, and over the years the kids have gotten farther and farther removed from the act of learning. They're not coming to school prepared. They're not fed, they're not taught at home proper etiquette, they're not responsible, respectful. A lot of them, I would say, not most, but a lot and those are my challenges. Those are the kids that I

feel like I need to partially act a role of mother in a way or role model in a way.

The physical education teachers had all been teaching for 20 plus years, so when describing the current day student they had a veteran perspective to compare the changes in the generations of pupils they had previously taught.

#### **2.2.1.4 Ambiguity**

The fourth theme addressed by the participants during the interviews was related to the ambiguity of the paraeducator role. The participants were asked if the role of the paraeducator was clearly defined for them, and how the role was defined. The responses of the participants were further examined against the districts definition of the paraeducators roles. The paraeducators all said that their role is pretty clear. They also all mentioned it being defined by the teachers. The special education teachers on the other hand reported the role never really being described to them beyond receiving the districts sheet of responsibilities for instructional assistants. All the physical education teachers said that the role had never been described to them, while one adapted physical education teacher in each district said it had not, while their counterpart said it had.

The paraeducators all reported that their role had been defined for them and was described by the various teachers. Megan (paraeducator, Sycamore MS) said, “absolutely because the communication is there...I have daily communication with each teacher...I know everything and every teacher.” Lauren (paraeducator, Maple MS) also said that her special education teacher was extremely good at giving her direction in how to best assist in the classroom, but also said that coming in she was

not provided a job description by her teacher or the administration other than telling her what teacher she was going to be an aide for. She said in the beginning it was incredibly unclear but they just learned as they went within each environment they worked with the students. Jack (paraeducator, White Oak MS) said that his role was defined by the teachers and was pretty clear, but also said, "I think each teacher has his/her own role on what they want you to do or be, you know some just do it their own way...other teachers are really excited about you being there and want you to be part of that class." His counterpart Tammy (paraeducator), at White Oak MS felt her role was clear and that she had been lucky because "everybody's been really good about telling me what I need to do and my limits". She however mentioned that the other paraeducators taught her and gave her the guidelines in which they expected her to follow. When asked who set those guidelines she responded by saying "the teachers".

The special education teachers that the paraeducators said defined their role mentioned that the role of the paraeducator had never been described to them. They further went on to mention that they may have indirectly received something about the role of the paraeducator such as performing lifts and transfers, self help skills etc. but they were not even sure if the paperwork was official. Rachel (special education, Maple MS) simply stated "indirectly there are, there are things that we get which talk about their role...I know there is guidelines but I am not even sure their official." Greg (special education, White Oak MS) said it had never really been described to him but that about two years ago he received a paper of the responsibilities of instructional assistants, which is what his district calls their paraeducators.

The physical education teachers reported not being informed about the paraeducator and that it had not been clearly defined. Judy (physical education, Maple MS) had mentioned that she had been described the role by the paraeducators that came into her class. She said, “they’re the ones who taught me about it, cause I had been like what am I suppose to do with you guys.” She goes on to say that they told her what they had done in the past and that was how the role had been described for her. Janice (physical education, White Oak MS) also described in her response how unclear the role of the paraeducator was to her. She responded by saying, “No, no that’s missing. I had to ask the question right off the bat, what’s going on? Who are you? Why are you here? What are we doing?” Both Matt (physical education, White Oak MS) and Nicole (physical education, Sycamore MS) said that the role had not been described in detail but they just figured the paraeducators were there to help the students get dressed but that there was never a “game plan laid out” (Matt). Two of the four adapted physical education teachers responded similarly.

Interestingly, one adapted physical education teacher in each district said that the role had not been clearly defined to them, but their co-worker alternatively said that it had. The two adapted physical education teachers that had mentioned the role being explained said that they had received a write up or summary of the basic roles. Colin (adapted physical education, Sycamore MS) responded to the interview question by saying, “Yeah, as a matter of fact our special education director just sent out an email summarizing the roles, the basic roles of paraeducators.” Paige’s (adapted physical education, White Oak MS) response was much the same, but said that they generally get a copy of the agreement that describes the basic roles in the

beginning of the school year. James who works in the same district as Paige and Mark who works in the same district with Colin both said that the role of the paraeducator had not at all been explained to them. If the role was explained the adapted teachers said it was explained in general expectations or responsibilities only.

Examination of the two school districts paperwork on the responsibilities of paraeducators showed a list of the duties they may perform, and the suburban district's human resource document contained some strategies on how to "help the teacher be successful." Neither district had a clear description for the teachers in how to utilize the paraeducator appropriately. In the suburban district the researcher asked for the paraeducator job descriptions and never received it from staff members. However, was able to find some information through the district website that was very well maintained. In the human resource packet there was a general list of how instructional assistants could help support teachers and also a section on classroom management. One of the bullet points stated the following; "Your primary source of learning is from teachers and other instructional assistants. Observe them and learn from them." (Suburban district HR packet). The rural districts position description listed the different expectations for paraeducators in different types of roles, for example in job coach/workability positions, preschool instructional assistants, instructional aide health/medically fragile, and then general instructional aides. Each job description had a definition of the position. The definition of the general instructional assistant was posted as;

Under the supervision of the program administrator and the direction of a specific certificated staff member, performs necessary duties to assist in the planning and implementation of a program for special needs children in classrooms.

A list of primary duties and responsibilities then followed.

### **2.3 Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the paraeducator in the physical education environment and to explore the standards of supervision from the perspectives of special education teachers, physical education teachers, adapted physical education teachers, and paraeducators. The paraeducators and teachers described the paraeducator role as being a protector and support to students and the teachers they assist. The paraeducator role was further described through the paraeducators' individual personality traits, challenges with expectations and acceptance and overall ambiguity of the paraeducator role.

The paraeducator role was described as providing support to students and teachers. It was clear that the paraeducators did take on the role of primary teacher and protector when managing behavior and keeping students safe in physical education as described by Broer, Doyle and Giangreco (2005) but they did not take on the other roles of mother or friend. The paraeducators also did not take on the role of caregiver described by French & Chopra (1999). The paraeducator was described as the "connector" for the physical education teacher and special education teacher as Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, Aragon, Bernal, Berg De Balderas, & Carroll (2004) illustrated with classroom teachers.

Within the description of the paraeducator role in physical education strengths and weaknesses were also examined. The teachers and paraeducators described the paraeducators strengths and weaknesses as individual characteristics such as patience, compassion, encouragement and their knowledge of and rapport with the students they worked with. Some weaknesses included not having clear boundaries and even too much compassion that hindered some of the expectations for students.

In physical education the teachers felt that the paraeducators were often uncomfortable with the setting, had a lack of content knowledge, and did not know when to step in and when to step away to foster independence and peer relationships. The paraeducators were often unaware and not comfortable working with the general education students. Other paraeducators remained right next to or within close proximity to their student(s) looking for reassurance or prompts from the physical education teacher when to step in. Many of these issues noted in the observations related to the “hovering paraeducator” that Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland (1997) described as interfering with ownership and responsibility by the general physical education teacher, separation from classmates impacting peer interactions and making special education students somewhat invisible to the teacher. The paraeducators were a barrier to peer involvement which is a key factor to successful inclusion (Giangreco, Halvorsen, Doyle, Broer, 2004).

Some of the challenges and issues surrounding the integration of students with disabilities in physical education were related to expectations, acceptance and clarity of the teacher and paraeducator roles. Although the teachers were thankful to

have paraeducators come in with students with disabilities, they were not clear on how to appropriately utilize them. It also remained unclear to the teachers whether paraeducators were to be a support to them, to the students or both.

Interestingly the paraeducators reported that the roles they fill were clear to them and had been described by the teachers they worked with, yet the teachers reported the role of the paraeducator to be unclear and that for the most part the paraeducator role had never been described to them beyond district lists of paraeducator responsibilities. How could the teachers be responsible for providing the paraeducators with a role description when they were unclear of what the role was to be, especially in physical education? Not only was it unclear to the physical education teachers what the role of the paraeducator should be when supporting students in their classes, but the teacher was unsure of their own role as it relates to both the students with disabilities and the paraeducators that come with them. Physical education teachers like many other teachers have not been trained or are undertrained to work with paraeducators (Giangreco, Halvorsen, Doyle, & Broer, 2004).

The overall lack of clarity of the paraeducator role in the general physical education environment, like other environments supports findings related to the detrimental effects of excessive paraeducator proximity (Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, Fialka, 2005). The paraeducators and teachers unknowingly were creating a separation of classmates, interfering with peer interactions, and interfering with the interactions of students with disabilities to the teacher. Teachers articulated a lack of knowledge about the paraeducator role, and observations further

supported their responses. It was also clear that the physical education teachers were unclear of their role teaching students with disabilities integrated into their classes and did not have a sense of responsibility or ownership over the students with disabilities. The majority were accepting of the students integrated in their classes, but did not readily take on the role of primary teacher to those students. Marks, Schrader, & Levine (1999) reported very similar findings with classroom teachers.

The addition of the paraeducator in general physical education can within itself create or produce conflict within the physical education teachers own role. When examining teacher role conflict the addition of personal or professional roles, or change in any role in itself may produce conflict. Teachers and paraeducators may then cope with the conflict by abandoning a role, creating role separation, or creating a hierarchy and designating one role as their primary role (Gehrke, 1982). What remains unknown is how teachers and paraeducators may cope if the roles are ambiguous in nature as found in this study.

The multiple roles of the paraeducator could very well be in conflict with the various roles they are asked to fill in each environment or classroom they work. The physical education teachers in this study articulated their role as creating a positive environment for students with disabilities, but that was not their primary role in teaching physical education and maybe to further understand the paraeducator role in general physical education both the teacher and paraeducator role should be examined from the grounded theory of teacher's role conflict. This theory could help guide further research by understanding that incongruent role definitions and expectations cannot be simultaneously filled creating cognitive dissonance (Braga,

1972). Inconsistencies in role definition in itself create conflict for teachers and may for paraeducators.

The intent of this study was to obtain a description of the paraeducator role in the general physical education environment from individual and group perspective. The views held by the 15 participants in this study may be unique to their own districts, schools, and settings in which they work but represent a starting place for studies regarding the paraeducators role within the general physical education environment. There is no argument surrounding the importance of paraeducator support for students with disabilities as they are integrated more and more in the general education environment. It is equally significant to understand as much as possible about their current roles and responsibilities within each environment they support students in, to compare best practices and legal policy in order to determine the most effective uses of these team members in all areas including physical education. Continued research should study the effects of training physical education teachers in regards to the paraeducator role and appropriate utilization. Inspection of integrated settings and the physical education teacher's role in creating truly inclusive settings should also continue. Research must go on to explore the needs of the teachers supervising paraeducators, and ensuring that individual and group roles are clear to team members to prevent confusion and compromising practices that affect the integration of students with disabilities in inclusive settings.

In conclusion it was clear that the role of the paraeducator in general physical education was unclear. The teachers were not clear what they should expect of the paraeducators or the students they are asked to integrate within their classrooms.

Although students with disabilities were being educated in the general education environment the acceptance of those students and the struggles with “inclusion” were very much the same as 25 years ago. Teachers remain unprepared to work with students with disabilities and are even less prepared to work with other adults that provide support for students with disabilities. The districts may have vaguely described the roles of paraeducators but they were not disseminated to all the staff and there were no accountability measures in place to ensure appropriate utilization of the paraeducators nor was there adequate training in place.

Intervention research should take place and examine the effects of training on teachers, paraeducators, and more importantly, the students in physical education. Other areas to be studied should include the effects of paraeducator support or the use of other support models such as peer support on student outcomes in physical education, In order for the successful inclusion of students to take place more training and collaboration is needed within teacher teams and roles need to be unambiguous.

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### **3 The Supervision and Training of Paraeducators in the General Physical Education Environment; A Qualitative Approach**

In the previous manuscript, findings were presented regarding the role of the paraeducator in the general physical education environment. This manuscript will focus on the supervision and training needs determined from the same study.

Due to both educational budget cuts and the shortage of qualified teachers in special education many wonder how the least restrictive instructional alternatives such as co-teaching and collaboration can take place (Walsh & Jones, 2004). With the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) requiring students with disabilities to have full access to the general education curriculum and receiving such curriculum by highly qualified teachers other support structures have been put into place to deal with the shortage of special education teachers. The use of paraeducators has been employed to extend the support of the special education teachers to multiple general educational settings (Walsh & Jones, 2004). The increased use of paraeducators has raised many important questions surrounding the areas of overreliance (Giangreco, Halvorsen, Doyle, & Broer, 2004); proximity and the effect on peer interactions (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & Mac Farland, 1997; Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005); and the questionable utilization of paraeducators (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Due to the many areas of concern surrounding the paraeducator role standards were developed by the federal government (IDEA 1997, & NCLB, 2001).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001) defined the role of the paraeducator as an individual who is employed in an education environment under

the supervision of a certified or licensed teacher. The NCLB Act placed minimum requirements on paraeducator positions such as completing two years of college, an Associates degree, or the need to pass a state or local assessment that demonstrates their ability to assist students in instruction in writing, reading and math. The requirements previously made under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 were similar and both IDEA (1997) and NCLB (2001) have left it up to the states and local agencies to provide their own standards for training paraeducators. However, the majority of states have adopted the NCLB requirements as their own and done little more to provide standards of training (Pickett, Likins, & Wallace, 2003). Lack of preparation for the many roles paraeducators fill and the sporadic nature of training in school districts continue to be an issue (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2004).

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) took interest in the role of the paraeducator and developed 10 professional standards (CEC, 2004). These national standards were developed in response to IDEA amendments (1997) that required states to develop a plan to ensure all personnel that provided services to students with disabilities had the skills and knowledge to meet their educational needs. The professional standards for the paraeducators have both knowledge and skill descriptions. The ten standards include: foundations, development and characteristics of learners, individual learning differences, instructional strategies, learning environment/social interactions, language, instructional planning, assessment, professional and ethical practice, and collaboration. Each standard lists the knowledge and skills the paraeducator should then hold.

Accountability remains an issue even with NCLB (2001) and the standards developed by the CEC (2004) for paraeducators. Some of the issues that remain unclear or unaddressed are whether or not paraeducators should be providing services along side the students or along side the teacher (French, 2003). It is unclear if paraeducators are supports to the teacher or to the student. Other research has continued to show that paraeducators remain untrained and unsupervised (Mueller, 2003). Teachers are often unaware of their role in supervising paraeducators and were not trained to manage other adults (Morgan, Ashbaker, & Forbush, 1998).

Issues related to training deal with the multiple roles of the paraeducators. They often accompany students into various general education settings such as math, English and physical education and are being asked to provide support in various settings with little or insufficient training. To complicate the lack of paraeducator training, teachers often report being unprepared to supervise or manage paraeducators. This often results in a lack of communication between the adult team members and inappropriately shifts the responsibility for the students with disabilities to the paraeducator.

Training issues surrounding paraeducators have been documented in most settings, but relatively little has been done to examine the role of the paraeducator in the general physical education environment. In a study by Davis, Kotecki, Harvey, & Oliver (2007) a low percentage of paraeducators reported receiving any training to work in physical education when responding to questionnaire questions yet physical education is an environment in which paraeducators provide support to students.

The standards and supervision of paraeducators and accountability for the students with disabilities in general physical education remains unclear. In order to support paraeducators in meeting the responsibilities of their multiple roles, state and local education agencies (SEA's & LEA's) must understand the variety of environments in which paraeducators work and use that information to provide appropriate training and supervision. The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers and paraeducators defined the standards, supervision and training of paraeducators in the general physical education environment.

### **3.1 Methodology**

#### **3.1.1 Participants**

Participants were paraeducators (n=4), special education teachers (n=3), physical education teachers (n=4), and adapted physical education teachers (n=4). Participation was voluntary, but required all members of educational teams to volunteer to participate. Potential participants were addressed using a pre-written recruitment script (Appendix C). Once participants agreed, consent forms were signed (Appendix D). To conceal their identity, the 15 participants, their schools and school districts were given pseudonyms.

#### **3.1.2 Apparatus**

The Olympus DS-4000 Digital voice recorder was utilized for the interviews during this project. The digital voice recorder was used for recording all 15 interviews and was directly transcribed by a professional and reviewed by the researcher for accuracy.

The systematic observation sheet, demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions were created by the researcher. Transcripts and observation notes were coded by hand and stored and managed in Max QDA (VERBI Software, 2001) a qualitative coding software tool.

### **3.1.3 Data Collection**

Once consent forms were signed (Appendix D), data collection commenced. It included data from a questionnaire, interview, and direct observations of the paraeducator throughout one full day and three separate days during physical education only.

#### **3.1.3.1 Demographic Questionnaire**

The demographic questionnaire (Appendix E) was developed by the researcher. The questionnaire included questions relating to years of experience, time at current placement and the levels in which they have worked. The questionnaire also included questions related to degrees earned and coursework taken specific to physical education and/or special education content. Participants were also asked questions in relation to support, competence, standards, and training offered within their districts.

#### **3.1.3.2 Observations**

The paraeducators were observed for one full day of work, and three subsequent days for one hour during physical education. Extensive observation notes were taken by the researcher as well as systematic observations during physical education (Appendix G). The observations examined the interactions of teachers,

paraeducators and students in relation to one another. The results from the systematic observations were then standardized into rate per minute and graphed in Microsoft Excel.

### **3.1.3.3 Interviews**

Participants took part individually in a semi-structured interview (Appendix F) lasting 30-75 minutes. Participants answered questions developed by the researcher surrounding the standards, training and supervision of paraeducators in the general physical education environment. Interviews took place after the first full day observation of the paraeducators. Participants were asked a number of open ended questions regarding the supervision and training of paraeducators. The interviews were then transcribed by a professional and checked for accuracy by the researcher. Participants also had the opportunity to check their transcripts, coded dated, and theme descriptions during member checks to ensure the researcher had accurately portrayed their experiences.

### **3.1.4 Data Analysis**

Data analysis included three strategies to ensure trustworthiness; a) triangulation of multiple sources, b) the use of two individuals to code and develop themes, c) member checks involving study participants. The transcription of interviews was done by a professional and the primary researcher. Transcripts of interviews, observation notes, and journal entries were coded using the Max QDA (VERBI software, 2001) analysis software and analyzed for specific themes and sub-themes by the primary researcher and a research assistant. The themes were

continuously compared and refined based on discussions between the researcher and the research assistant and the seven steps to data analysis using the phenomenological approach described by Patton (2002) which included:

1. Epoché, the process of examining one's own bias to gain clarity about preconceptions in order to understand the researcher's view of the subject matter.
2. Phenomenological reduction or bracketing is explained in five steps, which includes:
  - a. Locate within the personal experience, or self-story, key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question.
  - b. Interpret the meanings of these phrases, as an informed reader.
  - c. Obtain the subject's interpretations of these phrases, if possible.
  - d. Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon being studied.
  - e. Offer a tentative statement, or definition, of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified in step 4. (Patton, 2002, p. 485- 486)
3. Organize data into meaningful clusters.
4. Delimitation process. This involves eliminating irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping data.
5. Invariant themes are identified.
6. Structural description. Content is extracted from the data for textural portrayals of each theme.
7. Last, a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience or phenomena are revealed.

These seven phenomenological steps were used by the researcher to ensure that assumptions and biases were set aside so that the participants' phenomena, as they described it, were the focus of the study.

During the first step known as the rule of Epoché the researcher wrote in a journal their expectations and assumptions about what would be happening in the schools surrounding the issue of the paraeducator in physical education. By keeping a journal the researcher continuously kept track of preconceptions and bias. The rule of epoché was an on-going process and not a single event in data analysis. Epoché is also described as establishing rigor by looking differently at the experience being investigated to allow the voice of the participants speak about the phenomenon in question (Patton, 2002).

During the second stage known as reduction, the researcher located within the participants interview data, statements and phrases regarding the role of the paraeducator in physical education. These statements were highlighted within data so that interpretations of the phrases could take place. During that stage phrases from the teacher and paraeducator interviews and questionnaires were interpreted by the researcher and research assistant and later checked by participants. Once the interpretations were made the researcher examined reoccurring themes and meanings for what was revealed about the supervision and training of the paraeducator in the general physical education environment and those themes were given tentative definitions.

After the data had been reduced and tentative definitions had been given, the researcher organized data into clusters that were meaningful and provided further

clarification about the phenomena of the supervision and training of paraeducator in physical education. Data were then reduced; during this stage the researcher eliminated data within clusters that were repetitive, overlapping, or irrelevant to the supervision or training of the paraeducator. After the irrelevant data was delimited from the clusters, themes were identified. Themes are the content and illustration of the experiences described by teachers and paraeducators, but not the essence of the phenomena.

The fundamental nature or essence of the phenomena took shape during the structural description. During the stage of structural description the researcher looked to understand how the individual participants experienced the supervision and training needs for teachers and paraeducator as a whole. Last, the researcher synthesized the meaning and revealed the phenomena surrounding the supervision and training of the paraeducator in general physical education. The themes addressed were dissemination of standards,

## **3.2 Results**

### **3.2.1 District Standards**

The rural and suburban school districts both had position statements for the paraeducators. The rural school district called their paraeducators instructional aides and the suburban school district used the term educational assistants. Both school districts descriptions were similar in stating that the paraeducators were under the supervision or direction of a licensed staff member. The rural school districts statement was “under the supervision of the program administrator and the direction

of a specific certificated staff member, performs the necessary duties to assist in the planning and implementation of a program for special needs children in classrooms” (Granite School District HR sheet). The suburban district form stated “educational assistants, supervisory assistants and clerical aides and library media assistants are to assist licensed teachers in order to enhance the education program for students. All classified staff and volunteers, while working with students, shall operate under the direction of a licensed staff member and shall be within sight or sound of a licensed staff member while working with students” (Obsidian School District HR sheet).

The rural school district’s human resource packet for paraeducators was more detailed and in depth than the suburban school district. Each type of paraeducator in the rural district had their own definition, primary duties and responsibilities, general qualifications, desirable skills, educational experience, and physical demands defined. Some of the duties listed included; 1) assists in planning and implementing suitable learning experiences for students, 2) helps students develop positive interpersonal relationships with peers and adults, 3) assists in the observation and recording of student development and progress, 4) functions as an appropriate/positive role model, 5) provide necessary physical care and emotional support, and 6) may participate in IEP meetings (Granite School District HR sheet).

The suburban school district was more general and discussed the NCLB mandated qualifications for Title I schools; 1) complete at least two years of study at an accredited institution of higher education; 2) or obtain an associate’s or higher degree; 3) or meet a rigorous standard of quality, and can demonstrate, through a formal state or local academic assessment. The form then went on to discuss how

the paraeducators may be assigned such as one-on-one support, assist in classroom management and provide instructional services to students while working under the direct supervision of a teacher (Obsidian School District HR sheet).

The participants were asked on a questionnaire if their district had standards regarding paraeducators, and if they did, what those standards were. Most participants were unsure and very vague in their written responses. The special education teachers from Obsidian School District answered the question by writing “I think so, maybe they are in my special education handbook” (Rachel). Mary wrote “paraeducators are encouraged to take the parapro test. It is required for title I schools.” The special education teacher from Granite School District answered more specifically to the challenges in his district. Greg wrote:

Yes, it is a job description of what their duties are and minimum qualifications and desired qualifications. We have a tremendous, dire need for instructional assistants. As a result we have people in those slots that don't have or have very limited training. Also, we have job openings now for IA's that we can not fill so we end up taking people that maybe should not be hired!

The paraeducators answered the question differently depending on the district where they were working. The paraeducators from Obsidian School District both answered the question by saying yes their district had standards and then they both stated standards from No Child Left Behind (2001) such as two years of higher education. The paraeducators at Granite School District answered no. Tammy wrote “not that I am aware of”, while Jack first wrote “yes, must pass a general education test; math, English” but then crossed it out and wrote “no” appearing he was unsure if there standards or not.

The physical education teachers all responded to the question the same way. They all wrote responses stating they did not know of any. Judy from Obsidian School District wrote “not sure” and Matt from Granite School District wrote “have no idea”. All four of the physical education teachers’ responses were similar in that they did not know if the district had paraeducator standard or not.

The adapted physical education teachers gave mixed answers. One adapted physical education teacher from each district was unsure if there were standards, while their counterparts responded by saying yes the district had standards but they were not clear on what they were. Colin from Obsidian School District wrote “yes, highly qualified” meaning that his district did have standards set by the NCLB (2001) legislation. James from Granite School District was less clear but wrote “yes for employment – I don’t know, they have to pass a test.”

It appeared that even if the participants answered yes to the question regarding their districts standards they were still unclear exactly what they were. In comparison to the actual district documents the responses from the participants would suggest that they had not really viewed or remembered viewing the districts standards besides having to take a district or standardized test.

On the questionnaire the participants were also asked if they had ever seen or heard of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) professional standards for paraeducators (2002). Only one of the special education teachers responded yes. Mary from Obsidian wrote “yes on their website”. Greg a special education teacher from Granite School District wrote “yes, I know about the CEC however I have not viewed the competencies for paraeducators”. The third special education teacher,

Robin wrote “no, I would like to though!” The adapted and general physical education teachers, and the paraeducators all wrote no to the question and were not aware of the CEC’s professional standards for paraeducators.

### **3.2.2 Responsibility**

During the interviews responsibility emerged as a theme surrounding the special education students, paraeducators and teachers. The subthemes related to responsibility included the development and monitoring of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals and paraeducator supervision. The observation data further triangulated the findings in relation to the responsibility for paraeducators and special education students.

The teachers and paraeducators were all asked if they had knowledge of the adapted physical education goals and objectives on the special education students IEP as well as who was accountable for tracking and documenting the goals. The special education teachers from both districts answered that they knew or had access to the goals. They also all reported that the adapted physical education teacher was responsible for the goals. Mary (special education) from Obsidian School District said “I know exactly what is on their IEP”. While Rachel (special education) did not specifically say she knew the students’ adapted physical education goals, she did say she had access to them. Greg (special education) from Granite School District discussed in great detail the process he and the adapted physical education teacher went through. He stated, “the adapted PE teacher and I, he writes the goals that he and I discuss because we’re both going to that class different times, we discussed kind of what would be the best thing for these kids...in PE and then writing goals

accordingly”. Greg was the only special education teacher that often went to physical education as the support person for his students due to issues specific to their physical education program. The students at Greg’s middle school had segregated physical education and the male physical education teacher would not allow the special education students to come to class unless a paraeducator or other support person such as the special education teacher or the adapted PE teacher accompanied them. Therefore, Greg had more in depth answers surrounding physical education environment than the special education teachers from Obsidian School District who rarely, if at all, went into the physical education setting.

In regards to knowledge of the IEP goals for the students integrated in their classes three of the four physical education teachers said they did not know what the students IEP goals were. They would say that they go to the meetings they can and have access to the IEP but overall did not know the goals. Judy’s (physical education) response demonstrated this best; “I’ll get some knowledge from it, you know their IEP when I go to the IEP meetings... honestly I don’t have time to go through their IEP’s individually”. Nicole (physical education) from the same school district as Judy was the only physical education teacher to have knowledge of her students IEP goals in physical education. When the physical education teachers were then asked who was accountable for the IEP goals they all responded by saying the adapted physical education teacher except for Janice (physical education) from Granite School District. She responded by saying, “you’d have to tell me what those goals are. My understanding is just immersion”.

The adapted physical education teachers were also asked if they knew the IEP goals regarding students integrated in general physical education and who was accountable for the goals. All of the adapted physical education teachers knew the students goals and viewed themselves as responsible for the goals. The adapted physical education teachers mentioned that if a student had adapted physical education on their IEP and were included in general physical education they were responsible for tracking and documenting those goals. Pam (adapted physical education) from Granite School District stated “if they’re specific adapted PE goals written by and adapted PE specialist, the adapted PE teacher is”. Mark (adapted physical education) from Obsidian School District responded similarly by replying, “if I write the goal, I’m accountable”. It was less clear what type of goals were written for the students who were integrated in physical education yet had adapted physical education goals on their IEP, it was even less clear if the goals related to the general physical education curriculum or if they were isolated goals and objectives.

The paraeducators were asked slightly different questions surrounding the accountability of students’ IEP goals. They were first asked if they knew the students adapted physical education goals but they were not asked who was accountable for those goals. They were asked if they were aware of the physical education objectives before going to the class each day and if the physical education teacher ever gave expectations or ideas to best support the students with disabilities or the class. The paraeducators were also asked if they felt competent assisting students meet curricular goals in physical education.

Only one of the three paraeducators said that they knew the students IEP goals, while the other three said they had access and could look. Megan from Obsidian School District said “I could go ahead and read the goals, but when you are talking about PE main thing is safety and then I help him to be a part of the group”. Tammy also responded by saying she was allowed and encouraged to look at the IEP, but she did not know the goals for the students. Lauren simply responded that she did not know the students goals. Jack from Granite School District on the other hand said he did know the adapted physical education goals and that both his special education and adapted physical education teachers were good at letting him know what to work on with the students.

Looking further into the paraeducators role in physical education they were asked if they were aware of lesson or unit objectives prior to going in to the class each day. All of the paraeducators except Jack from Granite School District did say they were aware of lesson and unit objectives prior to going to class. However, they all stated they knew what unit they were in, but nothing more specific. For example Megan responded “the PE teacher lets me know if they have it for two or three weeks in a row. For example, I know we are going to have basketball for two, three weeks”. Tammy and Lauren’s responses were very similar about knowing what unit they were doing and for how long, but they did not give a clear response in relation to lesson or unit objectives. Jack’s situation was very different in the segregated boy’s physical education environment. He responded by first saying he would know whether they were inside or outside, but did not know what they were doing until he got into class. He then went on to say “they don’t have curricular goals, goals is part

of the problem”. The other paraeducators may have responded as knowing the objectives by assuming that the activity of the unit itself was the objective, they may not have understood that physical education should have clear content objectives.

The paraeducators were also asked if they felt competent supporting students in physical education and if the teacher ever gave them expectations of what to do during class to support students. All of the paraeducators said that they felt fairly competent supporting students in physical education. In regards to expectations given by the teacher to the paraeducators, all the paraeducators except Jack said that they did. Jack firmly responded “no” to the question and described his many frustrations over the physical education environment on his site. The three paraeducators that said the teachers did give them expectations for lessons went on to describe those expectations surrounding the management of the class. Lauren’s response illustrated this best;

I guess every so often, you know we might be assigned a certain end of the gym or the field... sometimes she’ll come up to us at the beginning of class and ask one of us to hold the ball bag or do jump rope on this end or basketball on that end or whatever.

The paraeducators responses were more in relation to helping with organization and/or supervision type tasks, but none of them mentioned specific content or skill development suggestions from teachers when describing expectations.

In relation to responsibility the supervision of the paraeducator emerged. The teachers and paraeducators were asked questions regarding who is responsible for the supervision of paraeducators. Most of the teachers believed they were responsible for overseeing paraeducators when they were providing support in their classroom.

A couple of the teachers felt that the paraeducators were more co-teachers and some were unsure. The paraeducators had slightly varied answers as well.

The special education teachers from Obsidian School District had slightly different answers. Mary's response was, "I would definitely say it depends who they're working with at that time and they know their, you know, what they're doing more than I would know what they're doing for PE. So definitely I would say that they take the advice of that person". Rachel (special education) on the other hand did not feel like she was responsible for their supervision and said, "I don't feel that way at all...I really feel like we're co-teachers". Greg (special education) from Granite School District felt he was responsible for supervising the paraeducators that helped support the students in his class but also that the teachers from the general education classes the students were integrated into were when the paraeducator was in their classroom.

The paraeducators were asked who was responsible for their supervision and gave mixed answers. Megan (paraeducator) and Lauren (paraeducator) from Obsidian School District had very different answers. Megan's response was that she was always under the supervision of the teacher in whatever classroom she was in. Lauren's response was the opposite stating, "No. no, I wouldn't say so" she then said "they're always there" but she did not feel they supervised her. Jack (paraeducator) and Tammy (paraeducator) from Granite School District both felt they were supervised by the teachers. Tammy's response about teacher supervision was, "from afar they'll watch you know, make sure you're doing what you're suppose to be doing". Jack clearly stated that he was under the supervision of the teachers except

for in physical education. His response about being supervised in physical education was “I guess I am. I mean I’m not there. I mean I’m there, but...he just lets me know that I have no role there because I’m not qualified”. Overall the paraeducators acknowledged being supervised by teachers except for Lauren.

The physical education teachers were unsure who was responsible for the supervision of paraeducators. Nicole (physical education) from Obsidian School District was the only physical education teacher to respond, “me, the teacher in whatever class she’s in”. Judy (physical education) from the same district inquisitively said, “I guess it would be me... that’s funny cause I look at them as such peers”. The two physical education teachers from Granite School District responded differently. Janice (physical education) responded that the special education teacher was responsible while Matt (physical education) was unsure and said, “well, that I don’t know how to answer either because it’s not my job to evaluate them. If they’re in my classroom, I look at them as equal, but at the same time it is my class so if there’s a problem I’ll confront that”. Overall the physical education teachers were not clear in the responsibility of supervising the paraeducators.

The adapted physical education teachers overall understood that the supervision of the paraeducator was a responsibility by the teacher, but understood the confusion. A good example of this was Colin’s (adapted physical education) response,

The teacher but some PE teachers with really no experience having other staff working with them and they get a little confused and they think that

somehow either the classroom teacher or home classroom is still suppose to be in charge of this person or sometimes it'll even get turned around.

Paige (adapted physical education) from Granite School District was the only adapted physical education teacher to not mention herself or the other teachers when working with paraeducators in response to the questions regarding supervision. She was unsure and said, "I would have to say that the special ed teacher that is...that that para goes with. I've never been asked to do any kind of evaluation or performance critique or anything. I would feel uncomfortable doing so cause I'm not trained."

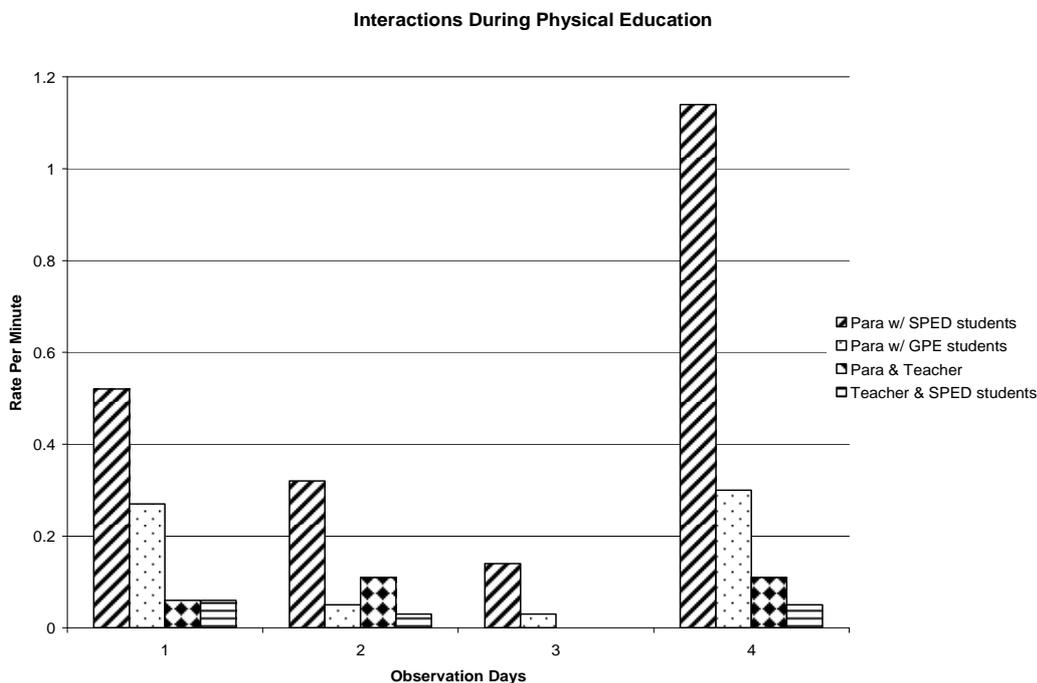
To further examine accountability each participant was asked how they are evaluated, by whom, and how often. The teachers' responses from both districts were very similar. The paraeducators also responded similarly to one another with the exception of one.

### **3.2.2.1 Observations**

Accountability surrounding the supervision of paraeducators and responsibility for students with disabilities integrated into general physical education classes was further examined and triangulated through the observations of the paraeducators during physical education. During the observations the paraeducators and teacher interactions with each other and the students was recorded through systematic observation. The two paraeducators from Obsidian School District were observed for four physical education class periods. The paraeducators from Granite School District were to also be observed for four days but due to illness and scheduling conflicts Jack was only observed for two days and Tammy was observed

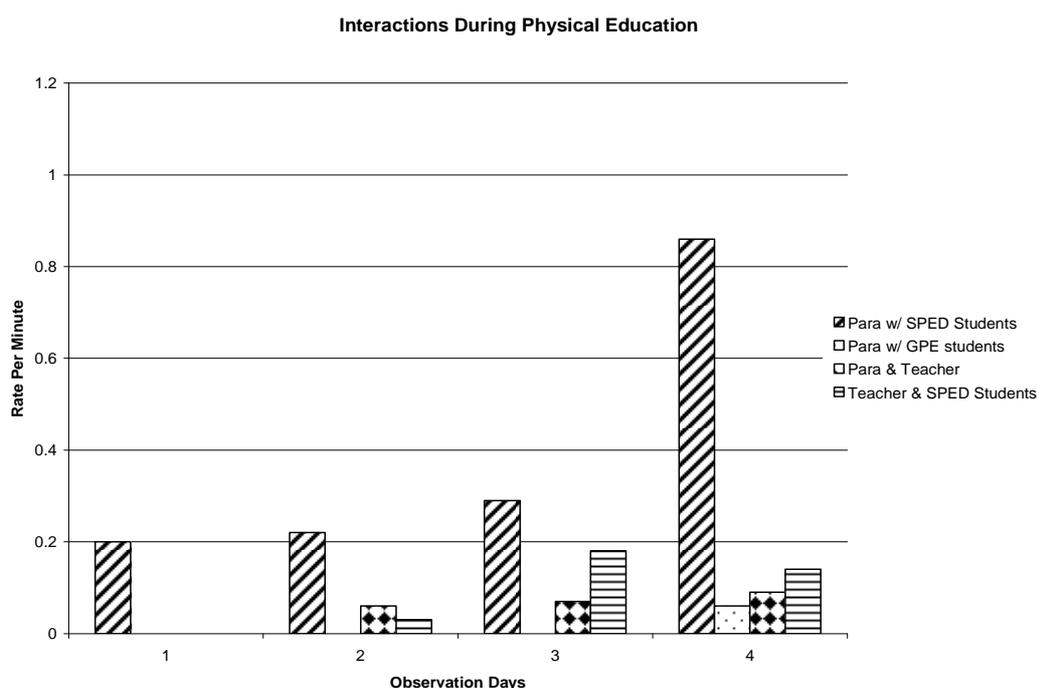
for 5 days. Tammy invited the researcher for a fifth observation on one of the days Jack was scheduled but absent.

The specific interactions defined as verbal or physical cues, prompts, and/or feedback were coded. The one on one interactions of the paraeducator and the student(s) with disabilities, the interaction of the paraeducator and the teacher, the teacher and the student(s) with disabilities, and the paraeducator with the students without disabilities were coded for each of the physical education observations. To standardize the amount of interactions during the time observed, data were calculated into rate per minute. The interaction rates were very low and often consisted of very general feedback and lacked specific and corrective feedback related to the content.



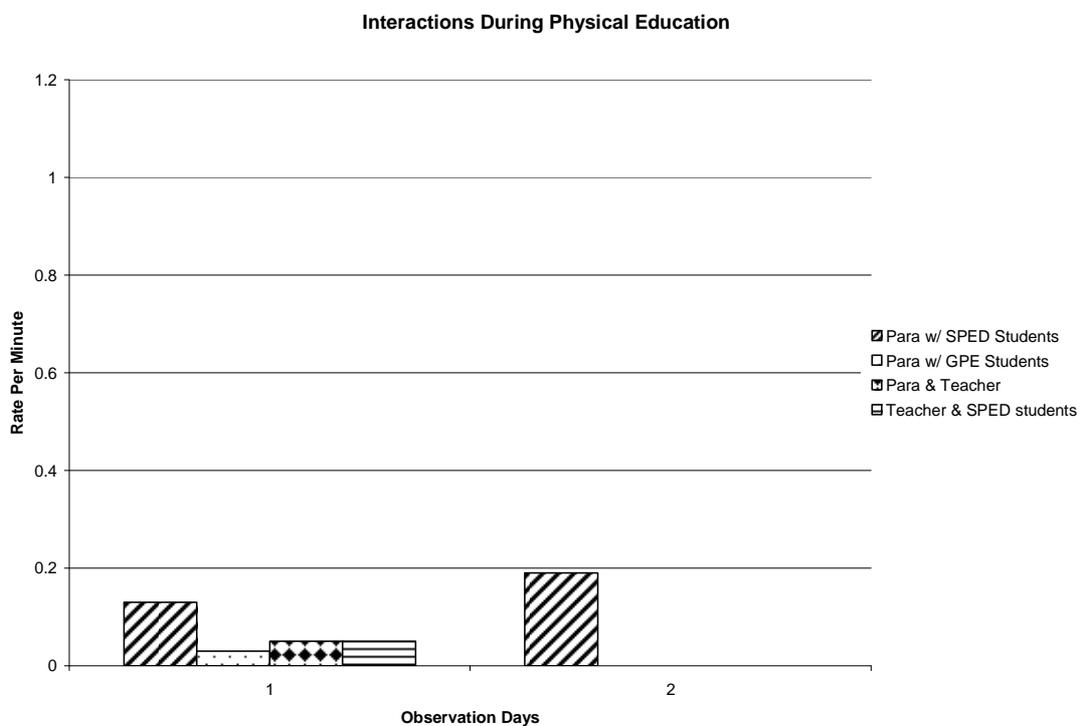
*Figure 1.* The rate of interactions between Lauren, the physical education teacher and students during physical education.

The observation notes described Lauren as standing near the group of special education students providing assistance and prompts and feedback during the warm up activity each observation. Lauren helped get the special education students placed where they needed to be and again provided prompts, and general positive feedback such as “good job”. The physical education teacher’s interaction with the special education student(s) was handing them a ball and telling them to throw it in the game activity or asking how many points there team scored.



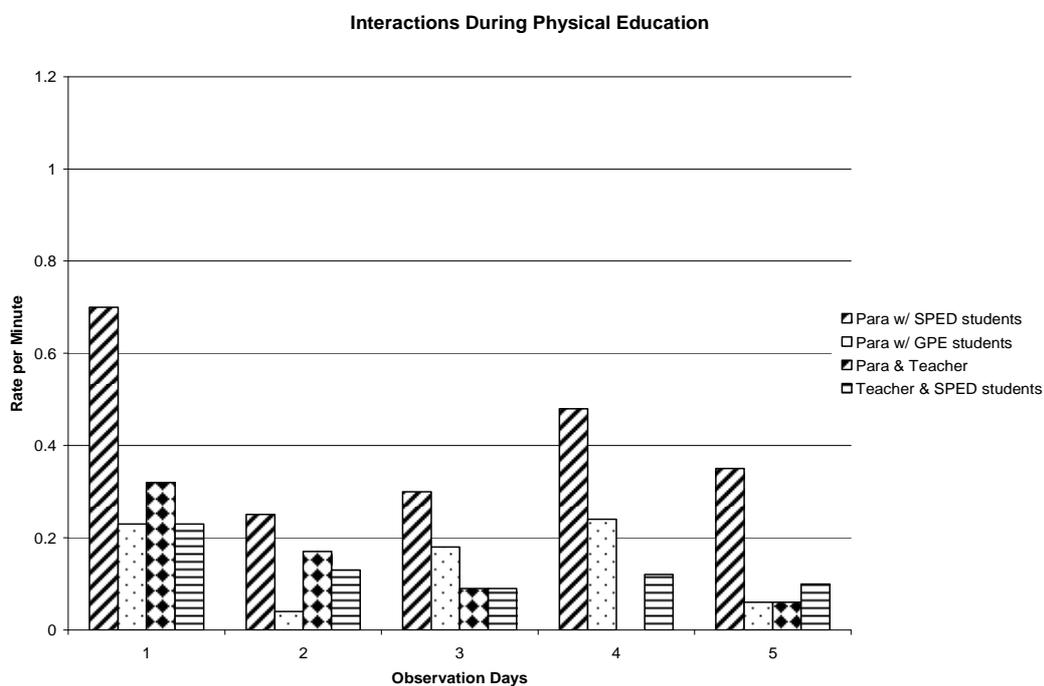
*Figure 2.* The rate of interactions between Megan, the physical education teacher and students during physical education.

Megan was a one-on-one paraeducator that supported one student in general physical education. Megan and the teacher’s interactions were to prompt and provide safety support in the class activity for the student with a disability.



*Figure 3.* The rate of interactions between Jack, the physical education teacher and students during physical education.

Jack had the lowest amount of interactions during physical education. He did not feel he or his students were very welcomed in the physical education environment and did not feel he had a role there. The teacher did not interact with any of the special education students if he did not have to. Jack and the teacher were typically at the opposite ends of the gym for the duration of the class period. The physical education teacher had very limited interaction with the entire class except during instruction time.



*Figure 4.* The rate of interactions between Tammy, the physical education teacher and students during physical education.

The interactions from both Tammy and the teacher were in support of the special education students by providing prompts and positive reinforcement. It was a difficult class for the students with disabilities as their peers were often bickering and picking on the special education students and not being very supportive or encouraging when on the same teams.

From each of the observations of the four paraeducators overall the greatest amount of interactions occurred between the paraeducator and the students with disabilities and the least amount of interactions were generally between the paraeducator and the teacher and between the teacher and special education students. In review of the observation notes many of the interactions were the paraeducator providing general positive feedback such as “good job”, “nice try” and “good work”.

There were limited instances that the special education students were given specific or corrective skill feedback during activities. Overall the rate of interactions were extremely low and lacked substance related to learning specific content in the class.

### **3.2.3 Training Needs**

The teachers and paraeducators were asked what type of training they felt would be beneficial surrounding physical education and the paraeducator role in physical education. The participants were also asked to discuss the type of training they would prefer.

The special education teachers mentioned many different areas for training needs. Inclusion, collaboration and modifying and adapting curriculum were all discussed as areas of need. Rachel from Obsidian School District also mentioned adolescent behavior and how different disabilities may impact development; she also discussed specific programs or curriculum such as “Brain Gym”. Greg’s (special education) response described needs specifically to his situation;

Well I think first of all paraeducators could really be improved in dealing with behavior in the mainstream situation with regular ed kids, cause they don’t have that full experience maybe my experience gives me. So they have regular...special ed kids and they come into a big room of PE with 40 kids possibly, plus maybe one or two of mine and so they’re having to deal with a large group of kids and they could work on some behavior issues and how to make things work. The other thing is just having more knowledge about what is expected in terms of PE goals, what the teacher’s trying to accomplish and that happens a little bit, but it doesn’t happen to the extent that it should.

Mary (special education) on the other hand described area of need surrounding the integration of students. She replied,

I would say you know, on how to look inclusion ideas... And also collaboration with teachers. I think...teachers are not trained enough to

modify curriculum, to implement different strategy that work with special needs kids. So I think they need a lot more training in that area.

The special education teachers were then asked what type of training they would like or most benefit from that would also include general and adapted physical education teachers and paraeducators. The teachers described hands on learning. They wanted something they could do and participate in and have a tactile experience. Many of the paraeducators and teachers described similar type of training formats.

The paraeducators described training needs in the areas of understanding student limits, managing behavior, and collaboration or communication. Jack and Tammy from Granite School District both specifically mentioned a need for understanding student limits specific to their disability. Jack's (paraeducator) response illustrates,

I think you know exactly what the kids' limits are physically. You know cause emotional and behavior issues you need to be aware of and how to deal with those kind of things too, but some kids really have physical limitations and so I think if we were more abreast of that.

Tammy (paraeducator) specifically described, "Getting you better prepared for what to expect from like Down syndrome or autistic, all their different limitations."

Lauren (paraeducator) from Obsidian School District discussed a need for training in the area of behavior management. She said, "Learning what their behaviors are and having better training on learning how to deal with certain behaviors in kids." She also went on to describe needing to know how to address specific types of behavior.

The paraeducators all discussed communication as being very important and mentioned that training in how to work as team and collaborate more effectively would be beneficial. Jack responded with, “I would like to include how to make us all work as a unit.” The other paraeducators stated that communication and time to meet and share is needed.

The paraeducators described the type of training they would want would need to be hands on and job shadowing type experiences. They wanted more feedback in what they were doing. The paraeducators discussed videos dealing with different situations and types of students as well as having the opportunity to meet with the students’ previous paraeducator to share some insight.

The physical education teachers discussed multiple training areas they were interested in. They mentioned behavior, individualizing curriculum, special education laws and language as well as collaboration and communication. They also felt they needed in regards to the paraeducators role. Other issues that came up for teachers included being able to have teacher training days in their own content area and not having to sit in on history or English, but having time to meet with other physical educators. Judy’s (physical education) response illustrates,

I think training specific to your curricular areas would be nice because I know there’s lots of training for classroom teachers. Or at least more then what we have as PE teachers and so they get more training on individualizing their curriculum and that sort of thing.

Judy also mentioned training in communication. She asked, “what are a great way to communicate or how can we help each other get... and I guess opening up the chains of communication?” Judy also discussed difficulties in meetings trying to

understand all the special education language and terms. Nicole (physical education) responded similarly: “It would be good for the teachers to know all the legalities or the legal things they need to know about.”

The physical education teachers from Granite School District discussed training needs more in regards to behavior management and collaboration. Matt (physical education) said he would like to learn, “how to deal with them as far as the physical activities, maybe what to watch for...kind of like flares that may come up that you can see something starting to evolve with emotional behavior or whatever.” Janice (physical education) concurred, but also really wanted time to be with the adapted physical education teacher and special education teacher to learn. She really felt that time to collaborate was a major training need. The physical education teachers from both districts wanted hands on and collaborative training with the adapted and special education teachers. They also wanted resources such as videos and learning the specifics of curricular models for new ideas to assist with differentiating their curriculum for their students.

The adapted physical education teachers were similar in the types of training they would like, but also gave some more specific examples for what they think would be beneficial surrounding the paraeducators role. The particular needs varied. Paige (adapted physical education) responded much the same as Judy the physical education teacher from Obsidian did by mentioning a need for more job alike training. She said,

You know in-services to like job alike groups for all PE teachers rather than just by site...I think if you did some job alike stuff so that

we people could really hammer in on some specific questions. You know I don't need to learn more about the reading program.

The three other physical education teachers discussed collaboration and communication. Colin (adapted physical education) mentioned communication of expectations, he responded "to meet with the staff ahead of time... to explain to everyone what the goals are and what they expect out of the other staff members that are in there." Colin described how teachers all have their own way of teaching, but if the expectations were clear to the paraeducator and other teachers the more appropriate planning could be to benefit the students. Mark (adapted physical education) discussed the need for communication, but described why it is difficult, "when I was going to school... there was no discussion about managing other adults." Many of the teachers were learning on the job how to work with paraeducators. They all felt that training was needed to better understand appropriate roles for paraeducators. Physical education teachers especially seemed unsure how to best utilize the paraeducators and all wanted training in regards to collaboration and communication.

### **3.3 Discussion and Conclusion**

The overview of the district standards for paraeducators in the two school districts revealed that they had done little more than describe the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) minimum qualifications and describe the responsibilities of paraeducators. Both districts stressed that paraeducators were to be under the direction or supervision of a licensed staff member. Granite, the rural school district had more in depth information about the primary duties of different types of

paraeducators but neither school district provided any type of standards for supervision for the teachers. As participants were asked to answer questions on a questionnaire about the district standards regarding the utilization of paraeducators they were very vague and did not mention more than the NCLB (2001). The special education teachers and the paraeducators were the only participants to answer yes they new about the district standards, but would respond by mentioning the need to pass a test. This conflicted with findings from Mueller, (2002) who found that paraeducators reported not having any job descriptions. Only half of the adapted physical education teachers wrote that they did know the district standards, but again said they received the job description or described NCLB qualifications. The physical education teachers did not know of any standards regarding the role of the paraeducator. It is unclear if the job descriptions of paraeducators are given to all staff, or only to special education staff. District level oversight and training was absent.

The CEC national standards were developed to ensure all personnel including paraeducators had the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Katsiyannis, Hodge & Lanford (2000) believed that most states would incorporate the CEC's national standards into the credentialing and training process. Data from the participants in the current study from two states does not support good awareness of the national paraeducator standards. Only one participant, a special education teacher, had any knowledge of the CEC standards for paraeducators.

Regardless of the standards, if teachers are unaware of them, how are they to direct and supervise the paraeducator appropriately in their own classroom and how can one be sure paraeducators have the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of students with disabilities in multiple settings? Giangreco and Broer (2005) would say that the standards were set in place to treat a symptom; untrained paraeducators, but that the root of the cause has yet to be addressed surrounding the appropriate utilization of paraeducators in inclusive classrooms or even appropriate inclusion.

Another of the many symptoms surrounding the paraeducator role is the accountability of paraeducator supervision and responsibility for students with disabilities. Giangreco & Broer's (2005) data suggested that general education teachers need clarification surrounding their role in the education of students with disabilities. Similar findings were present in the current study in regards to knowledge of IEP goals, lesson objectives, and the interactions captured in the observation data.

The observational data showed that overall the greatest amount of interactions in the general physical environment were between the paraeducator and the special education students. The least amount of interactions occurred between the paraeducator and the teacher and the teacher and special education students. This supports the concern of paraeducators taking on the role primary teacher as found in previous work by Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco (2005). It also triangulated the interview data in respect to the physical education teachers' responses to understanding the role of the paraeducator and their own role in supervising them. The general physical education teachers were overall thankful to have the

paraeducators in their class to “deal” with the students, but overall the teachers did not take responsibility for the special education students in their classes. The one physical education teacher who took any responsibility for the paraeducator and the student integrated into her class was the physical education teacher who only had one special education student integrated at a time with paraeducator support. She was also the only physical education teacher who knew her students’ IEP goals. This contradicts Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka’s (2005) discussion on inadvertent and detrimental effects of paraeducator proximity yet may be an indication of the need for natural distributions of students with and without disabilities (Brown, Farrington, Knight, Ross, & Ziegler, 1999). The observations in the three other settings unfortunately did highlight many of the detrimental effects of paraeducator proximity such as separation from classmates, interference with peer interactions, and interference with teacher engagement (Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka’s ,2005). The physical education teacher in the suburban school district that felt the paraeducators were more co-teachers had the least amount of interactions with students on average, while the paraeducator had the most amount of interactions with students with disabilities. The physical education teacher did not take responsibility for the students integrated into her class and inappropriately assigned that role to the paraeducator who did assume the primary teacher role.

The male physical education environment within Granite School District had many issues that affected not only the paraeducator role, but the appropriate integration of students with disabilities. The male physical education teacher (Matt)

in the rural school district did not feel it was his responsibility to teach students with disabilities. He refused to grade them, or allow them to come to class without the paraeducator, adapted physical education teacher or special education teacher. This was classic illustration of what Mueller (2002) refers to as irresponsible inclusion where the teacher relinquishes responsibility for the student and the paraeducator lacks the training to effectively modify content and consequently the students end up not receiving quality instruction.

The participants were very similar when addressing training needs. The majority of teachers and paraeducators mentioned a greater need to communicate and collaborate and manage behavior. This was the area the paraeducators were especially interested in. The paraeducators also acknowledged a need to understand the nature of certain disabilities and how it impacts their students. Davis, Kotecki, Harvey & Oliver (2007) reported similar findings in the relation to the responsibilities and needs for training of paraeducators in physical education. The areas of training most important to the paraeducators in physical education were activity modifications, attributes of students with disabilities, and knowledge of motor development (Davis, Kotecki, Harvey & Oliver, 2007). The special education teachers were interested in inclusion ideas and modifying and adapting curriculum as were the physical education teachers. The adapted physical education teachers had similar training needs but stressed the communication and collaboration. The adapted physical education teachers were the only ones to mention training in the area of paraeducator utilization. The type of training the participants wanted was hands on instruction. The participants wanted interactive and hands on training as

well as resources such as videos. Many of their ideas included job shadowing and visiting other sites or programs to see what else was being done. The paraeducators had not received any training surrounding physical education, and the physical education teachers had not had any training in how to utilize them.

The intent of this study was to identify the district standards, accountability measures and training needs of paraeducators in the general physical education environment. The district standards did little more than describe the qualifications mandated by NCLB (2001) and did not incorporate training needs in either of the two districts. It is clear that there are training needs for the paraeducator surrounding physical education, as well as for the teachers in how to manage paraeducators. However, these are again symptomatic fixes and do not get at the root of the issues surrounding the education of students with disabilities in general physical education or the utilization of paraeducators. There needs to be a paradigm shift in education and higher education programs that certify and train teachers and oversight at the state and local level.

Research should continue to examine role clarity, appropriate support models for students with disabilities in integrated settings, and district standards for supervision and training for paraeducators and teachers. Training should be provided to teachers and paraeducators based on their needs and the CEC national standards. However, Giangreco (2003) would caution that teachers may abandon more instructional responsibilities to paraeducators once they are perceived to be trained. Training paraeducators should not take place of the teacher's responsibility to all students within their classrooms. Similar research should investigate the role

of paraeducators in general physical settings as well as the affect of training teachers in appropriate utilization and supervision of paraeducators.

### **3.3.1 Implications for Physical Education Teacher Education**

Based on the current findings physical education teachers need more training in regards to collaboration, differentiating curriculum, and supervising paraeducators. All teachers need to be trained to work with and modify curriculum for students with diverse needs and learn to work on teams with other adults in the current educational system. One class surrounding disability awareness and inclusion is insufficient for teachers as more and more students are being integrated into the general physical education environment. Inappropriate inclusion continues to be an issue. Simply placing a student in a class with non disabled peers is not inclusion and until we remedy what appropriate inclusion is within schools students will continue to be integrated into classes of which they are still very much not a part. Teachers will continue to place the responsibility for students with disabilities integrated into their classes inappropriately onto paraeducators.

Within the current educational models of teacher training, programs need to develop a curriculum component regarding the use of paraeducators as recommended by Frith & Lindsey (2001) and train all teachers to work with all students. Initial and Advanced teacher standards (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2008) should reflect the current nature of physical education settings in regards to students with disabilities. Teachers need to know they are accountable for students that are integrated in their classes with or without a paraeducator present and need to take responsibility for teaching those students.

Teachers also need more time to plan and work together as teaching teams. Districts could help in many of these efforts by not allowing physical education to continue to be marginalized. Physical education teachers should have access to training and materials surrounding physical education curriculum on teacher in-service days and not placed into other content areas.

The institutions of higher education need to shift from a segregated model of teacher training and reflect the diverse classrooms of modern education systems. Physical Education Teacher Education training programs should reevaluate initial teaching standards to reflect the needs of inclusive classrooms and some standards may need to be more specific in regards to working with students with disabilities.

The current dual training model should be examined as general education teachers will be teaching students with disabilities and need to collaborate with other professionals. While training should continue for adapted physical education specialists, physical education teachers need more pre-service training in inclusive practices including adapting and modifying curriculum, creating peer interactions, collaborating with teacher teams and the role and supervision of paraeducators.

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## 4 Conclusion

Given the results of this study, it is important to revisit the initial research questions:

(1) How do paraeducators, special education teachers, physical education teachers, and adapted physical education teachers define the role of the paraeducator in the general physical education environment? (2) How do the teachers and paraeducators define the standards and supervision of paraeducators? (3) What are the districts standards and training for paraeducators, and do they include physical education?

The phenomena surrounding the role of the paraeducator in general physical education had mixed results from a self and team perspective across both the rural and suburban school districts. Overall there was a lack of clarity in regards to the paraeducator role in physical education, the standards for supervision of the paraeducator, and the responsibility for students integrated into general physical education. Collectively, the description of the role of the paraeducator was unclear but was described in relation to the students paraeducators worked with and not in relation to the teacher's role or content specific to physical education. The district standards did little to define the role of the paraeducator for teachers and teachers were often unaware of district standards existing beyond the qualifications mandated by NCLB (2001). These findings coupled with the observational and questionnaire data show a need for role description and clarification for the teachers and the paraeducators regarding the physical education setting and the integration of students with disabilities.

Throughout the interviews, questionnaires, and observations it was apparent that both the role and appropriate utilization of the paraeducator was unclear to the

teachers. The physical education teachers' role in integrating students with disabilities into their general physical education classes was also unclear.

Paraeducators and teachers both lacked training. The paraeducators lacked specific training in regards to attributes of students with disabilities, activity modifications, motor development, and collaboration. Behavior management was also a major training concern and key description of their own role, yet often defined as a weakness by both the individual paraeducators and the teachers. The physical education teachers were untrained in regards to the supervision of paraeducators. Communication and collaboration were training needs for all teachers and paraeducators.

The lack of clarity surrounding the paraeducator role, standards, and supervision may also account for the lack of teacher responsibility and accountability for the students with disabilities integrated into their classes. The teachers' own competence and perceived role in integrating students with disabilities may also compound the inappropriate roles of the paraeducator such as becoming the primary teacher to students with disabilities and primary partner causing social isolation.

The findings warrant more exploration needs to be done and several issues need to be addressed including teacher and paraeducator training and the dissemination of standards. Potential questions for future research include: (1) How does increased collaboration and communication affect the integration of students with disabilities? (2) What are the needs of teachers surrounding the supervision of the paraeducators? (3) How does training for teachers and paraeducators affect the integration of students with disabilities in physical education? (4) What are effective

alternative support strategies for students with disabilities? (5) How can general physical education teachers be better prepared to work in inclusive settings? (6) How do general physical education teachers describe their role in the education of students with disabilities integrated in their classes? (7) How does the natural distribution of students with and without disabilities affect teacher and student interactions in inclusive settings?

These questions are just the beginning when it comes to understanding the role of the paraeducator in the general physical education environment and other factors regarding the appropriate inclusion of students with disabilities. As this research has shown, in agreement with other studies on classroom paraeducators, the use of paraeducator support in general physical education settings may have unfavorable effects for students with disabilities if teachers and paraeducators remain untrained.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

### Literature Review

Since the mid to late 1950's teacher aides, currently known as paraeducators, have been recruited to alleviate teacher shortages and assist in the development of new community programs for individuals with disabilities (Pickett, Likins, & Wallace, 2003). In the past decade the use of paraeducators in education has grown tremendously as more students with disabilities are integrated into general education classrooms (Giangreco, Edelman, Boer, & Doyle, 2001) and the need to extend the support of the special education teachers to multiple general educational settings has grown (Walsh & Jones, 2004).

The increased use of paraeducators raises important questions such as, are they trained for their roles? Are the roles appropriate? What effects do they have on the students they work with? (Giangreco, Edelman, Boer, & Doyle, 2001). Other concerns from the literature include an over-reliance on paraeducators and the double standard this creates for students with disabilities to access trained "highly qualified teachers" a term linked to No Child Left Behind, NCLB (2001). Professionals and parents have been concerned about the amount of time special education students spend with a paraeducator receiving the majority of their instruction. The double standard is that of students with the greatest educational needs are being educated primarily by the least trained and lowest status staff and having less access to trained teachers than the general education student (Giangreco, Halvorsen, Doyle, & Broer, 2004; French & Chopra, 1999). Another concern is defining if paraeducators are assistants of students or if they are assistants of teachers (French, 1998); Downing,

2000). Due to many of these concerns the federal government placed standards on paraeducators (IDEA 1997, & NCLB, 2001).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001) defines the role of the paraeducator as an individual who is employed in an educational environment under the supervision of a certified or licensed teacher. The NCLB Act put minimum requirements on paraeducator positions such as those with instructional duties to have completed two years of college, an associates degree, or they must pass a rigorous state or local assessment that demonstrates their ability to assist instruction in writing, reading and math; however all paraeducators must have a high school diploma or it's equivalent (Ashbaker, 2004). NCLB also clearly states that paraeducators may not provide instruction unless under the direct supervision of a highly qualified teacher and has a minimum of two years of college, an AA or has passed a rigorous district test (NCLB, 2001). The requirements made under the Individuals with Disabilities Act IDEA (1997) are similar and both have left it up to the states and local education agencies (LEA) to provide their own standards for the training of paraeducators. However few states have done more than use the NCLB requirements as their own (Pickett, Likins, & Wallace, 2003).

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has also taken an interest in the role of the paraeducator and developed 10 professional standards for paraeducators with knowledge and skill descriptions (CEC, 2004). The ten standards created by the CEC (2004) include; foundations, development and characteristics of learners, individual learning differences, instructional strategies, learning environment/social interactions, language, instructional planning, assessment, professional and ethical

practice, and collaboration. Within each standard the CEC (2004) lists the knowledge and the skills paraeducators should hold.

The increased use of paraeducators and the provisions made to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1997 and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 has heightened the awareness among administrators and policy makers nationwide to more effectively address many of the issues linked to the employment, preparation, supervision, and roles of the paraeducators (Pickett, Likins & Wallace, 2003). The role, job satisfaction, retention and training of paraeducators have been of concern due to a shortage of special education teachers in the field (White, 2004; Trautman, 2004; French, 2004), which has therefore placed greater demands on the paraeducator.

Many of the demands placed on paraeducators are considered to be unrealistic and burdensome particularly on untrained individuals (Beale, 2001). Many of the demands include assisting students in different educational curricula, personal care, as well as in implementing different behavior management strategies (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). Paraeducators often receive very little reinforcement for the many roles they fill and are often underappreciated. For a paraeducator the realities of their frequently undefined roles, inappropriate responsibilities, lack of appreciation and reinforcement by others affects their perceived competence in their abilities to assist students with disabilities in all areas (Giangreco, Edelman, and Broer, 2001). The role of the paraeducator has inappropriately expanded in large part to the decrease in special education teachers because of high turn over rates due to adverse working conditions including large caseloads, paperwork, and lack of

administrative support (Giangreco, Edelman, Boer, & Doyle, 2001). These issues also highlight a breakdown in communication and collaboration among teachers and paraeducators which is essential in the current delivery models of special education where students are integrated into the general education environment more often (French & Chopra, 2006), especially in environments such as physical education. As more students are included more support personnel and collaborative practices are needed; however the role of the paraeducator in different classes, especially the physical education environment remains unclear.

### **Multiple Roles of Paraeducator**

Paraeducators are known to have many roles in educating students with disabilities. Not all the roles they take on are appropriate and are often times detrimental to students. In a study that explored parent perspectives on the responsibility of the paraeducator, French and Chopra (1999) described four primary roles that parents reported for paraeducators. The four roles were connector, team member, instructor, and caregiver/health service provider. The role of connector was described by parents as the most important and powerful role of the paraeducator. The role was primarily described as keeping the parents linked with the school. Parents often reported that they were more likely to be in contact with their child's paraeducator than with the teacher. However some parents also mentioned how the role of connector failed due to the paraprofessional being a barrier to their child with peers and general education teachers.

The second role parents described was team members. Parents felt that paraeducators needed to be an equal part of the team because their input was

valuable. A few parents mentioned the paraeducators role as being more valuable than the teacher's role because of the amount of time the paraeducator spent with their child and how the paraeducator should be more respected as a team member. Role three was described as instructor. Although parents knew that their child was being instructed by paraeducators they were comfortable when they perceived the paraeducator was doing a good job, being supervised by the teacher, and lessons reflected the IEP goals. On the other hand several parents were concerned that paraeducators were the ones adapting curriculum without supervision. The fourth role of caregiver had similar concerns stated by parents in that paraeducators were often doing things they were not trained to do. With the caregiver role parents also had concerns in regards to dignity and privacy for their children. The roles parents defined are similar and with similar concerns to the roles students have described for themselves especially in regard to friend and primary teacher.

Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco (2005) found in interviews of students with intellectual disabilities that paraprofessionals take on the roles of mother, friend, protector, and primary teacher which included themes of exclusion from peer relationships (friend), embarrassment (mother), stigma and bullying (protector) and invisible to general education teachers (primary teacher). Overwhelmingly present in the interviews was the denial of opportunity to develop peer relationships creating the role of friend in the paraprofessional due to a necessity.

Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren (2005) looked more closely at the inadvertent effect of the increased social isolation of students with disabilities and acknowledged the fact that paraprofessionals were considered to be a physical barrier

to peer interactions. However they did find that through intervention and training, paraprofessionals were able to facilitate and increase interactions among students with and without disabilities dissolving the inappropriate role of friend in the paraprofessional. However, teachers and educational team members have also reported similar concerns in the proximity and overuse of paraeducator support.

In a qualitative study examining the proximity of paraeducators through the observations and interviews of 134 instructional team members, eight themes emerged. The themes included; interference with ownership and responsibility by general educators, separation from classmates, dependence on adults, impact on peer interactions, limitations on receiving competent instruction, loss of personal control, loss of gender identity, and interference with instruction of other students (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli & MacFarland 1997). These eight themes are examples of the issues relating to the “hovering” of paraeducators and the importance of examining the policies regarding paraeducator support, teacher supervision and the collaboration of educational teams.

Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, Aragon, Bernal, Berg De Balderas, & Carroll (2004) looked into how paraprofessionals perceived their role as a connector to the community. What was found in the interviews was that the role of the paraprofessional is often to connect the parties involved. The paraprofessionals felt they were the connector of students to teachers, parents to teachers, parents to students, and students to peers. However as a connector they also described their role as problematic in the areas of respect, trust and appreciation (Giangreco,

Edelman, & Broer, 2001). It was also stated that often times their roles were unclear or undefined.

### **Paraeducator in Physical Education**

The roles of the paraeducator have not always transferred to the physical education environment. Often paraeducators have seen physical education as a time for a break or a planning period (Block, 2000). This has been due to a lack of expectation to assist in general physical education, and undefined roles when positions of employment were accepted (Silliman-French & Fullerton, 1998). It is less clear what happens in physical education regarding the role of the paraeducator. There is extremely limited literature regarding physical education and the paraprofessional, however one study by Bolen and Thomas (1997) found from their survey that 100% of paraeducators working in the physical education environment did not meet the minimal 3-day orientation recommendations. Sixty six percent also reported having no in-service training, 97% reported a need for more feedback and suggestions, 93% expressed inadequacies in being provided weekly conferences, while 90% wanted closer supervision by their supervising teacher. Another study found regarding the paraeducators' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in physical education. O'Connor and French (1998) found significant negative correlations on scores of expressed feelings about inclusion and the number of course credits in college, ratings of in-service experiences, and perception of inclusion. Other significant differences were found between mean knowledge about inclusion by time worked in general physical education, between men and women for years of education and for years of experience as a paraprofessional.

More recently, Davis, Kotecki, Harvey, & Oliver (2007) examined the needs and responsibilities of paraeducators through the use of a questionnaire. The areas of training found most important to paraeducators included activity modifications, attributes of students with disabilities, and knowledge of motor development. The format for training that most paraeducators chose was that in which took up the least amount of time and with the least time constraints. Most chose a one day training. These findings were consistent with literature regarding training time. A very low percent of paraeducators reported receiving any training to work in physical education. The authors however point out that it would be important in the future to examine the IEP needs listed in regards to physical education, the amount of support or role of the paraeducator may not be documented in PE as it is in other classes creating issues of support and training in PE and possible conflict with the general PE teachers expectations of the paraeducator, and their perception of their duties as it relates to PE.

Overall the training for paraeducators in physical education needs to include skills that promote activity implementation and game modification and not relate to issues of assessment or IEP development. Based on the findings the training should also be delivered in the most efficient format supported by participant incentives (Davis, 2007). Other literature in physical education regarding paraeducators is anecdotal with strategies in how to best utilize and work with paraeducators in physical education.

## **Job Retention**

Due to the lack of training and issues regarding undefined roles, paraprofessionals like special education teachers, are often difficult to retain. Giangreco, Edelman, & Boer, (2001) describe these issues in six themes. The themes were identified through interview and observational data of 103 teachers and paraeducators. The themes described the respect, appreciation, and acknowledgement of the paraeducators, and how they expressed a hope that they would be better valued by more of the people they worked with. The six themes describing how paraeducators could be better valued included; non-monetary symbols of appreciation, compensation, entrusted with important responsibilities, non-instructional responsibilities, wanting to be listened to, and orientation and support (Giangreco, Edelman, & Boer, 2001).

The retention of special education teachers has been an issue for sometime. Merrow (1999) said that when it comes to special education teachers, recruitment is not the problem, it is retention. As the role of the special education has been changing, the demands have increased making it more difficult to retain special education teachers in the field (Gersten, Keating, Yavanoff, & Harniss, 2001).

To examine the intent of special education teachers to stay in the profession Gersten et al. (2001) examined the job design of special educators. They discussed that with teachers attempting to keep up with new initiatives, fulfilling teaching and non-teaching duties, providing quality instruction to students with disabilities, and attempting to work with and collaborate effectively with other adults to provide quality instruction in the general education environment, stress levels increased effecting job satisfaction. The lack of job satisfaction on top of other issues such as

lack of resources, administrative support, and limited decision making power creates disharmony and affects teachers' sense of efficacy which can in turn affect the teachers' intent to remain in the field (Gersten, et al., 2001).

The role of the general education teacher is changing as well. Regardless of how prepared general education teachers report feeling, they are playing a primary role in educating students with disabilities (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006). Effective physical education teachers have reported frustration, lack of support, and feelings of inadequacy and guilt in a qualitative study regarding inclusion practices (LaMaster et al, 1998). Lienert, Sherrill & Myers (2001) discussed similar findings in a cross-cultural study with physical education teachers in the US and Germany. The teachers in both countries reported not being sufficiently trained and not having enough support personnel or resources to work with students with disabilities included in their classes. These issues regarding inclusion and the many other issues surrounding working conditions greatly affect teacher morale and even the intent to stay in the profession.

### **Collaboration**

Inclusion is an educational philosophy that advocates for the placement of students with disabilities to be in the general education classroom with their non-disabled peers with all support services necessary. In order for inclusion to be successful the following need to be in place; a) positive attitudes and commitment to change, b) honoring of individual differences, c) collaborative planning, and d) administrative support (Block, 1999).

Collaborative planning has been stated from the very beginning of the inclusion movement as a process that must take place. However many teachers were not trained to work with others, they were trained to be in charge of their own classrooms, therefore many “inclusive” programs have lacked planning between general education teachers, special education teachers, paraeducators and administrators. Most educators have been trained in a segregated model creating a need for information about a) purposes and benefits of inclusive placements, b) description of what their new roles look like, and c) what types of supports are available to them (Givner & Haager, 1995).

Issues relating to training deal with the role of the paraeducator to be a jack of all trades. They often accompany students to Math, English, Reading, and Physical Education to assist them. More and more paraprofessionals have multiple roles across all curricular areas to provide support for students in areas without sufficient training. To complicate the lack of training in different academic areas, teachers often report being unprepared to collaborate with paraeducators. This often results in a lack of communication between adult parties, and an inappropriate shift of responsibility for the students with disabilities.

The paraeducator is to be under direct supervision of the special education teacher when providing instruction according to NCLB (2001), yet it is not understood how this takes place in the physical education environment. It is important to examine the role of the paraeducator in physical education from the perspectives of the physical education teacher, the special education teacher and the paraeducator to determine where in lays the “conundrum” in this collaborative

relationship (Giangreco & Broer, 2002). An examination of what is happening in the physical education environment regarding the paraeducator support of students with disabilities will help determine the needs for future training to increase effective collaboration between teachers and paraeducators.

## **Appendix B**

### Timeline of Study Events

November 19 2007: meeting @ Sycamore Middle & send out recruitment email

December 5 2007: Full day observation w/ Megan

December 7 2007: Full day observation w/ Lauren (Maple MS)

December 10 2007: PE observation w/ Lauren (Maple MS)

December 11 2007: PE observation w/ Megan (Sycamore MS)

December 13 2007: PE observation W Megan (Sycamore MS)

December 17 2007: PE observation w/ Lauren (Maple MS).

Interviews: Rachel & Lauren (Maple MS).

December 18 2007: Interview w/ Colin (Sycamore MS)

January 22 2008: PE observation w/ Megan (Sycamore MS)

January 23 2008: PE observation w/ Lauren (Maple MS)

January 24 2008: PE observation w/ Lauren (Maple MS)

Interview w/ Mary (Sycamore MS)

January 29, 2008: Interview w/ Mark (Maple)

January 30 2008: Interview w/ Judy (Maple)

Interview w/ Megan (Sycamore MS)

February 1 2008: Interview w/ Nicole (Sycamore MS)

February 5 2008: Full Day observation Jack (White Oak MS)

PE Observation Tammy (White Oak MS)

February 6 2008: PE Observation & interview w/ Jack (White Oak MS)

February 7 2008: Full Day observation w/ Tammy (White Oak MS)

February 8 2008: Interview w/ Tammy (White Oak MS)

February 12 2008: PE observation w/ Tammy (White Oak MS)

Interview w/ Janice (White Oak MS)

February 13 2008: PE observation w/ Tammy & Jack (White Oak MS)

February 14 2008: Interviews w/ Matt & James (White Oak MS)

February 15 2008: PE observation w/ Tammy (White Oak MS)

Interviews w/ Paige & Greg (White Oak MS)

## Appendix C

### Recruitment Email

Dear Teachers & Paraeducators,

My name is Bekkie Bryan and I am a doctoral student at Oregon State University in the Movement Studies in Disability program. I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation and am contacting you to invite you to participate in my research project. The research study is designed to explore the role of the paraeducator in the general physical education environment. I have received permission from the district to ask for your participation.

The study will explore how members of educational teams define the role of the paraeducator in the physical education environment, how the supervisory roles of teachers to paraeducators are described and, what the districts policies and standards are for the employment and training of paraeducators. The study will also examine what the needs are for teachers and paraeducators to successfully include students with disabilities in physical education.

The study will consist of a demographic questionnaire, four observations including a full day observation, and three 1 hour post checks, and a 45-75 minute interview outside of school during your own personal time. The information gathered from this study will help provide future training for teachers and paraeducators to continue to successfully support students with disabilities.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated in this study. If you are interested or have any questions regarding the project please contact me at [bryanr@onid.orst.edu](mailto:bryanr@onid.orst.edu) or (541) 737-3402.

Sincerely,

Bekkie Bryan

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent



**Nutrition and Exercise Sciences**  
Oregon State University, 206 Women's Building, Corvallis, Oregon 97331  
Tel 541-737-3402 | Fax 541-737-6613 | www.hhs.oregonstate.edu/nes

#### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: **The Role of the Paraeducator in the General Physical Education Environment**

Principal Investigator: **Jeff McCubbin Dept. of Nutrition and Exercise Sciences**

Co-Investigator(s): **Rebecca Bryan Dept. of Nutrition and Exercise Sciences**

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are being invited to take part in a research study designed to explore the role of the paraeducator in the general physical education environment. The study will explore how members of educational teams define the role of the paraeducator in the physical education environment, how the supervisory roles of teachers to paraeducators are described and, what the districts policies and standards are for the employment and training of paraeducators. The study will also examine what the needs are for teachers and paraeducators to successfully include students with disabilities in physical education.

The results and outcomes of the study are intended to be used for a doctoral dissertation project for degree completion, and for research publication. The role of the paraeducator is being studied because new guidelines have been issued regarding the training of paraeducators; however there is limited research on the paraeducators role in physical education. The significance of this project is to provide a more complete understanding of the paraeducators roles in different classroom environments such as physical education.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?

This consent form provides you the information you will need to help you decide whether to participate in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not.

#### WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You are being invited to take part in this study because you are a physical education teacher that has students with disabilities included in your classes, are a paraeducator that works with students with disabilities, are an adapted physical education teacher, or a special education teacher.

There is a waiver of informed consent for the students because it is the normal educational setting and there is no risk to the students.

#### WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

If you decide to take part in this research study you will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire about your position in the school district, be observed for one full day at your school, and for three

additional one hour visits during physical education, and be part of a 45-75 minute audio recorded interview in a private quiet location to be determined by the participant and researcher. You will also be asked to review transcripts to be sure the researcher maintains the true meaning of your answers to questions. You will review the interpretations the researcher makes from your transcripts to ensure that the interpretations are correct. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the project. Pseudonyms will be used for the district, the schools, and the participants of this study. The researcher will be the only one with access to any identifying information.

If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last for one full day observation, three 1-hour observations, a 45-75 minute interview, and one follow up meeting lasting approximately one hour to review the interpretations made by the researcher from your transcripts.

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?**

The possible discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include: being uncomfortable during the observations or nervousness during the interview process and fear of recognition. The researcher will minimize the risks by reassuring the participants that the purpose of the study is to explore the roles of teachers and paraprofessionals in the school and not to disrupt any day to day activities and to also change any identifying descriptors to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, schools, and school districts.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?**

There are no direct benefits to you for being in this study. However, in the future other people might benefit from this study by understanding the roles and possible needs of teachers and paraeducators in the schools which will help professionals plan and develop training for the needs of teachers and paraeducators in working with students with disabilities in physical education.

**WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?**

You will be paid for being in this research study by receiving a \$15 gift certificate for your interview time.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?**

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. To help protect your confidentiality, the researcher will use pseudonyms for your name, the name of your school and school district. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed into written form by the researcher. The audio tapes and transcriptions will be confidential and all information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and on password protected computers.

The audio-tapes will be destroyed upon the completion of publication(s) for this study. Only the researcher will have access to all documents and data including audio tapes and transcripts.

The school district will be offered an in-service training based moderately on the reported needs of teachers and paraeducators in the study. The in-service will not report data from the study to ensure confidentiality.

If the results of this project are published your identity, the identity of your school and school district will not be made public.

**DO I HAVE A CHOICE TO BE IN THE STUDY?**

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. You may also skip any questions during the interview you wish to not answer. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researcher may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports.

**WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Bekkie Bryan at (541)-753-7955 or [bryanr@onid.orst.edu](mailto:bryanr@onid.orst.edu) or Jeff McCubbin at (541) 737-2176 or [Jeff.McCubbin@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Jeff.McCubbin@oregonstate.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-4933 or by email at [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu).

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Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

Oregon State University • IRB Study # 3426 • Approval Date: 3/16/07 • Expires: 3/16/08
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## Appendix E

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_ please circle: M F

Occupation (please circle one):

Special Education Teacher

Physical Education Teacher

Adapted Physical Education Teacher

Paraeducator

Years of Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

How long at current placement: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade levels you have worked with (please indicate how many years at each below).

Elementary: \_\_\_\_\_

Middle: \_\_\_\_\_

High: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your highest degree earned: \_\_\_\_\_

If you are currently in college please indicate level and major:

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Have you taken any adapted physical education coursework?

If yes, how many undergraduate credits : \_\_\_\_\_ Graduate credits: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you taken any special education coursework?

If yes, how many undergraduate credits: \_\_\_\_\_ Graduate credits: \_\_\_\_\_

How would you classify the students with disabilities you currently work with?

Mild to moderate

Moderate to severe

Severe

As a teacher or paraeducator what types of disabilities do the students you currently work with have?

Please rate the quality of your teaching experience working with students with disabilities.

Unsatisfactory  
Good

Satisfactory

Very



## Appendix F

### Interview Questions

#### *Physical Education Teacher*

1. Can you explain your role as a physical education teacher in this district at the Middle/High School level? What does a typical day look like?
2. What do you enjoy about being a teacher? What are some of the challenges you face as a teacher?
3. What is your role as it pertains to students with disabilities integrated into your class?
4. Do you have knowledge of IEP goals regarding physical education? Who is accountable for those goals? (who tracks & documents)
5. As a general physical education teacher do you feel you are well trained to work with students with disabilities? To work collaboratively with other teachers and staff such as paraeducators.
6. Do you meet or plan with the special education teacher or case manager of the students with disabilities in your class. When, why, how often?
7. Does an adapted physical education specialist assist with the inclusion of students with disabilities in your classes? Do you collaborate or meet to make adaptations or modifications for students? When & how often?
8. How would you describe the role of the paraeducator in your class? What do they do during physical education? Do they help you plan, or carry out portions of lessons? How, when, how often?
9. Has the role of the paraeducator been described or explained to you (by administration or SPED teacher)?
10. What are some of the strengths of the paraprofessionals you work with? What are some of their weaknesses in the physical education environment?
11. Who is responsible for the supervision of the paraeducator in your class?
12. Do you feel that paraeducators have enough physical education curricular knowledge to assist students with disabilities in meeting the lesson & unit goals?

13. How do you feel the paraprofessionals could be better utilized in physical education?
14. What type of training do you need to work with students with disabilities, paraeducators, and special education teachers regarding physical education?
15. If an in-service training was offered for physical education teachers, special education teachers, adapted physical education teachers and paraprofessionals, what types of things would you like to see offered, or do you see as a need to be covered in such an in-service?

*Paraprofessional*

1. Can you explain your role/job to me as a paraprofessional in the Middle/High School setting? What does a typical day look like?
2. What do you enjoy about being a paraprofessional? What are some of your challenges as a paraprofessional? What are some of your strengths?
3. As a paraprofessional what is your role in the classroom? In the physical education environment? Are the roles you fill clear to you?
4. How are your roles defined? Who defines them (i.e. by the teacher, administrator etc.) Do you believe the roles you fill are clear to the teachers you work with (PE & SPED)?
5. Are you aware of students IEP goals in physical education?
6. Are you usually aware of the unit or lesson goals in physical education class prior to arriving to class?
7. Does the physical education teacher(s) ever give you expectations or ideas of what you could do to support the entire class? The students with disabilities?
8. What do you usually do during physical education class?
9. Do you feel competent in assisting students meet curricular goals in physical education? Competent in the physical education content/curriculum?
10. In an ideal situation what would you see your role as in physical education? What types of things would need to happen in order for this to take place?
11. Do you feel that the physical education teacher is open to working with students with disabilities? Does the teacher meet their (students with disabilities) curricular needs? In what areas do you see for improvement?

Would the teacher be able to successfully include these students in lessons if you were not present?

12. How do you perceive teachers treat you as a paraprofessional?
13. Do any teachers supervise you when working with students with disabilities on their lessons or objectives? Are you supervised in physical education?
14. If an in-service were to be offered for paraprofessionals and teachers, what types of things would you like that in-service to include? What would you benefit from to make you feel more comfortable or competent in physical education curriculum?

*Adapted Physical Education Teacher*

1. Can you explain your role as the adapted physical education teacher in this district & at the Middle/High School level? What does a typical day look like?
2. What do you enjoy about being an adapted physical education teacher? What are some of the challenges you face as a teacher?
3. What is your role as it pertains to students with disabilities integrated into general physical education classes?
4. Do you have knowledge of IEP goals regarding physical education for the students included in general physical education? Who is accountable for those goals? (who tracks & documents)
5. As an adapted physical education teacher do you feel you were well trained to work with students with disabilities in different settings? To work collaboratively with other teachers and staff such as paraeducators.
6. Do you meet or plan with the special education teacher or case manager of the students with disabilities on your caseload. When, why, how often?
7. Do you meet with the physical education teachers outside of seeing students to assist with the inclusion of students with disabilities on your caseload? Do you collaborate to make adaptations or modifications for students, discuss goals & objectives etc.? When & how often?
8. How would you describe the role of the paraeducator in the different placement settings you work in regarding physical education (i.e. pullout, included etc.)? What do they do during physical education? Do they help you plan, or carry out portions of lessons? How, when, how often?

9. Has the role of the paraeducator been described or explained to you (by SPED teachers or administrators)?
10. What are some of the strengths of the paraprofessionals you work with? What are some of their weaknesses in the physical education environment?
11. Who is responsible for the supervision of the paraeducator during physical education?
12. Do you feel that paraeducators have enough physical education curricular knowledge to assist students with disabilities in meeting the lesson & unit objectives?
13. How do you feel the paraprofessionals could be better utilized in physical education?
14. What type of training do you feel is needed in order to work with students with disabilities, paraeducators, and special education teachers regarding physical education?
15. If an in-service training was offered for physical education teachers, special education teachers, adapted physical education teachers and paraprofessionals, what types of things would you like to see offered, or do you see as a need to be covered in such an in-service?

*Special Education Teacher*

1. Can you explain your role as a special education teacher in this district at the Middle/High School level? What does a typical day look like?
2. What do you enjoy about being a teacher? What are some of the challenges you face as a teacher?
3. What is your role as it pertains to students with disabilities integrated into general education classes including physical education?
4. Do you have knowledge of IEP goals regarding physical education? Who is accountable for those goals? (who tracks & documents)
5. As a general special education teacher do you feel you are well trained to work with students with disabilities in the different settings? To work collaboratively with other teachers and staff such as paraeducators.
6. Do you meet or plan with the other teachers of the students with disabilities on your caseload? With the physical education teacher? When, why, how often?

7. Does an adapted physical education specialist assist with the inclusion of students with disabilities in physical education? Do you collaborate or meet to help make adaptations or modifications for students? When & how often?
8. How would you describe the role of the paraeducator in your class? What do they do during physical education? Do they help you plan, or carry out portions of lessons? How, when, how often?
9. Has the role of the paraeducator been described or explained to you by the administration or who described it to you?
10. What are some of the strengths of the paraprofessionals you work with? What are some of their weaknesses?
11. Who is responsible for the supervision of the paraeducator in your class? In physical education?
12. Do you feel that paraeducators have enough physical education curricular knowledge to assist students with disabilities in meeting the lesson & unit objectives? Do you feel that you have enough physical education curricular knowledge to assist in including students with disabilities in physical education?
13. How do you feel the paraprofessionals could be better utilized in physical education?
14. What type of training do you need to work with students with disabilities, paraeducators, adapted physical education and general physical education teachers regarding physical education?
15. If an in-service training was offered for physical education teachers, special education teachers, adapted physical education teachers and paraprofessionals, what types of things would you like to see offered, or do you see as a need to be covered in such an in-service?

## Appendix G

Observation Sheet

### OBSERVATION CHECKLIST OF INTERACTIONS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Observation #** \_\_\_\_\_ **School:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time Start:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time End:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Para:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Note: one tally mark = 1 interaction**

Para w/ assigned student(s)	Para w/ other students	Para & Teacher	Teacher w/ students that have Para

**Notes:**

## Appendix H

### Qualitative Coding Scheme

	CODE	SUBCODE	DEFINITION
<b>RL</b>	<b>Role</b>		<b>Individuals role that describes their job position</b>
PA		Para	Reference to description of Para role
PE		PE teacher	Reference to role of PE teacher
APE		APE teacher	Reference to role of APE teacher
SE		SPED Teacher	Reference to role of SPED teacher
ST/WK		Strengths & Weaknesses	Reference to the strengths & weakness of paraeducators
<b>CH</b>	<b>Challenges</b>		<b>Reference to challenges surrounding Para role &amp; SPED students in PE</b>
DF		Difficulties	Reference to difficulties integrating students w/ disabilities
UT		Us & Them	Reference to categorization of SPED & GED
EX		Expectations	Reference to expectations
RS		Relationships	Reference to nature of relationship with other team members
<b>CL</b>	<b>Clarity</b>		<b>Reference to the clarity of the paraeducator role</b>
IN	Integration	Integration	Reference to issues surrounding the integration of students w/ disabilities
CM		Competence	Reference to one's competence integrating students
<b>AC</b>	<b>Accountability</b>		<b>Characteristics of accountability measures</b>
GO		Goals & Objectives	Reference to the accountability of goals & objectives for SPED students in PE
EV		Evaluations	Reference to job evaluations
SU		Supervision	Reference to supervision of Para
PY		Parity	Reference to para as equal or co-teacher
<b>TN</b>	<b>Training Needs</b>		<b>Reference to what individuals perceive they need to be more successful in PE w/ Para</b>
TF		Training format	Reference to type of training preferred
CB		Collaboration	Reference to communication w/ others
PL		Planning	Reference to planning time