

Introduction

There are many staff members that have an important role in the education of students with disabilities. Since teachers and paraeducators work together everyday, creating and maintaining strong collaborative relationships between them is critical. Unfortunately, in classroom today, this relationship is often underdeveloped. From my student teaching internship experiences and the research, I have found this relationship can impact the work environment atmosphere, delivery of instruction (Giangreco, 2003), and student success (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016). Certainly, this relationship can affect a classroom in many ways. With this in mind, I found it necessary to create a training focused on fostering and nurturing this relationship.

Methods

Classroom Experience

- During student teaching experiences, noticed undeveloped relationships, miscommunications and misalignment of expectations between teachers and paraeducators
- Issues observed were: personality conflicts, differences in work/teaching styles, difficulty communicating, lack of common planning and reflection time, and lack of training

Literature Review

- A literature review was conducted to analyze current research regarding promoting staff relationships, supervision training needs and effective teamwork strategies
- Current research does not focus on how to strengthen this relationship (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016)

Questionnaire

- Distributed questionnaire to current teachers and paraeducators in Delaware public schools
- Questions were related to the relationship between the teachers and paraeducators in the classroom

Partnership with DNEA

- Partnered with Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA)
- Created a PowerPoint professional development training to be provided to teachers and paraeducators

Sample Questions From Questionnaire:

“Please provide some examples and ideas that have resulted in a strong working relationship with your team.”

“What are some challenges within your working relationship with your team?”

Results

- Findings from questionnaire:
 - There is not enough training for paraeducators
 - Lack of communication between teachers and paraeducators
 - No definition for paraeducators, their roles, and responsibilities. Therefore each district, school and classroom define the role differently
- Combined knowledge and experience from current and past teachers and paraeducators with expertise from the DNEA
- Training will be presented in August/September 2019
- Delivered to teachers and paraeducators
- 2 page supplemental resource was created and will be housed on the DNEA website

Conclusions

- Understand the current issues within teacher & paraeducator relationship
 - Communication is the root of the problem and the key to the solution (Gerlach, 2016)
 - Training for paraeducators
 - Training on teacher supervision of paraeducators (Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay & Stahl, 2001)
- Identify ways to build a positive relationship
 - Learn about each other’s work styles
 - Define all staff members roles, responsibilities and expectations (Gerlach, 2016)
- Increase awareness of tools and resources to develop and support this relationship
- The team’s common goal is the students!
- Next steps: extend training to related service providers, other school personnel and families

Supplemental Resource

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

NAVIGATING THE TEACHER & PARAEDUCATOR RELATIONSHIP

Why is this relationship important?
Educators often have so much going on in the classroom, that they put themselves and their relationships second. However, this relationship has a powerful impact on the students and the work environment

It's a team effort!
Paraeducators and teachers are both important parts of the learning community. Each plays an important role in student success

Areas of concern

- Lack of communication
- Roles, responsibilities and expectations not defined
- Differences in work styles

LEND Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental & Related Disabilities | DNEA Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

Checklist: Building & Nurturing the Relationship

- Get to know each other and talk about your learning styles. Learn about each others strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, philosophies and preferences
- Define roles and responsibilities: time, planning, instruction and management
- Review the expectations of teachers, paraeducators and students.
- Hold weekly meetings (even though scheduling them can be hard!)
 - Talk about upcoming events
 - Address areas that are going well and areas of concern
- Check-in daily to talk about lesson plans and schedule changes
- Provide positive and direct feedback where changes are based on the needs of the students

LEND Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental & Related Disabilities | DNEA Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism

References

Biggs, E. E., Gilson, C. B., & Carter, E. W. (2016). Accomplishing more together: Influences to the quality of professional relationships between special educators and paraprofessionals. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 41*(4), 256-272.

Brown, T. S., & Stanton-Chapman, T. L. (2017). Experiences of paraprofessionals in US preschool special education and general education classrooms. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 17*(1), 18-30.

Carter, E., O'Rourke, L., Sisco, L. G., & Pelsue, D. (2009). Knowledge, responsibilities, and training needs of paraprofessionals in elementary and secondary schools. *Remedial and Special Education, 30*(6), 344-359.

Devlin, P. (2008). Create Effective Teacher—Paraprofessional Teams. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 44*(1), 41-44.

Floyd, L. (2002) Teachers' Tools for Building Productive Relationships with Paraeducators Considerations Packet. *William & Mary Training & Technical Assistance Center, 1-12.*

French, N. K. (2001). Supervising paraprofessionals: A survey of teacher practices. *The Journal of Special Education, 35*(1), 41-53.

Gerlach, K. (2016) Let's Team Up: What Every Paraprofessional Needs for Student Success and Effective Teamwork. *Pacific Training Associates, 1-32.*

Giangreco, M. F. (2003). Working with paraprofessionals. *Educational Leadership, 61*(2), 50-54.

Giangreco, M. F., Broer, S. M., & Edelman, S. W. (2002). "That Was Then, This Is Now!" Paraprofessional Supports for Students With Disabilities in General Education Classrooms. *Exceptionality, 10*(1), 47-64.

Giangreco, M. F., Edelman, S. W., & Broer, S. M. (2001). Respect, appreciation, and acknowledgment of paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 67*(4), 485-498.

Giangreco, M. F., Suter, J. C., & Doyle, M. B. (2010). Paraprofessionals in inclusive schools: A review of recent research. *Journal of educational and psychological consultation, 20*(1), 41-57.

Hughes, M. T., & Valle-Riestra, D. M. (2008). Responsibilities, preparedness, and job satisfaction of paraprofessionals: Working with young children with disabilities. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 16*(2), 163-173.

McGrath, M. Z., Johns, B. H., & Mathur, S. R. (2010). Empowered or Overpowered? Strategies for Working Effectively with Paraprofessionals. *Beyond Behavior, 19*(2), 2-6.

NASET. Working with Paraprofessionals in your school Team Building: Working with a Paraprofessional. Retrieved from https://www.writesolutions.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/11/Team_Building_With_Paraprofessionals1.pdf

Ratcliff, N. J., Jones, C. R., Vaden, S. R., Sheen, H., & Hunt, G. H. (2011). Paraprofessionals in early childhood classrooms: an examination of duties and expectations. *Early Years, 31*(2), 163-179.

Texas Education Agency. (2018, May). Working with Paraprofessionals: A Resource for Educators of Students with Disabilities. Retrieved from https://projects.esc20.net/upload/shared/20984_Paraprofessional_English_Updated_508.pdf

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by Kellene Copeland at the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA)