Effective Supervision of Paraeducators: Multiple Benefits and Outcomes

Ritu V. Chopra
Elena Sandoval-Lucero
Nancy K. French

The numbers of paraeducators employed in the schools increased has dramatically in recent years. The growth of the paraeducator workforce has also resulted in an evolution of their roles in the classroom as well as transition to teaching positions for many of them. It is well documented that paraeducators often do not receive supervision from teachers to be effective in their new roles This article reports selected findings from two studies that established the connection between effective supervision of paraeducators by teachers and paraeducators' performance in the classroom as well as their continuing professional and career development.

About the authors: Dr. Chopra is an Assistant Research Professor, and Executive Director of the PAR²A Center at the University of Colorado Denver, School of Education and Human Development. Dr. Sandoval-Lucero is Dean of Enrollment Management at Community College of Aurora, and Dr. French is a retired Research Professor and founding Director of the PAR²A Center at the University of Colorado Denver, School of Education and Human Development.

Keywords: paraeducator supervision, teacher education, special education

INTRODUCTION

Paraeducators[1] have been employed in increasingly large numbers to fill critical gaps in the educational process and deliver an array of services for over 50 years. In the last decade, the employment of paraeducators increased at a national average of 49% (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009).

The dramatic surge of employment for paraeducators to provide individualized support to students with disabilities began with the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975 (Pickett, 2008; French, 2002a, 2003; French & Pickett, 1997; Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005).

---

1   Other titles used for this position in the U.S. and other countries include paraprofessional, instructional assistant, educational assistant, teacher assistant, teacher aide, aide, and educational support professionals

In the 1990s, a growing trend towards inclusive education of children with disabilities was observed that led to further expansion of the use of paraeducators (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2010; Chopra, 2009; Doyle, 2008; French & Pickett, 1997; Pickett, 2008). Inclusive education means that children with and without disabilities participate and learn together in the same classes with teachers making adjustments for the varying needs of students (Deppeler, Harvey, & Loreman, 2005). Paraeducators are now prominently recognized as an integral part of the instructional process and critical supports for the success of the students in inclusive educational settings (Chopra, 2009; Chopra & French, 2004; Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; French & Chopra, 1999; Marks, Schrader, & Levine 1999; Wadsworth & Knight, 1996).

As a result of the above identified needs as well as national and state mandates for individualized services, the role of the paraeducator has changed dramatically, becoming more complex and challenging (Chopra, 2009; Chopra & French, 2004; French and Pickett, 1997;

Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996; Marks et al.. 1999: Minonk, Meyer, & Yin, 2001). Literature. though limited. shows that paraeducators now play several important roles when they support students in schools. These roles are: instructor, connector, behavior support facilitator. team member, personal care provider. and cultural broker (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2000; Carter. O'Rourke. Sisco & Pelsue, 2009; Chopra, 2009; Chopra & French. 2004: French & Chopra, 1999; Rueda & Genzuk. 2007).

Paraeducators are also excellent candidates for teaching positions (Nunez & Fernandez, 2006: Villegas & Davis, 2007). Their experience in schools means that paraeducators are highly likely to enter and to be retained in teaching positions, reducing teacher attrition rates that contribute to teacher shortages (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Villegas & Davis, 2007). Importantly, they work mostly in fields such as bilingual and special education that have persistent teacher shortages (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996; Rueda, Monzo, & Higareda, 2004). Further contributing to a reduction in teacher attrition, paraeducators are more willing to take hard to fill positions in rural and urban schools, and more likely to remain in the profession for more than three years (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996). Moreover, paraeducators live in the communities where they work, and are culturally, as well as, linguistically more similar to their students; thus they enhance diversity and community connections for the schools (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2000; Rueda & Genzuk, 2007; Villegas & Davis, 2007).

The literature over the past 25 years is unequivocal in insisting that paraeducators require training (Blalock, 1984; DeFur & Taymans, 1995; Downing, et.al., 2000; Frank, Keith & Steil, 1988; French & Cabell, 1993; Hansen, 1996; Jones & Bender, 1993; Killoran, Templeton, Peters & Udell, 2001; Long, Emery & Reeham, 1994; Mueller, 1997; Parsons & Reid, 1999; Passaro, Pickett, Latham & HongBo, 1991; Pearman, Suhr & Gibson, 1993; Pickett, Likens, & Wallace, 2003; Picket, 2008; Pickett, Gerlach, Morgan, Likins, & Wallace, 2007; Riggs, 2001). A career development continuum that includes increased training and development of paraeducators to be able to effectively serve in their current roles is clearly demanded in the literature (French & Chopra, 1999; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer & Doyle, 2001; Pickett, Likens, & Wallace, 2003; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Rueda & Genzuk, 2007). In addition, training and educational programs that focus on the unique learning needs of paraeducators is necessary to promote their transition into teaching positions in high-need fields (Nunez & Fernandez, 2006; Sandoval-Lucero, 2004, 2006, 2009; Valenciana, Morin, & Morales, 2005; Villegas & Clewell, 1998; Villegas & Davis, 2007).

In the United States, federal laws require that paraeducators work under the direction and supervision of a certified professional (IDEA Amendments of 1997; Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). However, the laws provide vague and limited descriptions of what paraeducator supervision entails (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006). Teachers remain reluctant to supervise paraeducators, and are unprepared to work effectively with them (Pickett et.al, 2008; French, 2003; French. 1998; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). Many teachers do not view themselves as the paraeducator's supervisors, instead they "prefer... to consider paraeducators as peers rather than supervisees" (French, 1998 p. 357).

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has established that supervision of paraeducators is an important role of the special education teacher (Council for Exceptional Children, 2009). The CEC recommends that the special educator demonstrate : a) skills in structuring, directing and supporting the activates of paraeducators, b) knowledge of roles and responsibilities of the paraeducators related to instruction, intervention and direct services, and c) skills in observing, evaluating, providing feedback to paraeducators (p. 211) The literature on supervision substantiates each of these responsibilities. Experts in the field have identified the following as the teacher's ethical responsibilities related to paraeducator supervision: assigning specific tasks, providing on-the-job training, holding planning meetings, designing instructional plans, directing and monitoring day-to-day activities, and providing coaching to paraeducators. (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006, 2010; French & Chopra, 2006; French, 1998, 1999, 2002a, 2002b; 2003; Pickett, 2008; French & Pickett, 1997).

Teachers' lack of competence in supervision is due to a lack of preparation (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2000; Lewis & McKenzie, 2009; Morgan, 1997; Wallace et al. 2001). The topic is neither adequately addressed in pre-service programs nor in professional development occurring after employment (Wallace, et al. 2001), in spite of the CEC standards for special education teacher preparation (Council for Exceptional Children, 2009).

For some paraeducators teacher supervision and mentoring play a powerful role in their decision to pursue teacher preparation programs and become teachers (Sandoval-Lucero, 2004). For paraeducators who are enrolled in teacher preparation programs strong leadership from their supervising teachers boosts their ambition to become teachers and provides an important opportunity to apply newly learned skills from their

college coursework. The lack of on-the-job feedback and coaching from supervising teachers inhibits their ability to apply newly learned skills from their college coursework (French, 1998; Rueda & Monzo, 2000; Sandoval-Lucero, 2004, 2006, 2009).

This article reports key findings from two studies that established the connection between teachers' effective supervision of paraeducators and paraeducators' performance in the classroom as well as their continuing professional and career development. While each study sought to examine different aspects of paraeducator employment and utilization, there was one major finding in common – the importance of the supervising teacher. We report on both studies together because they shared a common and important finding.

OVERVIEW OF THE TWO STUDIES

Study A:
Parent Paraeducator Relationships in Inclusion

Background and purpose of study A.

The Study A was a qualitative study that examined the relationship between parents of students with significant disabilities and the paraeducators who supported them in inclusive settings (Chopra & French, 2004, Chopra, 2002). It was a follow-up to a previous study that revealed that parents believed that paraeducators were the single most important factor to successful inclusion and that their relationship with paraeducators was stronger than their relationship with their child's teacher (French & Chopra 1999). The purpose of this study was to examine parent-paraeducator relationships and their impact on the education of the students with significant special needs.

Participant selection, data collection and analysis.

The study included the perspectives of 5 parents, 6 paraeducators, 5 special education teachers, 4 general educators and one administrator from the same school district. The sampling method for the study was purposive. The intent of purposive sampling is to find groups of participants in settings where the phenomenon under study is most likely to occur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The district was selected because it had a reputation of being effective in

terms of its implementation of inclusion policies, paraeducator training, and parent involvement (School District's Website; District Personnel, Personal Communication, January 19, 2002). The study sites included the special education programs at three elementary schools. The district special education coordinator helped in the identification of the sites and participants on the basis of the following pre-determined criteria:

a) the special education program included students with significant or severe needs who were included 70% or more of the time in regular classrooms;

b) the program had paraeducators who had worked one-on-one with the same student (with significant or severe needs) for at least six months or more; and

c) the special education teacher was willing to participate in the study and help in securing consent from other participants, i.e. the parents, the paraeducators and the classroom teachers of the students

In-depth interviews were conducted with all 21 participants using an interview guide. To ascertain that the focus for each interview remained the same, the interview guide included questions on identical themes for each category of participants. The themes included: general questions about the roles of the parent/paraeducator/professional in inclusion, relationships among team members with a special emphasis on parent-paraeducator, and implications of these relationships on education of the students. Interviews averaged 1 hour in length and were tape recorded. The investigator also took field notes and posed probing questions to seek further elaboration of each participant's response as needed during each interview.

Interview tapes were transcribed verbatim. To decipher salient themes from the data, the investigator listened to each tape and read the transcripts several times, recorded reflective notes as well as referred to the field notes taken during the interviews. All the written data were transported to QSR*NVivo, a computerized qualitative data analysis program. Next, each

data document was coded based on the research questions and initially-identified themes. This was followed by re-visitation of data and reorganization of themes ultimately leading to a rich interpretation of data.

Summary of Study A findings.

Major findings of this study were first, that collaboration among paraeducators, parents, teachers, and related service providers as a fundamental contributing factor to inclusion. The study confirmed that students are successfully included when general education teachers, special education teachers, paraeducators, and related service providers communicate and consult regularly in an organized manner in weekly scheduled meetings. This sense of working together generally helped accomplish much more than anyone can individually accomplish. The role of the teacher as the team leader in coordinating collaborative efforts was found to be vital to the student and program success. While paraeducators were recognized as vital members of the team, it was found that they were effective only when the teacher clearly defined their role and provided direction and guidance to them.

Next, it was found that it was important for parents and paraeducators to communicate on a regular basis but the paraeducator-parent relationships were beneficial in the students' education only when they remained within the limits and boundaries established by the team leader or person in charge of the program, i.e. the teacher. The findings highlighted the importance of the supervising teacher being "in the loop" in the communications and interactions between parents and paraeducators.

Study B:
Paraeducator Career Development Study

Background and purpose of study.

The second study was a mixed methods study that examined the career development of paraeducators who became teachers and of those who chose to remain in paraeducator roles. The study examined paraeducator career opportunities from the perspective of the influence of their work and educational experiences on their career aspirations, and desire to pursue educational opportunities. The purpose of the study was to explore the possibility that work and school experiences play a role in paraeducators' career decisions.

Participant selection, data collection and analysis.

The sample came from two groups of paraeducators. One was a group who had recently completed teacher licensure and entered the professional teaching ranks. All worked as paraeducators while earning their degrees, and were in their first semester of their first year of teaching. A methodological decision was made to limit this group to teachers very early in their career so that their paraeducator work experience was as recent as those paraeducators who chose to remain in the paraeducator role. These participants represented the paraeducators who became teachers. The other participants came from a pool of paraeducators who had completed in-service training designed specifically for paraeducators, and who were still working as paraeducators. These participants represented the paraeducators who planned to remain in the paraprofessional role.

The sampling method this study was also purposive. Participants were identified through a network of higher education and school professionals whose work focused specifically on paraeducator employment, training, and career development. For each stage of the study there was a selection process. Paraeducators who were selected to participate in the initial survey phase, were eligible to participate in the interview phase. Before any data was analyzed, the demographic data were reviewed to ensure the respondents met the inclusion criteria.

Criteria for paraeducators who became teachers.

1) Worked as a paraeducator before entering a teacher education program.
2) Worked as a paraeducator while completing the teacher education program.
3) Had two years or less teaching experience at the time of the study.

Criteria for paraeducators who will remain in the paraeducator role.

1) Currently working as a paraeducator.
2) Planned to remain in the paraeducator role.
3) Not currently enrolled in and have no plans to enter a teacher licensure program.

There were three data sources: a survey, career goals statements written by participants, and structured interviews. Twenty-two participants were included in the survey and career goals statements phases of the study, which occurred simultaneously. Fourteen of those original twenty-two participants agreed to participate in interview phase. Interview tapes were transcribed verbatim. To identify consistent themes from the data, the investigator listened to each tape and read the transcripts several times, recorded reflective notes as well as referred to the field notes taken during the interviews. All the written data were loaded into QSR*NVivo. Next, each data document was coded based on the research questions and initially-identified themes. This was followed by re-visitation of data and reorganization of themes ultimately leading to a rich interpretation of data. From these analyses a picture of the personal experiences of these paraeducators and teachers was created.

Summary of study B findings.

Major findings of this study were first that paraeducators in this study who became teachers described work environments that provided them the opportunity to learn and practice some aspects of the teacher role (e.g. planning, instructional delivery, Individual Education Plan [IEP] development, assessment, communicating with parents), and this influenced their desire to become teachers. They identified teachers who were role models and school professionals who encouraged them to advance their careers. They had supervising teachers who worked collaboratively with them to plan and deliver instruction to students in their classrooms, and who included them in other activities such as IEP work and parent teacher conferences. These paraeducators identified teachers as role models because they provided good supervision for the paraeducator role, gave them opportunities grow and develop new skills, and encouraged them to become teachers.

Second, paraeducators who planned to remain in the paraeducator role spent more of their work day performing general clerical duties. They worked less collaboratively with teachers to deliver instruction, and did not have any input into IEP's, or parent updates in student progress. These paraeducators also noted that they received little encouragement from supervisors or other school personnel to become teachers.

Two Studies and One Major Conclusion

The integral role that an effective supervising teacher plays in paraeducators' success across the career development continuum was a major finding of both studies, in spite of the fact that they had clearly different foci. Although the two studies were designed to study parent-paraeducator relationships in inclusion and paraeducator career development respectively, the importance of an effective supervising teacher in all aspects of a paraeducator's work and career was identified numerous times by multiple participants in each study. The following is a summary of the key themes from the two studies that highlight the teachers' role in supervising and supporting paraeducators, as well as, promoting their professional growth and development.

The Teacher Leads the Team

Results from both studies pointed to teacher leadership as the most important factor in the effectiveness of paraeducators in inclusion and their ambition to become teachers. One paraeducator described the teacher with whom she worked, "She is wonderful, always available, always there to answer questions ... if you have an effective teacher, then a teacher- para[2] team can do a lot more."

The paraeducator reflected on her previous years' experience when she worked with a different special education teacher who did not provide any support. In the absence of any guidance or supervision, the paraeducator assumed responsibilities that ethically according to the CEC standards for paraeducators (Council for Exceptional Children, 2009) should have been performed by a teacher. After working with Joan, the teacher she identified as supportive, she wondered how much more effective she could have been if she

2   Many of the participants refer to paraeducators in their direct quotes as paras. Although we prefer the term paraeducator, we did not change it in their exact quotes in order to maintain the integrity of their words.

previously had an effective supervising teacher to guide her. She elaborated:

> She gives paraeducators direction…it's working this year and it didn't work last year and I think it has a lot to do with her communication and leadership.

Another paraeducator in the program also spoke of the teacher's competence and leadership skills.

> *"It is a tremendous fortune and benefit to have an experienced teacher. She is very knowledgeable, she has incredible training, and…she provides great leadership."*

A paraeducator in Study B also admired her supervisor for her organizational and coaching skills:

> Our teacher is phenomenal. I couldn't ask for anyone better. I don't know how she keeps everything organized. It's amazing what she does. She teaches us. She teaches us how to teach the kids.

The Teacher Treats the Paraeducator as an Important Team Member

In Study A, the most effective special education teacher was highly focused on a team approach. She said, "We think as a team. We make decisions as a team and we all implement as a team." She explained that she stressed this to paraeducators, teachers, and other service providers in the school. She insisted, "Inclusion would not be possible without teamwork. It is not one person's job even if the person is doing their best." Valuing paraeducators' contributions as team members, the teacher stated, "Paras are such a huge piece of what we do, and they so need to be included on the team." In this study, both paraeducators said that they believed that theirs was a "unique situation" and that they knew that paraeducators in other schools were not treated as team members.

Similar findings were noted in Study B. Paraeducators described supervising teachers who used the team approach to deliver an effective program for students. One paraeducator, who became a teacher, recalled being considered an important member of the team. The teacher sought her insights when preparing for parent-teacher conferences because she recognized the close relationships between students and paraeducators.

The paraeducator stated:

> I have been available for the parent teacher conferences so that I may communicate with the parents and the student to see what all they may do to help their child in their classes.

A paraeducator in Study B also talked about teachers she admitted who followed the team approach: "They thought of me as part of their classroom. As their paraeducator, they thought of me as not just their copier, but as part of the students' success."

The Teacher Sets Boundaries for Paraeducators' Role and Relationships with Students and Parents

One of the major findings of Study A was that the teacher provided guidance for paraeducators regarding how to interact both with students and parents. The teacher spoke of an incident that occurred with the previous special education teacher in the program. The former teacher rarely communicated with parents; therefore, parents depended on paraeducators for information and advice. One of the paraeducators who had grown very close to the parents overstepped her boundaries by writing a long letter about the child's behaviors; she added her interpretations on why he was exhibiting certain behaviors and what she thought might be wrong with him psychologically. The letter infuriated the family because they believed that it was the teacher's, not the paraeducator's responsibility to analyze their child's behavior. The family reported the incident to the district administration which led to a reprimand. When the new teacher took over, she established boundaries around the interactions between the paraeducators and parents in the program and became the primary contact person. The teacher's beliefs and philosophy that brought about these changes are discussed below.

Realizing the importance of the daily contact between parent and paraeducators, the teacher encouraged paraeducators to exchange information with the parent in terms the child's morning at home and the day at school. In her ongoing formal and informal conversations with the paraeducators, she cautioned them against "analyzing the situations concerning children to their parents." She clarified to them that when the situation was more severe than a minor behavior infraction or sickness, she would communicate directly with the parents and keep the rest of the team informed. She communicated regularly in a scheduled weekly meeting with the parents of all the children on her caseload.

Under her supervision, one paraeducator did not see it as her job to give details of any of the child's sensitive performance or behavior issues to the parents. As she explained:

> I do not pass judgment. I am not a psychologist or a psychiatrist. I will not diagnose the situation. ... I will not go deep searching why it happened, because I do not have the background knowledge. ... I do not know why it happened.

> Another paraeducator, reported that she did not get "into the 'nitty gritty'" or say "judgmental" things to the parents. She specified that she refrained from giving her opinions in terms of "what should be done" and "how it should be done." Like the first paraeducator, she also viewed herself as someone who "tells the parents about the day, but when it gets down to the finer details that need to come from the teacher."

Both paraeducators and parents in the program from Study A expressed that through ongoing conversations with their supervising teacher, they had a clear understanding of what information to share with each other and how to keep the teacher in the loop. One mother summed up what the others had to say, and conveyed a sense of satisfaction with the situation:

> The teacher definitely sets the tone and they [paraeducators] know where the boundaries are. ... I like that because I feel like she's the boss and they [the paraeducators] know that. And so if there's a problem, they seem to go through her.

The Teacher Plans with Paraeducators

> In both studies, effective supervising teachers took time out of their hectic schedules to plan with their teams. One who was especially noteworthy was the teacher in Study A. She recognized that time was a rare commodity but everyone in the team realized the importance and usefulness of the meetings. As that teacher explained:

> I think the key is that it [planning] has to be a priority. This is something we have to do. We have to meet. We have to talk. We have to communicate. Once you prioritize it as a team, people will make time to do it. ... You have to get flexible with your scheduling.

> In addition to the weekly scheduled meeting

before school, the teacher and the paraeducators touched base with each other during the day and at the end of each day to address any problems or issues that needed immediate attention. According to the paraeducators and classroom teacher, the teacher was always "accessible" and "available" and "willing to talk."

Study B also had results that indicated planning was a key to effective supervision. Not only did it contribute to an efficiently functioning team, but it gave the paraeducators the opportunity to participate in the planning of the delivery of services. Essentially, they had the opportunity to begin learning aspects of the teacher's role, and this influenced their eventual decision to become teachers. One paraeducator, for example, who subsequently became a teacher, recalled the opportunities she had to plan and deliver lessons with the teacher:

> On many occasions, the teacher and I would get together and plan the weeks' activity. Several times a month, I was given the opportunity to provide instruction to half of the class.

This paraeducator worked in this position for five years, and during that time had many similar opportunities to plan, learn, and teach under the supervision of the teacher. This was essentially an early practicum experience for her that contributed significantly to her career development.

The Teacher Coaches and Guides the Paraeducator

Parents' comments in Study A also identified key aspects of the effective supervising teachers' roles and responsibilities. Two parents in Study A saw the teacher's role as the person "on top" who was overseeing their children's IEP and providing guidance to the paraeducators who worked one-on-one with their children. Both mothers shared a clear distinction between the paraeducators' role and the teacher's role with their children. They viewed paraeducators as the persons who worked under the supervision of the teacher but spent more time with their children than anyone else in the school. The following statement from one of the mothers sums up what both of them shared:

> I count on her to set the tone and also to look at the material because she had so much more experience and learning to know how to guide them and how to work with my child. And then they have to carry that out, because they're there for longer periods of time since she has to go to several children.

The Teacher Encourages Paraeducators' Professional Development

Effective supervising teachers in Study B also provided opportunities for paraeducators' professional development regardless of their career path, notifying them of training opportunities available to paraeducators. One teacher, who was very much admired by her paraeducator, encouraged that paraeducator throughout her career. When she was a parent volunteer, the teacher encouraged her to become a paraeducator. The teacher then encouraged her to begin taking paraeducator training classes. The paraeducator recounted her story:

> Last summer they were starting [paraeducator training] courses. The teacher called me, and it was in the summer, and I could have said no, but she asked me to take these courses and see what it was all about, and it was interesting.

That paraeducator is now a teacher, thanks in part to the supervising teacher's encouragement and commitment to her continuing professional development.

Another paraeducator in Study B, who also became a teacher, was encouraged to do so by teachers in her building, claiming, "I have gained the respect and friendship of most of the [teachers] I work with. They have encouraged and repeatedly advised that I go back to school to get the teaching degree." A third paraeducator in Study B was also encouraged by supervising teachers to continue her education:

> I can say that they actually empowered me to see that I could do it, because for me as a second language learner...I wasn't sure that I was able to do it. But they always encouraged me.

The Teacher is a Role Model for Paraeducators

The powerful influence of teachers as effective role models was evidenced in Study B. Paraeducators who participated in Study B often identified teachers who served as important role models, thus increasing their desire to enter the teaching profession, and their belief that they could do it. It is important to note that the majority of references were to teachers they had worked with in classrooms. Moreover, teachers who served as role models were those teachers who had supervised paraeducators effectively. A fourth paraeducator in Study B who became a teacher, thought highly two middle school teachers with whom she worked. They encouraged the paraeducator to continue her education. If she had a final exam or had to leave early for class,

they accommodated those needs. The paraeducator summarized, "Seeing teachers like that just encourages you. You want to work with teachers like that. It's just motivating."

A Study B paraeducator was inspired to become a teacher by the teacher she worked with at the time of the study. She referred to her several times during her interview, stating, "She is an awesome teacher. I really like her strategies, her philosophies. I hope I am at least half as good a teacher as she is."

DISCUSSION

Both of the studies add to the body of knowledge about the supervision of paraeducators. The two studies' key findings on the importance of effective paraeducator supervision highlight the roles of the supervising teacher that have been recommended in previous research. As previously stated, these teacher supervisory functions include: task assignment, planning meetings, creating instructional plans, delegating and monitoring the day-to-day activities, and on-the-job training and coaching (French & Chopra, 2006; French, 1998, 1999, 2003a, 2003b; French & Pickett, 1997). The duties outlined in previous research, correspond closely to the categories of key findings culled from these two studies.

Essentially, these studies have reinforced previous research on the importance of the teacher assuming a leadership role in supervising the instructional team (French & Chopra, 2006). As these studies indicate, teachers who led effectively:

- Valued paraeducators as important members of their team;

- Established clear boundaries for the paraeducator role;

- Took responsibility for, and time to plan the delivery of services with the team;

- Provided on- the-job coaching to paraeducators;

- Encouraged paraeducator professional development to help them carry out their responsibilities effectively, and to promote their movement up the career ladder.

Moreover, teachers who supervised paraeducators well became powerful role models. The power of mentorship through appropriate supervision suggests that preparing

current teachers to supervise and mentor paraeducators might not only increase their job satisfaction, but it could positively affect the numbers of paraeducators who enter teacher preparation programs.

Implications for Practice

Teachers receive little training on how to supervise paraeducators. Research has found that teachers tend to assign responsibilities to paraeducators based on how they perceive the paraeducator role, clerical versus instructional, regardless of the individual interests, career goals, skills, or abilities of paraeducators (Rueda & Monzo, 2000). While this practice may be convenient for the teachers, we have learned from these studies that different types of work environments may impact the career aspirations of paraeducators, as well as, their effectiveness in the classroom. A more effective method of supervising paraeducators would be to design individualized job descriptions for paraeducators based on input from both supervising teacher and paraeducator, that builds on their interests, strengths, and abilities (French, 2002; Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Rueda & Monzo, 2000). This one practice could contribute to increases in job satisfaction for the paraeducators. Job satisfaction contributes to retention of paraeducators strengthening special education teams, contributing to opportunities for paraeducator professional development, and providing program continuity for students (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007). Long term employment as a paraeducator would give them time and opportunities to develop competencies that contribute to their career development, regardless of whether they choose to remain in the paraeducator role, or move into teaching positions.

Teachers also need to be aware of the importance of mentoring paraeducators. Paraeducators have identified mentoring support from teachers as important in their development as teachers (Rueda & Monzo, 2000; Sandoval-Lucero, 2004, 2006, 2009). From Study B we have learned that the teachers who mentor paraeducators also have the potential to become role models that help them build career aspirations. Both studies present implications in the area of preparation and in-service programs for teachers. Teachers need to recognize paraeducators are valuable members of the instructional team. The studies also revealed the benefits of the teacher's ability to lead and supervise paraeducators. Pre-service as well as in-service teacher preparation programs need to prepare future teachers with competencies in supervision, teaming and collaborating as well as leadership skills for them to effectively work with paraeducators and other team members.

School districts that are experiencing teacher shortages or staff retention problems have the potential to develop in-service training programs for paraeducators, as well as, "grow your own" programs that recruit and train paraeducators to become teachers. By providing pathways to career advancement for their paraeducators, they have the opportunity to train paraeducators to be effective in their jobs, and to recruit teachers who are members of the community, experienced in classrooms, diverse in terms of ethnicity and language, committed to the district, and who will potentially remain in teaching for a long term career. The first step in this professional development process would be to review how teachers supervise paraeducators, and then train teachers to work more effectively with paraeducators in ways that allow them to collaborate in instruction, and build upon their skills, abilities, and strengths.

REFERENCES

Ashbaker, B., & Morgan, J. (2010). *Assisting with early literacy instruction: A manual for paraprofessionals.* Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Ashbaker, B., & Morgan, J. (2006). *Educational Considerations,* 34(1), 17-21.

Ashbaker, B., & Morgan, J. (2000). Bilingual paraeducators: What we can learn from Rosa. *NASSP Bulletin, (84)*612, 53-56.

Blalock, V. E. (1984). *Factors influencing the effectiveness of paraprofessionals with disabled populations.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Texas. Austin.

Carter, E. W., O'Rourke. L. Sisco. L. & Pelsue. D. (2009). Knowledge. responsibilities. and training needs of paraprofessionals in elementary and secondary schools. Remedial and Special Education. 30. 344-359.

Chopra. R. (2009). *Parent-Paraeducator Collaboration in Inclusive Classrooms: Reality and Issues for Students with Disabilities.* Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag.

Chopra, R. V. (2002) *Parent paraeducator collaboration in inclusion: Reality and issues.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado at Denver.

Chopra, R. V. & French, N. K. (2004). Parent-Paraeducator Relationships in the Context of Students with Significant Disabilities: *Reality and Issues. Remedial and Special Education, 25(4),* 240-251.

Clewell, B. C., & Villegas, A. M. (2001). *Absence unexcused: Ending teacher shortages in high-need areas: Evaluating the pathways to teaching careers program.* Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

Council for Exceptional Children. (2009). What Every Special Educator Must Know: Ethics, Standards, and Guidelines for Special Educators. (6th Ed.). Author: Arlington, VA.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Solving the dilemmas of teacher supply, demand, and standards: How we can ensure a competent, caring, and qualified teacher for every child. New York: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

DeFur, S. H. & Taymans, J. M. (1995). Competencies needed for transition specialists in vocational rehabilitation, vocational education and special education. *Exceptional Children 62(1),* 38-51.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). Part III strategies of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 367-378). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Deppeler, J., Harvey, D., Loreman, T. (2005). Inclusive Education: A Practical Guide to Supporting Diversity in the Classroom. Routledge: New York.

Downing, J. E., Ryndak, D. L., & Clark, D. (2000). Paraeducators in inclusive classrooms. Remedial and Special Education, 21(3), 171-181.

Doyle. M. B. (2008). The *paraprofessianal's guide to the inclusive classroom: Working as a team* (3rd ed.). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Frank. A. R.. Keith. R. Z.. & Steil, D. A. (1988). Training needs of special education paraprofessionals. *Exceptional Children, 55,* 253-258.

French. N. K.. (2003). Paraeducators in Special Education Programs. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 36(2).* CO: Love Publishing Company.

French. N. K. (2002a). 20 Ways to Maximize Paraprofessional Services to LD Students. Intervention in School and Clinic, 38(1), 50-55.

French, N. K. (2002b). *Managing paraeducators in your school: How to hire, train, and supervise non-certified staff.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

French, N. K. (1999). Paraeducators - who are they and what do they do? *Teaching Exceptional Children, 32(1),* 65-69.

French, N. K. (1998). Working Together: Resource Teachers and Paraeducators. *Remedial and Special Education, 19(6),* 357-368.

French, N. K., & Cabell, E. A. (1993).Are community college training programs for paraeducators feasible? *Community College Journal of Research and Practice. 17,* 131-140.

French, N. K., & Chopra, R. V. (2006). Teachers as Executives, *Theory Into Practice, 45(3),* 230-238.

French, N. K., & Chopra, R. V. (1999). Parent perspectives on the roles of paraprofessionals. *Journal of the Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps,* 24(4), 259-272.

French, N. K., & Pickett, A. L. (1997) Paraprofessionals in special education: Issues for teacher educators. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 20(1),* 61-73.

Ghere. G., & York-Barr, J. (2007). Paraprofessional turnover and retention in inclusive programs: Hidden costs and promising practices. *Remedial and Special Education, 28(1),* 21-32.

Giangreco, M.F., Yuan, S., McKenzie, B., Cameron, P., & Fialka, J. (2005). "Be careful what you wish for...": Five reasons to be concerned about the assignment of individual paraprofessionals. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 37*(5), 28-34

Giangreco, M. F., Edelman, S. W., Broer, S. M., & Doyle, M. B. (2001). Paraprofessional support of students with disabilities: Literature from the past decade. *Exceptional Children, 67*(1), 45-63.

Hansen, D. (1996). Use of focus-group needs assessment for planning paraprofessional staff development in Iowa's education settings. *Journal of Children's Communication Development, 18*(1), 1-3.

Haselkorn, D., & Fideler, E. (1996) *Breaking the class ceiling: Paraeducator pathways to Teaching.* Belmont, MA: Recruiting New Teachers, Inc.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, Pub. L. No. 105-17, 111 Stat. 37 (1997).

Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-446, 118 Stat. 2647 (2004).

Jones, K. H., & Bender, W. N. (1993). Utilization of paraprofessionals in special education: A review of the literature. *Remedial and Special Education, 14*(1), 7-14.

Killoran, J., Templeton, T. P., Peters, J., & Udell, T. (2001). Identifying paraprofessional competencies for early intervention and early childhood special education. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 34*(1), 68-73.

Lewis, S., & McKenzie, A. R. (2009). Knowledge and Skills for Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments Supervising the Work of Paraeducators. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 103*(8), 481-494.

Long, C. A., Emery, M., & Reeham, S. P. (1994, April). *Training special education paraprofessionals: A comparison of teachers' and paraprofessionals' concerns.* Paper presented at 13th Annual Conference on the Training and Employment of the Paraprofessional Workforce in Education, Rehabilitation and Related Fields, Albuquerque, NM.

Marks, S., Schrader, C., & Levine, M. (1999). Paraeducator experiences in inclusive settings: Helping, hovering, or holding their own? *Exceptional Children, 65,* 315-328.

Minondo, S., Meyer, L. H., & Xin, J. F. (2001). The role and responsibilities of teaching assistants in inclusive education: What's appropriate? *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 26*(2), 114-119.

Morgan, B. (1997). *The S_____ word: What teachers consider important in the supervision of paraeducators.* Paper presented at the 16th Annual Conference of the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services.

Mueller, P. H. (1997, April). The Vermont paraeducator survey. *Paraeducator Newsletter,* pp. 16. No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002).

Nunez, M., & Fernandez, M. R. (2006). Collaborative recruitment of diverse teachers for the long haul—TEAMS: Teacher education for the advancement of a multicultural society; innovative practices. *Multicultural Education, 14*(2), 14.

Parsons, M. B., & Reid, D. H. (1999). Training basic teaching skills to paraeducators of students with severe disabilities: A one-day program. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 31*(4), 48-54.

Passaro, P. D., Pickett, A. L., Latham, G. & HongBo, W.(1991). *The training and support needs of paraprofessionals in rural special education settings.* Unpublished report. Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center, Utah State University, Logan.

Pearman, E. L., Suhr, D., & Gibson, F. (1993). *Colorado system of personnel development needs assessment: Paraprofessionals.* Denver: Colorado Department of Education.

Pickett, A. L. (2008). Roles and responsibilities of paraeducators working with learners with developmental disabilities: "Translating research into practice. In H. Parette & G. R. Peterson-Karlan (Eds). Research-based practices in developmental disabilities (2nd ed., pp. 501-520). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Pickett, A. L. (2003). Paraeducators in educational settings: Framing the issues. In A. L. Pickett & K. Gerlach (Eds.) *Supervising paraeducators in educational settings: A team approach* (2ⁿᵈ ed.) (pp. 1-44). Austin, TX: PRO-ED.

Pickett, A.L., Gerlach, K., Morgan, R., Likins, M., & Wallace, T. (2007). *Paraeducators in schools: Strengthening the educational team* . Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Pickett, A. L., Likins, M., & Wallace, T. (2003). *The employment and preparation of paraeducators, the state of the art – 2003.* Utah: The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals.

P. L. 107-110, 107ᵗʰ Cong., (2001) (enacted) No Child Left Behind Act. Retrieved from: http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA02/

Riggs, C. G. (2001). Ask the paraprofessionals: What are your training needs? *Teaching Exceptional Children, 33*(3), 78–83.

Riggs, C. G., & Mueller, P. H. (2001). Employment and utilization of paraeducators in inclusive settings. *The Journal of Special Education, 35*(1), 54-62.

Rueda, R., & Genzuk, M. (2007). Sociocultural scaffolding as a means towards academic self-regulation: Paraeducators as cultural brokers. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 40*(3), 1-8.

Rueda, R. S., & Monzo, L. D. (2000). *Apprenticeship for teaching: Professional development issues surrounding the collaborative relationship between teaches and paraeducators.* Santa Cruz, CA: University of California, Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence.

Rueda, R., Monzo, L. D., & Higareda, I. (2004). Appropriating the sociocultural resources of Latino paraeducators for effective instruction with Latino students: Promise and problems. *Urban Education, 39*(1), 52-90.

Sandoval-Lucero, E. M. (2004). *The role of self-efficacy in paraeducators' career decisions.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado at Denver.

Sandoval-Lucero, E. (2006). Recruiting paraeducators into bilingual teaching roles: The importance of support, supervision, and self-efficacy. *Bilingual Research Journal, 30*(1) 195-218.

Sandoval-Lucero, E. (2009). *The Role of self-efficacy in paraeducators career decisions: The impact of effective supervision and support.* Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag

U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). *Tables of instructional aides 1997-98 & 2007-08 by state* [Data file]. Available from http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/bat

ValValenciana, C., Morin, J. A., & Morales, R.S. (2005). Meeting the challenge: Building university–school district partnership for a successful career ladder program for teachers of English Learners. *Action in Teacher Education, 27*(1), 10.

Villegas, A. M., & Clewell, B. C. (1998) Increasing the number of teachers of color for urban schools, lessons from the pathways national evaluation. *Education and Urban Society, 31*(1), 42-61.

Villegas, A.M. & Davis, D. E. (2007). Approaches to diversifying the teaching force: Attending to issues of recruitment, preparation, and retention. *Teacher Education Quarterly 24* (4), 137-147.

Wadsworth, D. E., & Knight, D. (1996). Paraprofessionals: the bridge to successful inclusion. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 31*(3), 166-171.

Wallace, T., Shin, J., Bartholomay, T., & Stahl, B. (2001). Knowledge and skills for teachers supervising the work of paraprofessionals. *Exceptional Children, 67*(4), 520-533.