



Involving Paraprofessionals in the Classroom for Students with Disabilities

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Schools in the United States have supported the idea of having paraprofessionals in the classroom for a very long time. Moreover, early researchers tried hard to find where the original idea of inclusion of paraprofessionals came from. Paraprofessionals, when they are available and when they have been trained to fit into the program, as well as paraprofessional teacher aides, are extremely important, and they should be chosen with the same care as the teacher supervisor and coordinator (Carlisle, 1973).

Paraprofessionals must get training before entering the classroom and dealing with students. Obviously, as Carlisle (1973) mentioned in his article was not such a degree of high quality training, because not every community or environment has a supply of people who have an educational background of experience in schools or the classroom.

Supporting and helping students in school is very important; in addition, supporting students with disabilities may need more attention. The literature highlights the importance of listening to students with disabilities, and including them in decisions about their own support (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005). There are many ways to help students with disabilities and improve their academic ability in the classroom. In this paper I will focus on one way to help and support students with disabilities in the classroom, which is involving a paraprofessional as a helper or as an assistant to the teacher.

Paraprofessionals can act as a protector from bullying, which presents a complicated area (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005). Also, some researchers and students apply another name for the paraprofessional, which is paraprofessional as a mother. One young man described how he felt about some of the paraprofessionals assigned to support him; it was not surprising that several students described paraprofessionals by using the term mother, because many of the paraprofessionals at schools are women (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005). Students felt that peers viewed their paraprofessionals favorably, but that promotion of socialization and peer networking may have been compromised, as they reported that they spent a majority of the school day interacting with the paraprofessional as opposed to other students (Tews & Lupart, 2008).

The questions that this study addresses are: What are the benefits for students and teachers of offering the assistance of paraprofessionals in the classroom? How can paraprofessionals be trained by using single subject method if they have not had any previous experience with students with disabilities?

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

Paraprofessional training is a huge support to students with disabilities, even when they are included in classes in general education classrooms. The paraprofessional can be perceived as a friend, teacher, protector from bullying and a mother for those students with disabilities. Since the inception of legislative acts such as No Child Left Behind (2001), paraprofessionals facilitating instruction in classroom settings are required to have a minimum of two years of college education, and they must meet rigorous standards of quality documented by state or

local assessments (Malmgren, Causton-Theoharis, & Trezek 2005). This training consists of many major activities to enhance perspective, establish the importance of interaction, and increase the paraprofessional's knowledge of strategies for facilitating peer interaction in the classroom, along with background about every disability (Malmgren, Causton-Theoharis, & Trezek, 2005). This means that paraprofessionals need to have training before they enter the classroom and deal with students with disabilities. Moreover, the first time the paraprofessional enters the classroom, it is necessary for professors or other experienced teachers to supervise paraprofessionals and to evaluate their performance and how they deal with students with disabilities.

Communication with paraprofessionals, planning and scheduling, instructional support, modeling for paraprofessionals, public relations, training, and management of paraprofessionals are all very important. All of these areas suggest that help skill areas could be used as a basis for developing training programs for teachers and other professionals responsible for directing the work of paraprofessionals in educational settings (Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). Some paraprofessionals stated the need to have training, which may account for the increased importance that paraprofessionals have assigned to the training subscale (Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001).

One way for the paraprofessional to work with students with disabilities besides training is to have at least a bachelor's certification in special education. Background and skills are important to the paraprofessional, because this affects students' outcomes. Clearly, training or bachelor's certification in special education can work hand in glove to meet that end.

Special educators' responsibility with regard to working with their paraprofessionals would be to ensure that pre-planning meetings occur, in order to help clarify roles and define learning goals for individual students (Jones, 2012). One pre-plan that could help a paraprofessional plan for inclusive classes to help students with disabilities is attracting and retaining paraprofessionals who have experienced productive levels of job satisfaction, which is a very important part of building the continuity of schools to support students with disabilities (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001).

METHOD

Participants

There will be two paraprofessionals with high school degrees; neither has much experience teaching students with disabilities. They both work as paraprofessionals at an elementary school, because they want to make money to complete their education degree after high school. They both found full time work as a paraprofessional at the elementary school at the third grade level. In fact, they did not have experience before working with students with disabilities. On their first day at school, both received instructions from the main teacher in the classroom and they observed and helped in the first couple of days. The main teacher planned to give them a training program at the special education center so they could get more knowledge and learn strategies such as for math, reading and writing, and also to learn about students' disabilities.

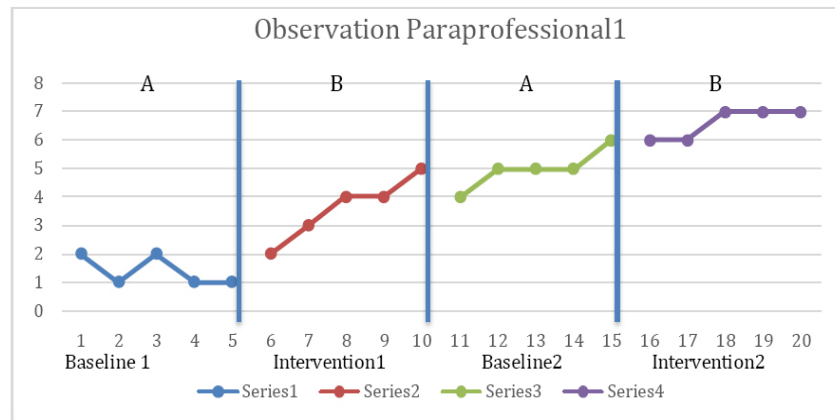
Setting, Materials and Experimental Design

As part of the required training program for paraprofessionals, an intervention was required. This consisted of a single subject one on one section ABAB design. One of the hallmarks of single subject research is objective measurement formative, evaluation and control common to ensure validity of an experimental finding (Gast, & Ledford, 2014). The study was conducted during approximately four months (200 credit/hours), covering two sections. The first section of the training (*independent variable*) consisted of two months (100 credit/hours) of face-to-face sessions in a class with a trainer to learn about knowledge, skills, strategies, disabilities and how to deal with students with disabilities. The second section consisted of two months (100 credit/hours) and practical application in an elementary school at the third grade level, with each paraprofessional having

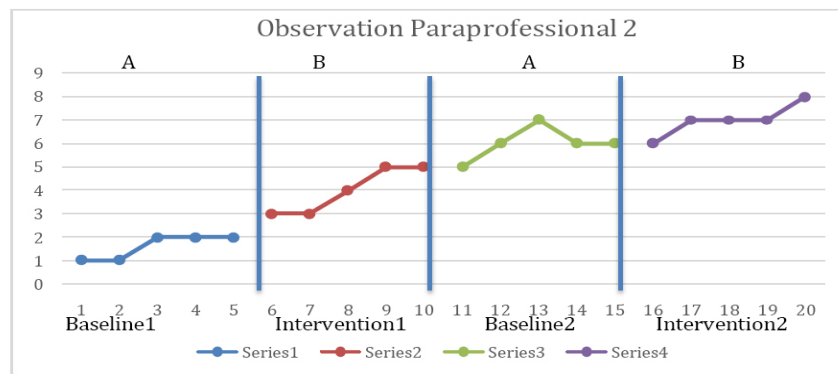
one student and working with him/her while observing their work. The observation (*dependent variable*) will be for about a month, and the students need to pass this section, because it is like an exam for them. Furthermore, during the 100 credit/hours in the practicum (about two months) they will need to use what they learned in the two months in the first section of the training, such as how to deal with students with disabilities and how to use strategies and manage the classroom.

The baseline in the first two graphs for both paraprofessionals were low in the (A) phase, which was during the first couple of days when they entered the classroom and they did not have much knowledge. The (B) phase shows a little improvement when they had some help from the teacher. On the second baseline they were both also still working on their backgrounds, skills, learning about laws about special education, and on the intervention 2 they both showed development of their skills and dealing with students with disabilities. The maintenance phase made greater changes for both paraprofessionals to pass the training program and get certification for completing requirement. For the *dependent variable*, first paraprofessional began between 10-20% in the first couple of days and then she successfully improved her skills to 30-40% during the training program. The second paraprofessional began with 10-20% in the first couple of days and she successfully improved her skills to 40%. Both started with help and observation by their teacher and then they made progress with their ability after the training program.

Para's Performance during daily session with % score



Para's Performance during daily session with % score



RESULTS

Both paraprofessionals achieved improvement in the classroom when they applied the practicum. Also, they showed that they had little background during the first two months about skills and special education laws, but they learned more about disabilities, strategies and behavior management. Lastly, they received a certificate

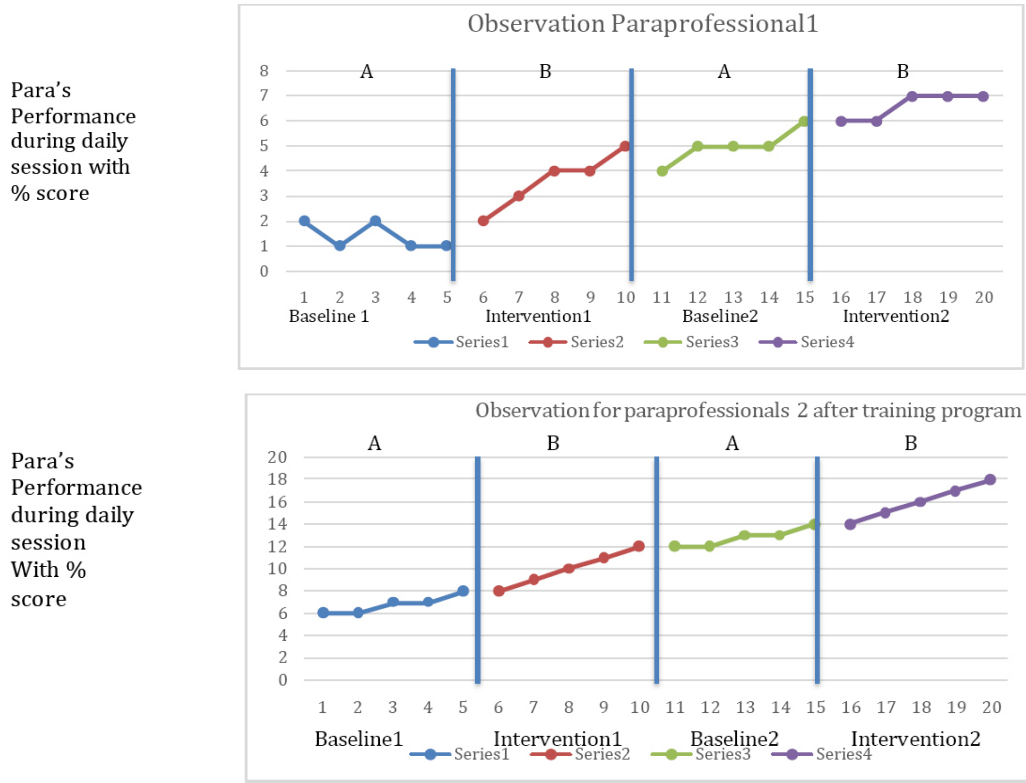
from the special education center for taking the training program, specifically for third grade level. I observed their performance during their first couple of days and then during the training after about two months.

The last two graphs show for both paraprofessionals how they had the same or similar outcomes from the training in the special education center. These two graphs also shows that the training (intervention) for both worked very well and indicates improvement after they finished their training after about two weeks. Between A baseline and B intervention, overlapping data goes up, which means are they still working and improving better.

As can be seen in the chart, theparaprofessionals had huge improvement in their performance. The paraprofessionals figured out what an appropriate response was and what is inappropriate when following a general curriculum. Both paraprofessionals had a great performance and real improvement, as shown in the chart about observation for both paraprofessionals after the training program, which took about two weeks.

Independent Variable

The intervention for both paraprofessionals worked perfectly and they made progress. The last two graphs show how they both made improvements and developed their skills with students with disabilities after their training program,achieving about 90% success.



CONCLUSION

Discussion

As expected, the training program led to a huge alteration in both paraprofessionals in their performance in the school, specifically in the classroom and how to deal with students with disabilities, using strategies, skills, background and overall radical change. In fact,it is important to provide training of paraprofessionals before

they enter the classroom and deal with students with disabilities. Although many people want to work in the classroom, some do not have a degree, but they need to have a training program of some sort before they enter the classroom. The school is like a home for students, so they need to feel safe and comfortable, especially students with disabilities, because they need more care than the typical students. Broer, Doyle, and Giangreco (2005) state that, "School is one of the key social environments where children and adolescents establish relationships and an identity separate from their parents. When paraprofessionals function in ways that are perceived as mothering, students are denied typical opportunities to develop peer relationships and a sense of self that is so important for social emotional maturation." In my personal experience, I have seen many paraprofessionals working in the classroom without any education degree or training program, but they have a very long experience working with students with disabilities in the classroom spanning 15 to 20 years or more. Actually, some of them were very professional based on their long experience, but others may have experience but are lacking some skills or strategies.

The role of paraprofessionals is improving in the United States, although there are many areas that need more development, since some of them do not have an education degree or training program certification. As stated by Riggs (2001), "Paraprofessionals have had little experience working with children. Regardless of their point of entry into a paraprofessional career, training is essential for paraprofessionals to be as effective as possible in their job setting."

Limitation

One of the limitations to be considered in this proposal is having a small number of participants in the training program, which consists of two paraprofessionals. But my future plan is to conduct a larger study with many paraprofessionals, some of them with education degrees, with training program certification, and paraprofessionals without either of these to compare their experience, outcomes for students and interviewing the primary teacher in many different areas for paraprofessionals.

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