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Supervising Paraprofessionals: A Survey of Teacher Practices

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This study examined the practices of special education teachers with responsibility for the supervision of paraprofessionals. Teachers reported little preservice or inservice preparation for supervising; "real-life experience" was the primary source of their supervision knowledge. Few teachers participated in selecting or hiring the paraprofessional they supervised, although more than half of the respondents indicated that they held primary responsibility for evaluating the performance of paraprofessionals. Teachers provided oral instructions to paraprofessionals rather than written plans. The oral instructions consisted of directions about guiding students' skills practice and suggestions for behavior management. Few teachers held regularly scheduled, sit-down meetings with paraprofessionals. Substantial overlap of tasks and duties was reported. However, paraprofessionals assumed primary responsibility for the personal care of students and for playground supervision. Teachers maintained primary responsibility for determining goals and objectives of the Individualized Education Program (IEP), informing parents, attending IEP meetings, and planning lessons. The remaining tasks, including many involving instruction, were equally shared. Findings demonstrated that teachers' supervision methods vary somewhat from recommended supervisory practices and support the call for supervisory training in preservice and inservice special education programs.

For many years, paraprofessionals have been employed to provide assistance in special education programs, and special education teachers have held de facto responsibility for their supervision (Alexander, 1987; French & Pickett, 1997; Pickett, 1980, 1986, 1989; Vasa, Steckelberg, & Ulrich-Ronning, 1982). There is some agreement that paraprofessionals perform their duties most effectively when they are appropriately supervised (Blalock, 1984; Boomer, 1980), when their roles are clearly defined (Blalock, 1991; Lindsey, 1983), when they are trained for assigned tasks (Courson & Heward, 1988; Frank, Keith, & Steil, 1988), and when they participate in regularly scheduled planning meetings (Miramontes, 1990; Pickett, Vasa, & Steckelberg, 1993).

There is substantial agreement in the literature that teachers should assign specific tasks, deliver on-the-job training, hold planning meetings, design instructional plans, and direct and monitor the day-to-day activities of the paraprofessional (Doyle, 1997; French, 1998, 1999; French & Pickett, 1997; May & Marozas, 1986; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities [NJCLD], 1999). In fact, the NJCLD posited that teachers who "fail to provide appropriate supervision of paraprofessionals may be in violation of their profession's code of ethics" (p. 25).

In various opinion-based articles, authors have made recommendations to teachers about supervisory practices. For example, Alexander (1987) recommended that teachers provide orientation to new paraprofessionals, provide on-the-job training, hold meetings, and plan for paraprofessionals. Boomer (1980) recommended that teachers do the planning, scheduling, directing, and delegating of tasks to paraprofessionals. Boomer also provided some sample formats for planning. Heller (1997) discussed the ethics of hiring practices, evaluation of school personnel, and the delineation of roles. Pickett et al. (1993) recommended planning, scheduling, and delegation practices. French (1999) recommended that teachers maintain responsibility for assessing students, planning for instruction that addresses Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, prescribing the characteristics of the learning environment, and directing the work of paraprofessionals.

In spite of widespread agreement that the supervisory role is appropriate and even though teachers have had these responsibilities for many years, preservice teacher training regarding the supervision of paraprofessionals is, and always has been, conspicuously absent in special and general education certification or endorsement programs (Lindeman & Beegle, 1988; Marozas, 1984; May & Marozas, 1986; Morgan, 1997; Salzberg & Morgan, 1995). Moreover, there is little in the literature that provides a picture of what teachers currently are doing about supervision, considering the lack of formal preparation. A thorough review of the literature reveals only

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two unpublished reports and two published studies of teacher perceptions and practices. In an unpublished research report, Adams (1990) used frequency of meetings as the single indicator of quality of supervision and concluded that frequency of meetings was high among the population she surveyed. Morgan (1997) reported that formal education and inservice training predicted self-perceived adequacy of supervisory skill but that other factors such as length of teaching experience did not. Harrington and Mitchelson (1987) reported that teachers did not want to supervise. In addition, they reported that teachers valued the presence of paraprofessionals and that paraprofessionals provided individualized instruction, clerical and logistical support, classroom continuity, emotional support to teachers, and important community linkage. French (1998) also concluded that teachers were reluctant to supervise, because they failed to provide written plans or to hold sit-down meetings, yet were dissatisfied with the communications between the paraprofessionals and themselves. In that study, teachers reported that they had scheduled no time to plan or meet and that they preferred paraprofessionals who were able to work without direction or supervision. The scant literature base gives rise to more questions than answers about teacher practices. For example, what role do teachers currently play in the selection and hiring of the person they supervise? What decisions do they make regarding the assignment of tasks to paraeducators? How do they plan for paraprofessionals? What on-the-job training do they provide and how do they provide such training? How do they evaluate the work paraprofessionals perform? What kinds of problems or successes do they experience in their interactions with paraprofessionals?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain information about the practices of special education teachers as they supervise paraprofessionals and to compare those findings to the recommendations in the literature. Five research questions framed the development of the instrument, the data collection, and the data analysis:

1. To what extent do special education teachers supervise paraprofessionals?
2. How have they learned to supervise as they do? What effect does training to supervise have on practice?
3. To what extent are teachers involved in selecting paraprofessionals, planning for them, meeting with them, training them, and evaluating them?
4. What tasks are most frequently assigned to paraprofessionals, and how are tasks shared or distributed between teachers and paraprofessionals?
5. To what extent are teachers satisfied with the amount and quality of paraprofessional assistance?

Method

Instrument Development

A questionnaire consisting of 28 items, some of which had multiple parts, was designed for this study. The content emerged from three sources. First, questions were designed to explore teachers' use of practices recommended in the literature discussed previously. Second, findings of a previous pilot study (French, 1998) led to questions about the nature and content of plans; the frequency, length, scheduling, and content of meetings; and the nature of on-the-job training. Third, questions about the assignment of tasks were based on the results of a prior time/activity pilot study (French, 1998) and on various state or regional training needs assessments (e.g., Passaro, Pickett, Latham, & HongBo, 1991).

A draft of the questionnaire was reviewed by 14 national experts, who established content validity. It was then pilot-tested by a group of 23 special education teachers representing 11 school districts in the Denver metropolitan area, all of whom were enrolled in a graduate-level special education course. The teachers answered the items, then provided written comments on the clarity of items, terms, and instrument length and made suggestions for improvements. The final instrument reflected the recommendations of both the expert panel and the pilot test group.

Instrument Content

The first seven items requested background information about the respondents. Question 8 asked, "How many paraprofessionals do you supervise?" Respondents who did not supervise paraprofessionals were instructed to stop there and submit the questionnaire.

Items 9 through 13 documented assigned paraprofessional hours per week, perceived adequacy of time allotments, changes of paraprofessional time over the years, length of experience teachers had in supervising paraprofessionals, and the source of their knowledge about how to supervise. Items 14 through 17 documented the amount of influence teachers held in the hiring and evaluation processes, the extent to which paraprofessional evaluations were based on actual job performance, and the importance of various reasons for paraprofessional employment. Item 18 listed 30 possible tasks that a paraprofessional might perform. Teachers were asked to indicate who held primary responsibility for each task according to the following scale: 1 = The paraprofessional assumes exclusive responsibility for this entire task; 2 = We share it, but the paraprofessional does most of it; 3 = We share it equally; 4 = We share it, but I do most of it; 5 = I maintain exclusive

responsibility for this entire task; and N/A = This task is irrelevant to my program.

Items 19 through 26 documented aspects of meeting, planning, and on-the-job training. Finally, items 27 and 28 addressed problematic and favorable circumstances related to teachers' work with paraprofessionals.

Sample

The questionnaire was mailed to 447 special education teachers in Colorado, selected through a stratified, systematic sampling procedure by geographic region (rural, outlying city, suburban, and urban) and by size of school (number of faculty) from a population of kindergarten through 12th grade special education teachers employed in public schools in Colorado in the 1997–1998 school year. After one follow-up mailing, 321 teachers returned completed questionnaires, for a return rate of 71.8%. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of goodness-of-fit was used to compare the geographic and school-size distributions of respondents to those of the selected sample. No significant differences were found between the selected sample and the respondents in terms of geographic distribution or size of school.

Results

Respondents

Education and Experience. The 321 respondents were highly experienced and educated. Nearly 88% held master's degrees, 1% held a PhD or EdD, and 62% had been teaching 11 or more years. About 75% of the respondents supervised paraprofessionals. The reported experience of teachers who supervised paraprofessionals and those who did not showed no significant differences.

Special Education Endorsements. About 65% of the respondents earned their special education endorsements prior to 1989, when changes in state licensure standards required coursework in consultation and collaboration for the first time. Eight respondents (2.5%) held the newer "Profound Needs" certificate—the only state certificate for which the state standards mention paraprofessional supervision.

A little over 4% of the respondents held no certification and were teaching under temporary teaching permits. Three were first-year teachers. Nearly two thirds of the uncertified teachers supervised paraprofessionals, including two of the first-year teachers.

Type of Program. Nearly half of the respondents (46.1%) worked in resource programs, and 67.2% worked with students with learning disabilities. About 10% worked with students with developmental disabilities, about 6% with students with vision or hearing impairments, 8.4% with students with multiple disabilities, and 7.5% with students with emotional disorders. In Colorado, students are more likely to be grouped by educational need than by disability label. Although the definitions are somewhat subjective, the categories "mild/moderate," "severe," and "profound" are familiar to teachers because they are commonly used in the state, and special education endorsements are named accordingly. No definitions were provided on the instrument, nor are exact definitions of the terms available to teachers in writing elsewhere. Teachers were, nevertheless, able to identify the educational need level of the largest portion of their caseload. About 77% of the respondents indicated that they worked primarily with students whose educational needs were mild to moderate, 20.2% reported working with students with severe needs, and 2.5% worked with students with profound needs. These proportions are consistent with state identification and placement data.

Extent of Paraprofessional Supervision Responsibilities

Eighty-one respondents (about 25% of the total respondents) reported they did not supervise a paraprofessional and, as directed, submitted their survey without responding to subsequent questions about supervision of paraprofessionals. Of the remaining 240 respondents, 51.6% reported that they supervised a single paraprofessional, 32.5% reported supervising 2 paraprofessionals, 11.3% reported supervising 3 paraprofessionals, 2.1% supervised 4 paraprofessionals, and 2.5% supervised 4 or more paraprofessionals. These findings were then further examined to determine whether differences in the extent of supervision existed among teachers with different caseload sizes or among those who worked with students with different levels of need or disability labels.

Extent of Supervision of Paraprofessionals by Size of Caseload. Table 1 shows the distribution of paraprofessionals by size of caseload. Teachers with the largest caseloads supervised slightly fewer paraprofessionals on average. Teachers who had caseloads of up to 20 students supervised 165 paraprofessionals collectively, an average of 1.72 paraprofessionals per teacher. Similarly, teachers who had caseloads between 21 and 30 supervised 152 paraprofessionals collectively, an average of 1.77 paraprofessionals per teacher. Those with caseloads between 31 and 40 supervised 58 paraprofessionals, an average of 1.61 paraprofessionals per teacher, and teachers whose caseloads were greater than 41 supervised only 33 paraprofessionals collectively, an average of 1.65 paraprofessionals per teacher.

Teachers with the largest caseloads did not supervise the highest number of paraprofessionals, nor did those with the smallest caseloads. In fact, most of the teachers who supervised 4 or more paraprofessionals had caseloads between 21 and 40.

Table 2 shows the number of paraprofessionals supervised by teachers who work with students with different need

TABLE 1. Number of Paraprofessionals Supervised by Caseload Size

	Number of paraprofessionals				
Caseload	1	2	3	4	5 or more
Fewer than 20 (n = 96)	45.8%	38.5%	13.5%	2.1%	0
21–30 (n = 86)	52.3%	30.2%	10.5%	2.3%	4.7%
31–40 (n = 36)	69.4%	13.9%	8.3%	2.8%	5.6%
41 or more (n = 20)	45.0%	45.0%	10%	0	0

TABLE 2. Number of Paraprofessionals Supervised by Student Needs

	Number of paraprofessionals				
Student needs	1	2	3	4	5 or more
Mild/Moderate (n = 168)	55.0%	32.0%	10.0%	0.6%	2.3%
Severe (n = 64)	48.0%	34.0%	9.0%	4.6%	3.4%
Profound (n = 8)	12.5%	25.0%	50.0%	12.5%	0

levels. Most of the teachers of students with profound needs supervised multiple (2–4) paraprofessionals.

Number of Paraprofessionals by Disability Label. Of the 240 teachers (who collectively supervised more than 400 paraprofessionals), 63% served students with learning disabilities, and they supervised about 60% of the total reported number of paraprofessionals. About 13% taught students with mental retardation, and they supervised about 13.5% of the total number of paraprofessionals. About 9.6% taught students with multiple disabilities, and they supervised nearly 14% of the reported number of paraprofessionals. Teachers of students with other disability labels (vision impairments, hearing impairments, speech/language disorders, and emotional/ behavior disorders) made up the remaining 14.4% of the respondents, but they supervised only slightly more than 12% of the total reported number of paraprofessionals. Proportionally, teachers who work with students with multiple disabilities supervised the most paraprofessionals.

Allocation of Paraprofessional Time. Of the 240 teachers who supervised one or more paraprofessionals, 29.2% reported that the paraprofessional worked 20 hours or less per week, whereas 42.8% reported that the paraprofessional worked 21 to 40 hours per week. Nearly 28% reported 41 or more hours per week of paraprofessional assistance, combining the hours of multiple paraprofessionals.

Perceptions of Amount of Time Allocated. About 67% of the respondents judged the paraprofessional time allotment as just about right, and 30.5% felt it was too little. Nearly 2% reported that they were allotted "more than enough" paraprofessional assistance. About 37% of respondents reported that paraprofessional hours had increased over the past 10 years, and an equal number reported it had stayed the same. Only 52 (21.4%) reported that paraprofessional time had decreased.

TABLE 3. Reasons for Having Paraprofessional Assistance

	Very or crucially important	
Reason (n responses to item)	n	%
Assist individual students (235)	192	81.7
Assist general education teacher with students included in classrooms (237)	168	70.9
Assist special education teacher (234)	212	90.6
Provide role model for students (236)	55	23.5
Public relations with community (238)	53	22.5

Reasons for Having Paraprofessionals. Teachers were asked to rate five possible reasons for employing paraprofessionals using a scale ranging from *not important* to *crucially important*. Table 3 shows the five possible choices and the percentages of respondents who rated each choice as *very* or *crucially important*. Instructional assistance was of greatest importance. Few (22.5%) considered the public relations aspect of the paraprofessional's job very important, and even fewer (23.5%) considered that the paraprofessional's serving as a role model for students was very important.

Experience and Preparation for Supervising

About 90% of teachers who earned special education endorsements during or before 1989 supervised paraprofession-

als. About 85% of those who earned special education endorsements during and after 1990 supervised as well, and about 88% of teachers who held no special education endorsements also supervised one or more paraprofessionals. All of the teachers who worked in self-contained classrooms, and more than 94% of those who reported that their primary job was "consulting teacher," supervised one or more paraprofessionals. About 76% of teachers who reported that they were co-teaching with general education teachers and about 61% of teachers in resource programs supervised paraprofessionals.

Nearly 65% of respondents reported 1 to 10 years of experience supervising paraprofessionals, and 29% reported more than 11 years of paraprofessional supervision. More than 88% of those who supervised paraprofessionals reported that "real-life experience" served as the primary source of their knowledge and ability to supervise paraprofessionals, rather than inservice training, college courses, or help from administrators. A slightly higher percentage (89.7%) of teachers who earned endorsements during or before 1989 reported real-life experience as the primary source of knowledge, and a slightly lower percentage (85.1%) of teachers who earned endorsements during or after 1990 reported real-life experience as the primary source. The differences are insignificant.

Planning, Meetings, On-the-Job Training

Planning. To gain information about the nature of planning and of the plans special education teachers provided to paraprofessionals, teachers rated the extent to which each of six possible situations described the nature of their planning for paraprofessionals. The response options were not mutually exclusive, so an individual rated each one on a scale ranging from *never* to *very often*. Table 4 presents the number and percentage of *very often* responses to each item. About a third of the teachers said that very often no one plans, that the paraprofessional follows along and gets oral instructions as they work together throughout the day or ahead of time. Less than a third said that they planned together. Less than 19% reported that they created written plans that they provided to the paraprofessional. Only 13% said that other teachers planned for paraprofessionals.

The next item asked respondents to rate the extent to which 9 different types of information were included in their plans as they described them in the previous question. Table 5 contains the nine types of information that might be included in plans, and the number and percentage of teachers who reported including them. Only 5 content items were reported as being included *very often* by more than half of the respondents. The items reported as most frequently included were "directions for how to do the activity or lesson," "how to manage behavior," "how to guide students' practice," "purpose of the lesson," and "anticipated problems," in that order.

Moreover, for every content item at least a few respondents said that they *never* or *rarely* included it in their plans. "IEP goals," "questions to ask students," and "how to document student performance" were the three items most likely to be left out of plans.

Meetings. Of the 227 individuals who responded to the question regarding frequency of formal sit-down meetings, 25% (n = 57) reported that they "never" met with paraprofessionals, leaving 170 teachers who met with paraprofessionals on at least some occasions. Of the 170 respondents who met with paraprofessionals, 11.2% (n = 19) met 4 to 5 times per year, 22.4% (n = 38) met 10 times per year, 51.8% (n = 88) met once a week, and 14.7% (n = 25) met daily with paraprofessionals.

Reports of the duration of formal sit-down meetings ranged from "less than 15 minutes" (23.3%), "15 to 30 minutes" (43.6%), "30 to 45 minutes" (23.3%), to "more than 45 minutes" (9.3%). Only 168 of the 170 respondents who reported meetings with paraprofessionals completed the question regarding when they met. "Morning—before students arrive" was the most frequently selected response (n = 44, 26.2%); "during class" was the least frequently reported (n = 10, 5.9%). The re-

TABLE 4. Nature of Planning

Item	Total responses to item	"Very often" responses (n)	"Very often" responses (%)
No one plans—paraprofessional follows along	225	74	32.9
Another teacher plans	230	30	13.0
Give oral instructions as we go	232	77	33.2
Plan alone or give oral instructions ahead	226	79	35.0
Plan alone or give written plan to paraprofessional	228	43	18.9
We sit down together to plan	231	67	29.0

TABLE 5. Information Contained in Plans

Type of information	Extent to which information is included in plans: Never/Rarely *n*	Never/Rarely %	Sometimes *n*	Sometimes %	Very often *n*	Very often %	Total item responses
IEP goals	57	24.7	75	32.5	99	42.9	231
Purpose or rationale of lesson or activity	27	11.8	83	36.2	119	52.0	229
Directions for how to do activity or lesson	13	5.8	71	31.2	145	63.3	228
Directions for how to guide student practice	20	8.8	87	38.2	121	53.1	227
Questions to ask students	57	25.0	98	43.0	73	32.0	228
Types of reinforcers or rewards to use	33	14.5	90	39.6	104	45.8	227
Anticipated issues or problems for students	19	8.3	93	40.8	116	50.9	228
How to manage behavior	18	7.9	83	36.6	126	55.5	227
How to document student performance	44	19.4	85	37.4	98	43.2	227

TABLE 6. Personal Attention to Students

Task/Student need	Paraeducator (%)	Shared equally (%)	Teacher (%)	Not applicable (%)
Dressing/Changing clothes				
M/M	11.4	10.8	0	77.7
Severe	23.5	20.3	0	56.3
Profound	25.0	37.5	0	37.5
Eating/Feeding				
M/M	16.2	6.0	4.3	76.0
Severe	23.5	14.1	3.1	59.4
Profound	12.5	50.0	0	37.5
Toileting/Diapers				
M/M	16.2	10.8	2.4	70.7
Severe	29.7	17.2	4.7	48.4
Profound	25.0	37.5	0	37.5
Mobility				
M/M	27.9	23.6	2.4	46.1
Severe	31.2	42.2	4.7	21.9
Profound	37.5	50.0	0	12.5
Grooming, cleanliness				
M/M	15.6	18.7	3.0	62.7
Severe	25.0	34.4	6.3	34.4
Profound	25.0	37.5	0	37.5
Health needs(e.g., suctioning)				
M/M	1.2	5.4	.6	92.8
Severe	7.8	14.1	3.2	75.0
Profound	25.0	37.5	0	37.5

Note. M/M = Mild/Moderate. $N = 238$. M/M $n = 166$. Severe $n = 64$. Profound $n = 8$.

TABLE 7. Planning for Instruction

Task/Student need	Paraeducator (%)	Shared equally (%)	Teacher (%)	Not applicable (%)
Plan small group or individual lessons				
M/M	9.6	12.6	74.2	3.6
Severe	3.1	10.9	81.3	4.7
Profound	0	0	100.0	0
Determine goals or objectives for IEP				
M/M	1.2	1.8	88.6	8.4
Severe	0	3.1	82.9	14.1
Profound	0	0	100.0	0
Decide on behavior management strategies				
M/M	2.4	13.9	80.2	3.6
Severe	0	12.5	81.3	6.3
Profound	0	50.0	50.0	0

Note. M/M = Mild/Moderate. $N = 239$. M/M $n = 167$. Severe $n = 64$. Profound $n = 8$.

TABLE 8. Activity Preparation and Follow–up and General Supervision

Task/Student need	Paraeducator (%)	Shared equally (%)	Teacher (%)	Not applicable (%)
Set up/clean up for a lesson				
M/M	16.2	39.5	36.6	7.8
Severe	9.4	51.6	35.9	3.1
Profound	25.0	25.0	50.0	0
Construct instructional materials				
M/M	18.7	34.9	40.9	5.4
Severe	15.7	50.0	31.3	3.1
Profound	25.0	25.0	50.0	0
Tape record stories, lessons, assignments				
M/M	20.5	18.1	35.0	26.5
Severe	14.3	27.0	27.0	31.7
Profound	12.5	12.5	50.0	25.0
Supervise lunchroom, bus, playground activities				
M/M	34.3	19.9	13.8	31.9
Severe	45.3	28.1	9.4	17.2
Profound	50.0	37.5	12.5	0
Observe, chart student behavior in or out of classroom				
M/M	15.0	37.7	33.6	13.8
Severe	9.4	45.3	34.3	11.0
Profound	12.5	50.0	37.5	0

Note. M/M = Mild/Moderate. $N = 240$. M/M $n = 167$. Severe $n = 64$. Profound $n = 8$.

sponses were fairly evenly distributed across the remaining five choices of "after school" ($n = 24$, 14.3%), "planning period" ($n = 32$, 19.0%), "break time" ($n = 29$, 17.3%), "lunch time" ($n = 13$, 7.7%), and "special planning days" ($n = 16$, 9.5%). This question did not solicit information about *how* teachers arranged to meet in the morning or after school. Among the possibilities are that these paraprofessionals get paid to come in before students arrive or to stay after students leave, use flexible scheduling to arrange an early arrival or late stay, or simply work those hours without pay.

On-the-job training. When teachers were asked how often they addressed seven particular topics in meetings, 76.3% indicated that "teaching techniques" were addressed *often* or *always*. "Behavior management" came in second, with 74.7% of the respondents reporting that they *often* or *always* included it. "Classroom rules" was a topic addressed *often* or *always* by 58.1% of respondents. The topic "stress and time management" was addressed by 36.2%, followed by "parent interactions" (35%), and "health and safety procedures" (31.2%). The topic least discussed in meetings was "clarifying roles and responsibilities between teacher and paraprofessional," with only 24.1% reporting that they *often* or *always* included it as a topic of discussion.

The most frequently used method for providing training was "telling" (89.9%), followed by "giving feedback on performance" (83.6%). Few teachers maintained records or documented the training provided to paraprofessionals; a few (8.8%) kept a form on file that specified dates and topics covered. Only 4.4% indicated they kept the agendas and minutes of meetings that documented training topics.

Hiring and Evaluation

Hiring. Slightly more than 21% of teachers who supervised reported having no influence in the hiring process, and another 11.4% reported having minimal influence. Thus, about one third of these teachers' voices were not heard in the hiring process. However, 50% reported that they did have some influence, and 17.4% reported having complete control over the selection process.

Evaluation. About half (56.6%) of the teachers assumed primary responsibility for the year-end evaluation of paraprofessionals. Of these, about half said that they did the evaluation but the principal signed the official form. More than 73% reported that paraprofessionals' evaluations were based "to a great extent" on their actual job performance.

Task Responsibilities

Respondents used a 5-point scale to indicate how they preferred to accomplish tasks in their program; response options ranged from having the paraprofessional assume full responsibility for the task to having the teacher maintain full responsibility. A "not applicable (N/A)" response was allowed for tasks irrelevant to their program.

Tables 6 through 11 list the specific items associated with each task category and show the percentage of respondents who selected each rating, organized by the level of need of their students. In Table 6, respondents indicated that most of the tasks associated with the task category "personal attention to students" were performed primarily by paraprofessionals or shared equally. Very few teachers reported that they held primary or exclusive responsibility for performing personal attention tasks. Differences across need levels of students were small.

On the other hand, for the tasks associated with "planning for instruction" (see Table 8), most teachers planned instruction, determined goals, and decided behavior management strategies themselves. However, 3 individuals reported that paraprofessionals assumed exclusive responsibility for planning small group or individual lessons, and an additional 15 reported that paraprofessionals did most of the planning for small group or individual lessons.

The data in Table 8 indicate that paraprofessionals performed lunchroom, bus, and playground supervision to a greater extent than teachers but that all the other tasks remained largely within the purview of teachers.

Teachers also maintained responsibility for most of the tasks associated with "parent and community relations" (see Table 9), although some sharing of responsibility for public relations is evident. One difference in the pattern is that 25% of paraprofessionals who served students with profound needs assumed the task responsibility of informing parents of meetings.

Taking daily attendance, correcting papers, and organizing classroom materials and supplies (see Table 10) are tasks that are fairly evenly distributed. However, teachers of students with profound needs reported that they maintained primary or exclusive responsibility for consulting with other professionals about the child. Teachers reported that they maintained primary responsibility for attending IEP meetings, although a few shared the responsibility.

Table 11, "instructional delivery," indicates that instructional tasks were very evenly distributed, with few exceptions.

Problematic and Favorable Circumstances

Tables 12 and 13 show the percentages of teachers who reported the frequency of problematic and favorable circumstances, respectively. Teachers reported many more benefits and favorable circumstances than problems. Although some untenable situations might have existed because of personality differences, inappropriate behavior, poor performance, or initiative problems, results showed that teachers viewed the problems as minimal and emphasized the contributions of paraprofessionals. These findings showed that paraprofessionals largely met or exceeded expectations, provided valuable services to students, contributed positively to the building climate, and contributed many skills and talents to the school.

Discussion

The finding that about 75% of special education teachers supervise paraprofessionals is similar to that of Morgan (1997), who, in a survey of 274 teachers in Utah, found that 82% were supervising one or more paraprofessionals. In spite of the professional maturity and high education level of the respondents in this study, real-life experience was the primary source of their knowledge about supervising paraprofessionals, rather than any type of formal preparation. This, too, is comparable

TABLE 9. Parent and Community Relations

Task/Student need	Paraeducator (%)	Shared equally (%)	Teacher (%)	Not applicable (%)
Inform parents of meetings				
M/M	12.6	6.6	73.5	7.2
Severe	3.2	12.5	76.6	7.8
Profound	25.0	0	62.5	12.5
Maintain good relations with parents, community				
M/M	4.8	32.7	55.7	6.7
Severe	0	29.7	65.7	4.7
Profound	0	25.0	75.0	0
Write progress reports to parents				
M/M	1.8	5.4	83.9	9.0
Severe	0	6.3	87.5	6.3
Profound	0	0	75.0	25.0
Call parents regarding child's progress, behavior				
M/M	1.2	5.4	86.9	6.6
Severe	1.6	7.8	86.0	4.7
Profound	0	0	87.5	12.5
Participate with teachers in parent conferences				
M/M	0.6	8.4	81.9	9.0
Severe	0	7.8	90.7	1.6
Profound	0	0	75.0	25.0

Note. M/M = Mild/Moderate. $N = 238$. M/M $n = 166$. Severe $n = 64$. Profound $n = 8$.

TABLE 10. Critical and Other

Task/Student need	Paraeducator (%)	Shared equally (%)	Teacher (%)	Not applicable (%)
Keep daily attendance				
M/M	12.0	21.7	35.5	30.7
Severe	23.4	12.5	42.2	21.9
Profound	25.0	0	62.5	12.5
Correct papers				
M/M	16.2	57.9	16.9	9.0
Severe	9.4	64.1	15.6	10.9
Profound	37.5	12.5	25.0	25.0
Organize classroom supplies, materials				
M/M	23.5	55.5	17.5	3.6
Severe	6.3	75.0	18.7	0
Profound	25.0	75.0	0	0
Consult with other professional regarding child's problem				
M/M	1.2	44.5	47.6	6.6
Severe	1.6	43.8	50.0	4.7
Profound	0	37.5	50.0	12.5
Attend IEP meetings				
M/M	0	19.3	70.5	10.2
Severe	0	29.7	65.6	4.7
Profound	0	37.5	50.0	12.5

Note. M/M = Mild/Moderate. IEP = Individualized Education Program. $N = 240$. M/M $n = 166$. Severe $n = 64$. Profound $n = 8$.

TABLE 11. Instructional Delivery

Task/Student need	Paraeducator (%)	Shared equally (%)	Teacher (%)	Not applicable (%)
Drill and practice				
M/M	23.4	49.4	22.9	4.2
Severe	10.9	68.8	20.3	0
Profound	28.6	57.1	14.3	0
Reading tests, directions				
M/M	19.2	48.8	28.9	3.0
Severe	6.3	62.5	21.9	9.4
Profound	14.3	57.1	14.3	14.3
Teach lesson to small group				
M/M	9.6	45.2	41.5	3.6
Severe	4.7	56.3	39.1	0
Profound	0	42.9	42.9	14.3
Help with workbooks, assignments				
M/M	17.6	61.2	20.0	1.2
Severe	4.7	71.9	20.3	3.1
Profound	0	71.4	14.3	14.3
Select library books, read to students				
M/M	19.4	58.2	18.1	4.2
Severe	11.1	63.5	17.5	7.9
Profound	0	71.4	28.6	0
Community-based instruction				
M/M	11.2	17.5	18.6	53.6
Severe	3.2	41.3	20.6	34.9
Profound	14.3	42.9	14.3	28.6

Note. M/M = Mild/Moderate. $N = 240$. M/M $n = 166$. Severe $n = 64$. Profound $n = 8$.

TABLE 12. Problematic Circumstances

Circumstances	Often/Always %
Personality differences	8.2
Inappropriate interactions with students	8.4
Takes over inappropriately	9.8
Unmotivated to assigned work	4.9
Does tasks incorrectly; doesn't follow directions	3.1
Doesn't self-initiate	8.0

Note. $N = 228$.

TABLE 13. Favorable Circumstances

Circumstances	Often/Always %
Para meets or exceeds expectations	87.3
Para provides valuable services to students	92.9
Parents view para as positive role model	87.2
Para provides companionship, stress relief	80.5
Para contributes positively to building climate	92.1
Para provides good link to local community	73.1
Para contributes personal skills	69.0
Para seeks out learning opportunities	67.5

Note. $N = 228$.

to Morgan's findings in which 68% reported no formal preservice or inservice training. Morgan also found that higher educational levels as well as formal inservice preparation to supervise were highly correlated with self-perceived adequacy as a supervisor. Unlike Morgan's study, this study did not inquire as to the respondent's self-perceived adequacy as a supervisor. Therefore, self-perceptions of adequacy in this group of respondents is unknown.

Changes in Colorado's endorsement standards in 1989 apparently did little to change the preparation of teachers to supervise paraprofessionals. There were no differences in the reported sources of knowledge and ability to supervise among those who received endorsements before, during, or after 1989, nor was there a difference among individuals who held no endorsements. The report that real-life experience was the primary contributor to their knowledge and ability to super-

vise was consistent across those who earned endorsements more than 10 years ago, those who received more recent endorsements, and those who had no endorsement at all.

This study also identified some concerns about the practices employed by teachers and districts regarding paraprofessionals. First, with respect to the hiring or selection of paraprofessionals, about two thirds of the respondents were involved in some way in the process. Although there is only one citation in the "advice to teachers" literature suggesting that teachers should interview paraprofessionals (Boomer, 1980), it seems reasonable to involve teachers in selecting the persons with whom they will work so closely. This would be a relatively easy change to effect. With minimal preparation regarding the legal limitations on interview questions, every teacher who has supervisory responsibility for paraprofessionals could be part of the hiring process. In cases where the paraprofessional provides health-related services and intimate personal care for students with significant support needs, it also makes sense to include the school nurse as well as families in the hiring process.

Second, intuitive supervisory methods are apparent among teachers who reported that they have learned to supervise through real-life experience. Fifty-seven teachers reported that they never met with paraprofessionals, possibly indicating that their intuitive views of supervision do not include face-to-face contact, particularly if time constraints make it difficult. Yet, face-to-face contact seems basic to supervision, so basic that every major reference to the supervision of teachers from the late 1960s through the 1980s (e.g., Cogan, 1973; Flanders, 1976; Goldhammer, 1969; Goldhammer, Anderson, & Krajewski, 1980; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1979) refers to the first step of supervision as a face-to-face meeting. The supervision literature of the 1990s features collegial approaches and emphasizes the improvement of instruction as the purpose for supervision. Like the earlier literature, the 1990s supervision literature is based on face-to-face contact (e.g., Acheson & Gall, 1997; Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1990, 1995; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998; Goldhammer, Anderson, & Krajewski, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1992). If the supervision and professional development of teachers requires face-to-face meetings, it seems reasonable to expect that the supervision and professional development of paraprofessionals would require no less. Although it is possible to perform some supervisory functions (e.g., planning, delegation, communication) asynchronously (French, 1997), certain tasks, like providing job-specific orientation and on-the-job-training, can only be done face-to-face. Likewise, engaging in problem-solving processes and managing or resolving conflicts are most appropriately done face to face (French, 1997).

Another explanation for the lack of meetings is that there is no scheduled time to do so. In other studies, teachers have reported that there is little time for meetings because paraprofessionals are hourly employees who are assigned to work the same hours that students attend school (French, 1998; French & Chopra, 1999). Thus, no before-school or after-school times are available to meet. Apparently, some teachers figure out ways to work around the schedule limitations; others do not. Preparation in paraprofessional supervision should include information about how to establish and maintain a schedule that includes meeting time during the workday of the paraprofessional.

A third concern about the practices employed regarding paraprofessionals is that the majority of respondents reported that no one planned for the paraprofessional. Among those who did plan for the paraprofessional, the majority transmitted their plans orally. It is of some concern that paraprofessionals, who traditionally have little or no training, may be working without direction or with hastily constructed or easily misconstrued oral directions. This gives rise to a serious question about how teachers are able to ensure the delivery of the special education services required in the IEP.

Fourth, a related concern is the content of plans, whether provided orally or in writing. These findings show that fewer than half (43%) of the teachers regularly included IEP goals in their plans, and even fewer (42.7%) consistently included specifications for how paraprofessionals were to document student progress. Only slightly more than half (51.5%) included information about the purpose or rationale of the lesson or activity. Instructing the paraprofessional about the intended outcomes of the lesson or activity seems essential to program integrity. In fact, Ann G. Haggert Associates (1993) claimed, "In an inclusive environment, the paraprofessionals have a large responsibility in making sure that the goals and objectives outlined in a child's IEP are realized" (p. 1). One might ask how a paraprofessional would be able to make sure that goals and objectives are realized without knowledge of the goals, objectives, or purposes of the lesson.

Failure to instruct the paraprofessional about intended outcomes also raises some concern about how teachers are able to remain accountable for educational outcomes of students. If there is no written plan for services, no specification of outcomes to be addressed, no documentation that services were delivered, and no documentation of student performance, how do these teachers ensure the academic welfare of their students? How would the district defend the teacher's practices in a court of law, if contested? Finally, there is a question about how decisions are made for the provision of extended school year (ESY) services. If a paraprofessional provides instruction to a student on an ongoing basis without information about goals to be addressed, and has no system for documenting student performance, what data do teachers use to show regression or recoupment of skills when ESY decisions must be made? Considering that few paraprofessionals attend IEP meetings (French & Chopra, 1999), it also raises the question of how the teacher is able to report on student progress for those students who receive the majority of their services from paraprofessionals who do not document student progress or meet face-to-face with the teacher. Because the IEP goals are mandated to guide the instructional program, it seems that every service provider should know what they are and that teachers should be accountable for addressing them.

Since its inception, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has specified that special education students should receive their designated services from persons with the highest qualifications. Yet, these findings document that there are some paraprofessionals providing services with no written plans and with few formal sit-down contact meetings with the professionals who hold the highest qualifications and who have ultimate responsibility for the outcomes of the IEP. These findings are consistent with the work of others (Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999; Stahl & Lorenz, 1995) who found that paraprofessionals perceived that the responsibility for special education students was entirely in their hands, including planning lessons and supervising students. In fact, Marks et al. reported that paraprofessionals assumed that it was their responsibility to protect the classroom teacher from the student with disabilities.

A fifth concern raised by this study is that there were a few cases where tasks that are always inappropriate for paraprofessionals to assume were, in fact, permitted. For example, some teachers reported that paraprofessionals created their own plans, determined behavioral approaches for students, and consulted with other professionals about student needs. These types of planning and decision-making tasks are never appropriate for nonprofessionals and may compromise the integrity of the professional who permits it as well as the integrity of the program (Heller, 1997).

These practices might have emerged because of the dual lack of systematic policies in districts and the absence of preparation of teachers to supervise paraprofessionals. The lack of formal preparation to supervise has been shown in previous studies to be related to the reluctance of teachers to provide supervision (French, 1998). In this study, real-life experience was the primary source of knowledge about supervision for 88% of the respondents. For some, real-life experience and good common sense seem to lead to appropriate practice. For others, the supervisory practices they employ create legal, ethical, and liability concerns.

Overall, these findings suggest that teachers find many aspects of paraprofessional employment entirely satisfactory. However, teacher satisfaction with paraprofessional services is not enough. Providing services through inadequately prepared personnel who work with no written plan, no system of documenting student progress, and no regular meetings with professionals is inconsistent with the intent of the law. Those who allow such practices may be inadvertently inviting litigation and endangering the academic, social, and emotional welfare of students. If a student failed to meet IEP expectations, or if the health of a student were compromised, the argument could be made that the paraprofessional provided primary instruction or related services to the student without knowledge of the IEP goals, in the absence of direct guidance by the supervising professional, and without written plans. It could be argued that the combined effects of these circumstances jeopardized the instructional program for the student.

Limitations

There were several limitations of this study. The instrument did not ask about the assignment of paraprofessional time to the IEP of students or the educational level or training of paraprofessionals. Although the instrument inquired about the reasons for having paraprofessionals, it did not ask about stipulations that might have been placed on the hiring of the paraprofessional (e.g., hired as a one-to-one for a student or designated as a program paraprofessional), nor did it inquire about differences in planning or face-to-face meetings relative to the length of the relationship with a particular paraprofessional. These factors may affect a teacher's perception of what kind of plans or meetings are necessary. The instrument also did not address questions regarding the employment conditions of the paraprofessional that may be related to evaluation of job performance, or what the evaluations not based on job performance were measuring. It did not ask about self-perceived adequacy or skill in supervision. It also neglected to inquire about accountability for student outcomes—how teachers knew whether intended goals were reached, on what basis ESY decisions were made, or how teachers received feedback from paraprofessionals regarding student performance.

Recommendations

Although special education teachers have responded in ways that demonstrate their overall good sense about working with paraprofessionals, several recommendations emerge from these findings. First, special education teachers deserve to be part of the selection of paraprofessionals they supervise. Second, they deserve to be prepared to select, direct, train, monitor, evaluate, meet with, and otherwise supervise paraprofessionals. Finally, teachers deserve to have state and district guidelines as well as training on interview techniques, planning methods, meeting facilitation, providing on-the-job training, and distinguishing between tasks appropriately and inappropriately delegated to paraprofessionals. These data also lead to the recommendation that schools, colleges, and departments of education provide specific skills instruction to preservice special educators and that school districts provide specific skills instruction to inservice special education teachers supervising paraprofessionals.

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