

*Exceptional Teachers Teaching Exceptional Children*

# **NASET SPECIAL EDUCATOR E-JOURNAL**

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## Special Education Legal Alert

Perry A. Zirkel

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This month's update identifies two recent court decisions addressing two IDEA issues—eligibility determinations and settlement-agreement waivers. For related publications and earlier monthly updates, see [perryzirkel.com](http://perryzirkel.com).

On September 20, 2022, a federal district court in New Jersey issued an unpublished decision in *P.F. v. Ocean Township Board of Education*, addressing the issue of IDEA eligibility for a first grader with an undisputed diagnosis of dyslexia. In response to the parents' request, the district timely completed an evaluation to determine whether the child was eligible for special education with the classification of specific learning disability (SLD). Under New Jersey law, which permits districts to use either severe discrepancy or RTI for SLD identification, the district used the severe discrepancy approach. The evaluation included (a) testing that revealed the lack of such a discrepancy, (b) consideration of a private diagnosis of dyslexia, which the parents provided and which recommended daily dyslexia remediation incorporating Orton Gillingham methodology, (c) a social assessment that found reading difficulties that neither the social worker nor the child's teachers linked to dyslexia; and (d) a classroom observation. The resulting multidisciplinary team concluded that the child did not have a SLD that adversely affected her educational performance so as to necessitate special education. In the wake of this determination of IDEA ineligibility and an unsuccessful mediation, the parents filed for a due process hearing. Meanwhile, the district provided general education interventions, including small-group decoding and encoding instruction up to three times per week and small-group reading fluency support twice per week, and, after the parents submitted a diagnosis of ADHD, a 504 plan. After a three-day hearing during the child's third grade, the hearing officer issued a decision upholding the district's determination, finding that its evaluation did not rely on a single criterion of a computerized

<p><b>estimator of severe discrepancy and that the child did not meet the three prongs for eligibility: 1-classification, 2-adverse impact, and 3-need for special education. The parents filed an appeal in federal court.</b></p>	
<p>First, based on the diagnosis of (a) dyslexia and (b) the use of a computerized estimator, the parents challenged the SLD prong.</p>	<p>The court concluded that (a) a diagnosis of dyslexia does not necessarily equate to SLD under the IDEA, and (b) the district used the required variety of assessments rather than relying on the computerized program as the sole criterion.</p>
<p>Second, the parents disputed the determination that the SLD did not adversely affect the child’s educational performance, pointing to the district’s subsequent determination in grade 3 that she qualified for special education.</p>	<p>Relying on the “snapshot approach,” the court concluded that, even if the child had a SLD, the relevant information of educational impact was the child’s performance in grade 1, which was satisfactory in level and progress. In contrast, the child’s performance two years later, whereupon the child evidenced the requisite impact and other two required eligibility elements, was not the determinative information.</p>
<p>Third, relying on the private evaluator’s recommendations, the parents argued that their child needed special education.</p>	<p>Rejecting this contention, the court pointed out that the private diagnostician did not specifically recommend IDEA eligibility and, in any event, the parents failed to prove that Orton Gillingham exclusively equated to special education.</p>
<p>Although of inconsequential precedential weight, this decision illustrates the continuing judicial trend in eligibility cases, which includes the limited role thus far of RTI as compared to severe</p>	

discrepancy for SLD and the more general emphasis on the ultimate need prong.

**On March 15, 2022, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals issued an unpublished decision in *N.W. v. Princeton Public Schools Board of Education*, addressing the enforceability of release provisions in settlement agreements concerning students with disabilities. To resolve a long-standing dispute with a pro se parent, who was an attorney, the school district entered into a written settlement agreement that included two release provisions—one waiving “any and all claims [the parent and child] have or may have accrued [against the district] ... whether known or unknown ... through June 30, 2019” and the other indemnifying the district for any claims accrued “through the date of this agreement.” The document also included a provision allowing either side to void the agreement within a three-day window after signing it. At a March 2018 due process hearing to put the settlement agreement on the record, with the parent then signing it, the school district’s representative summarized its provisions, and the parent responded to the hearing officer’s questions to repeatedly confirm that she understood the agreement, including the meaning of these waiver clauses. Although disputing another provision of the agreement within the three-day window, the parent did not take explicit steps to void the agreement when the district refused to modify its language. Instead, the parent contacted the hearing officer to inquire whether the school board had approved the agreement so that she could proceed with her tuition reimbursement under the agreement. Nevertheless, the parent subsequently went to court in an attempt to void the agreement. The federal district court rejected her arguments that the agreement was unenforceable, and she appealed to the Third Circuit.**

The parent’s first claim was that, because the settlement agreement prospectively waives the child’s educational rights under federal and state law, it is void as contrary to public policy.

Based on the public policy that settlements promote amicable resolution of disputes and lighten the increasing litigation load, the Third Circuit largely rejected the parent’s claim based on its precedent that broad releases are valid “at least when negotiated by sophisticated parties.” The limited and severable exception was for anti-discrimination laws, which courts have held to be not readily contracted away by private arrangements.

<p>The parent’s second claim was that the agreement was obtained through equitable fraud and, thus, unenforceable.</p>	<p>Based on the record in this case, including the specific terms of the settlement agreement, and the parent’s assurances of her understanding of their scope and meaning, the court found no genuine issue of the requisite material representations for equitable fraud.</p>
<p>The parent’s final claim was that the waivers did not meet the Third Circuit’s knowing and voluntary test for waivers, including clear and specific terms, time to reflect upon them, and representation by legal counsel.</p>	<p>The Third Circuit also rejected this claim, finding that the waiver provisions met the six factors set forth in its 1995 decision in <i>W.B. v. Matula</i> (1995) for knowing and voluntary assent. For example, the court found that this particular settlement agreement was specific and unambiguous; the three-day reconsideration provision provided the requisite opportunity for reflection; and the parent, although pro se, was a practicing attorney.</p>
<p>Although not addressing one of the usual IDEA issues for updating, such as identification, FAPE, LRE, or remedies, the limited case law concerning settlement agreements is worth covering here because the vast majority of parents’ filings under the adjudicative avenue of the IDEA are resolved via settlement rather than hearing officer or court decisions. This case shows that such agreements, including any waiver provisions, must be carefully worded and finalized to ensure that they are legally enforceable.</p>	

## Buzz from the Hub

All articles below can be accessed through the following links:

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-sept2022-issue2/>

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-sept2022-issue1/>

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-aug2022-issue2/>

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-aug2022-issue1/>

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-july2022-issue2/>

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-june2022-issue2/>

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-2022-may/>

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-april2022-issue1/>

### **Early Childhood Reopening Resource Collection**

This CPIR resource collection spotlights materials, videos, and webinars that early childhood programs throughout the country can use to guide their reopening efforts. The majority of the resources have been produced by the 5 early childhood centers funded by OSEP.

### **Webinar | Sharing Info about State Assessments with Families of Children with Disabilities** *(Also available in Spanish)*

In February, CPIR teamed with NCEO to spotlight NCEO's amazing new resource, the *Participation Communications Toolkit*. The highly customizable toolkit is designed for participants to use in discussing and making decisions about how children with disabilities participate in state assessments.

### **Webinar | Return to School: Development and Implementation of IEPs**

This webinar focuses on important guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, entitled ***Return to School Roadmap: Development and Implementation of IEPs in the LRE.***

The guidance stresses the importance of revisiting the needs of students with disabilities as they return to classrooms.

### **Webinar | Providing Required Compensatory Services That Help Students with Disabilities in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

This webinar is a great way to learn when a school district must provide compensatory services under Section 504 and the IDEA to students with disabilities who did not receive the services to which they were entitled due to the pandemic. How to do so is also discussed.

### **2022 Determination Letters on State Implementation of IDEA**

IDEA requires the Department of Education to issue an annual determination of a state's efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of IDEA. How did your state measure up?

### **MHA's 2022 Back to School Outreach Toolkit**

What a wealth of information is in this toolkit! As children go back to school, there are many stressors like the lingering pandemic, gun violence, and social unrest. Check out the Social Media Cheat Sheet, virtual events, resource list, and handouts for adults, children, and teens.

### **Kids Who Worry They're Sick When They're Not**

This recent enewsletter from The Child Mind Institute includes 5 stand-alone articles on anxiety and somatic symptom disorders in children: stomach aches and headaches, panic attacks, mental health in children with medical conditions, and behavioral treatment.

### **All About My Child**

*(Available in Spanish: **Todo sobre mi hijo/a**)*

This resource is designed to help teachers learn more about each child in their classroom. The sheet asks parents to share info about their child (e.g., likes, dislikes, nickname, languages spoken in the home), using a fun, graphic format.

### **Partnering With Your Child's School**

*(Available in Spanish: **Sociarse con la escuela de su hijo**)*



You and the school share responsibility for your child's language and literacy learning. Collaborate with the school to make decisions about your child's literacy education right from the start. Working together promotes faster development and catches trouble spots early.

### **Scripted Stories for Social Situations**

*(In multiple languages, including Spanish, Hmong, Ojibwe, & Somali)*

These short, adaptable PowerPoint presentations mix words and pictures to communicate specific info to children about social situations such as going to preschool, sitting in circle time, staying safe, and using their words. (From the link, scroll down the page to "Scripted Stories," click the drop-down on the right, and see the many stories there are! It's rather amazing.)

### **Understood Explains: The Ins and Outs of Evaluations for Special Education**

Understood Explains is a podcast that unpacks the process that school districts use to evaluate children for special education services. There are 9 separate podcasts in the series, including parent rights, how to request an evaluation of their child, what to expect during (and after) an evaluation, and private versus school-based evaluations.

### **Getting Dressed**

Getting dressed is a wonderful opportunity for young children to build feelings of independence. It is also a wonderful opportunity to embed STEM learning opportunities, such as sequencing, relational concept, matching, or categorizing.

### **Help Us Calm Down: Strategies for Children**

*(Also available in Spanish, Ojibwe, Hmong, and Somali)*

Try these strategies with your child. The more you use a calming strategy and practice it with your child, the more likely he or she is to use the strategy when experiencing anger, stress, sadness, or frustration.

### **6 Ways to Help When Your Child is Excluded**

Parents may feel powerless when their child is excluded, but there's actually much they can do to help their child cope and overcome this painful experience. From Great Schools.

### **There is Power in Friendship Toolkit**

Making friends can be hard, especially for children with disabilities. *Power in Friendship* is designed for families of children with disabilities AND those with typically developing children. It provides resources on how to help your child build inclusive friendships.

### **How to Help a Disorganized Child**

Here's a simple trick that can turn the most scattered kid into a master of organization.

### **How to Handle School Refusal**

(In Spanish: **Rechazo a la escuela: Cómo ayudar a su hijo a superarlo**)

When students flat-out refuse to go to school, it can be stressful for both parents and teachers. Different kids resist or refuse school in different ways. Here are tips for parents, caregivers, and educators to manage school refusal, based on what behavior they're seeing (e.g., crying or tantrums, won't get dressed, won't get on the bus or in the car).

### **A Deeper Look at Anxiety in Kids**

This newsletter from the Child Mind Institute consists of separate articles on the subject of anxiety: What are the different kinds of anxiety? How anxiety leads to problem behavior. What is separation anxiety? Selective mutism. Social anxiety. Agoraphobia in children.

### **13 Bipolar Disorder Symptoms to Be Aware Of**

Bipolar disorder, or manic depression, can make it difficult to carry out day-to-day tasks. Here are 13 signs and symptoms to help you know if you or someone you care about should seek treatment.

### **Video | Supported Decision Making in Health Care and Medical Treatment Decisions**

This 8-minute video focuses on helping people with disabilities make decisions about their own health care.

### **Health and Learning Are Deeply Interconnected in the Body: An Action Guide for Policymakers**

As science is showing, the conditions and environments in which children develop affect their lifelong health as well as educational achievement. This guide from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard distills 3 key messages from science that can help guide thinking and policy in a time when innovation has never been more needed in public systems in order to improve both health and learning.

### **Planning Your Future: A Guide to Transition**

The transition to life after high school can be an uncertain time for students with learning disabilities. This guide from NCLD is a tool that students, families, and educators can use to navigate information and prepare for what's next.

### **Transportation: Knowing the Options**

VR professionals know that most job seekers with disabilities would prefer to travel as independently as possible. If owning and driving a vehicle is not an option, what alternatives exist?

### **Providing Required Compensatory Services That Help Students with Disabilities in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

This webinar, hosted by Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and OSERS, is a great way to learn when a school district must provide compensatory services under Section 504 and the IDEA to students with disabilities who did not receive the services to which they were entitled due to the pandemic. How to do so is also discussed.

### **Back-to-School: Tips for Parents of Children with Special Needs**

LDOnline offers 8 back-to-school tips for parents that emphasize communication, organization, and staying up-to-date on special education news.

### **The Promise and the Potential of the IEP**

The Spring-Summer issue of *The Special EDge Newsletter* is full of articles on the IEP, such as:

*Strength-based and Student-focused IEPs;*

*Improving the IEP: The Parent and Family Perspective;*

*Collaboration and the IEP;* and

*What I Learned That Can Help Others*, written by a youth speaking for those who cannot.

### **Prepararse para una reunión de IEP**

This 7-minute video in Spanish describes how parents can prepare for an upcoming IEP meeting.

### **Tools for Tough Times**

Much has been said and written about the importance of supporting the mental health of students returning to school in such turbulent times. Now youth speak for themselves in 30 two-minute teen-led videos. They show us all what steps they're taking to cope with the isolation, anxiety, and uncertainty they're feeling. You don't need to be a teen to benefit from the tools they describe.

### **Adapted PE for Your Child? Dear Parents**

Adaptability.com has some information to offer parents on Adapted Physical Education and the rights they have, given that adapted PE is a federally mandated special education service.

**An Action-Packed Year for Parent Centers** | Here's the infographic CPIR produced with the data you submitted. It's 2 pages (designed to be printed front/back to become a 1-page handout or mini-poster). It's a stunning portrait of what can be achieved by a few, extremely dedicated people for the benefit of so many.

**Adaptable Infographic for Parent Centers to Use** | This infographic is designed so you can insert just your Center's numbers, data results, and branding into key blocks of information. Adapt the PowerPoint file, and shine the spotlight on the work of your Center!

**Quick Guide to Adapting the Infographic** | This 2-page guide shows you where to insert your Center-specific information, just in case having such a "checklist" would be helpful.

## **PTAs Leading the Way in Transformative Family Engagement**

(Also available in Spanish: **Las PTA lideran el camino en la participación familiar transformadora**)

Drawing from research findings and best practices for family-school partnerships, this 11-page resource explains the guiding principles of the 4 I's of transformative family engagement (inclusive, individualized, integrated, impactful) and shares strategies local PTAs can use as a model to implement these principles in their school community.

## **Summer and Sensory Processing Issues**

(Also available in Spanish: **El verano y los problemas de procesamiento sensorial**) | Why can summer be a difficult time for kids with sensory processing issues? What can parents do to help kids stay comfortable in overstimulating outdoor activities?

## **Ideas to Engage Students with Significant Multiple Disabilities in Activities During the Summer Holidays**

Here are fun ideas for summer activities for children with significant multiple disabilities and visual impairment, including sensory trays, art activities, books, music, and toys.

*Two more, with titles speakin for themselves?*

## **Babies and Toddlers Indeed!**

This landing page serves as a Table of Contents and offers families and others many options to explore, including an overview of early intervention, how to find services in their state for their wee one, parent rights (including parents' right to participate), the IFSP, transition to preschool, and much more.

## **Just want an quick step-by-step overview of early intervention?**

To give families the "big picture," share the 2022 update *Basic Steps of the Early Intervention Process* with families.

## **For Spanish-speaking families**

CPIR offers a landing page called *Ayuda para los Bebés Hasta Su Tercer Cumpleaños*.

Beginning there, families can read about early intervention, the evaluation process for their little one, writing the IFSP, and the value of parent groups and suggestions for where to find them.

## **10 Basics of the Special Education Process under IDEA**

*In Spanish (**Sobre el proceso de educación especial**)*

## **Your Child's Evaluation** (4 pages, family-friendly)

*In Spanish (**La evaluación de su niño**)*

## **Parent Rights**

*In Spanish (**Derechos de los padres**)*

Landing page, again, this time to a simple list of each of the parental rights under IDEA, with branching to a description about that right. Surely a bread-and-butter topic for parents!

## **All about the IEP Suite**

*(**Similar info about the IEP in Spanish**)* The landing page gives you and families numerous branches to explore, beginning with a short-and-sweet overview of the IEP, a summary of who's on the IEP team (with ever-deepening information below and branching off), the content of the IEP (brief summary first, then in-depth discussion thereafter), and what happens with the IEP team meets.

## **Placement Issues**

*(**Basic info about placement in Spanish**)* Again, start with the main landing page for this bread-and-butter topic. Take the various branches, depending on what type of info the family is seeking at the moment. Branches include: a short-and-sweet overview to placement, considering LRE in placement decisions, school inclusion, and placement and school discipline.

## **CPIR Resource Collections and Info Suites**

The resources listed above cover just a few of the topics that Parent Centers often address. For a

more robust index of key topics, try the *Resource Collections and Info Suites* resource, which will point you to where other resources on key topics are located on the Parent Center Hub.

### **Advancing Equity and Support for Underserved Communities**

In keeping with President Biden’s Executive Order, signed on his first day in office, federal agencies have now issued Equity Action Plans for addressing equity issues in their individual agency scope and mission. These plans are quite relevant to family-led and family-serving organizations, especially plans from the Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services.

### **Fast Facts: Students with disabilities who are English learners (ELs) served under IDEA Part B**

OSEP’s *Fast Facts* series summarizes key facts related to specific aspects of the data collection authorized by IDEA. This newest *Fast Facts* gives you data details about students with disabilities who are also English learners. (Want to see what **other** *Fast Facts* are available?)

### **Asian Americans with Disabilities Resource Guide**

The *Asian Americans With Disabilities Resource Guide* was designed for Asian American youth with disabilities, allies, and the disability community in mind, in response to the significant information gap about Asian Americans with disabilities. Chapters include Advocacy 101, Accessibility, Culture, Allyship, and Resources.

### **Strategies for Partnering on Culturally Safe Research with Native American Communities**

To identify strategies for promoting cultural safety, accountability, and sustainability in research with Native American communities, Child Trends assessed peer-reviewed and grey literature (e.g., policy documents and guidelines). Findings? To rebuild trust and improve health outcomes, research collaborations with Native American communities must be community-based or community-engaged, culturally appropriate, and recognize tribal sovereignty in the collection and use of data.

### **Understanding Screening**

This toolkit helps educators and parents learn about screening and how screening can help

determine which students may be at risk for reading difficulties, including dyslexia. From the National Center on Improving Literacy.

### **Inside an Evaluation for Learning Disorders**

*(Also available in Spanish: **Un vistazo a una evaluación para los trastornos del aprendizaje**)*

If a child is struggling in school, the first step to getting help is an evaluation. A learning evaluation can give parents and the child's teachers valuable information about the child's strengths and weaknesses. It can also reveal what kind of support would be helpful. A full evaluation is necessary for a child to be diagnosed with a learning disorder. To help parents understand the process, the Child Mind Institute and Understood.org teamed up to create this 20-minute video that walks us through the evaluation process.



## **U.S. Department of Education Hosts Raising the Bar: Literacy & Math Series to Address Academic Recovery**

As part of the Biden-Harris Administration's ongoing efforts to support the academic recovery of students from the impact of the pandemic, the U.S. Department of Education will host five sessions focused on strategies and programs to boost student literacy and math outcomes.

These sessions will highlight strategies and best practices to help states, districts, and schools improve learning outcomes for students especially in literacy and mathematics. The series seeks to build engagement from the field; identify collaboration opportunities among research, practice, and funding; and lift best practices and resources for practitioners and policymakers to take action to address learning loss and academic recovery.

"We always knew the pandemic would have a profound impact on students' learning, which is why the Biden-Harris administration made it a priority from Day One to safely reopen our schools and secure the American Rescue Plan's \$122 billion investment in public education to support students' recovery," said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. "From that moment on, our Department has encouraged state and local leaders to spend their American Rescue Plan dollars on evidence-based strategies for ensuring our students can catch up in the classroom. I'm pleased to announce a new expert-led speaker series that will equip educators, school leaders, and district administrators with the latest information on the science of learning and the most promising tools for accelerating academic recovery, so that they can raise the bar to support our students and level up their skills in the critical areas of math and reading."

The sessions will occur monthly from October through February and will center on sustained, cohesive efforts to improve educational practice. The kickoff event on Oct. 26, hosted at the U.S. Department of Education, is a continued call to action to practitioners, education leaders, teachers, parents, students, and policymakers to continue to leverage the extraordinary level of available federal resources to mitigate learning loss and accelerate academic recovery.

Additionally, next week the Department will issue a guide to drive strategies in districts and states on how to best address learning loss and academic recovery. This guide will be a follow-

up to the extensive guidance provided in the handbooks on reopening and recovery provided by the Department in early 2021.

The subsequent four convenings include topics focused on:

- Learning research-based practices from content experts
- Highlighting promising practices from SEAs and districts
- Leveraging ARP funding to implement literacy and math achievement best practices at scale
- Offering dedicated time and expertise to support action planning (i.e., guided working sessions and support from technical assistance providers).

More information on the additional convenings to come.

	Date	Session Topic
Session 1	October 26, 2022	Enhancing Awareness of the Best Strategies and Resources Available to Address Learning Loss and Academic Recovery
Session 2	November 10, 2022 (Date is subject to change)	Best Practices and Research on Rigorous Instruction for all Students in Literacy and Mathematics
Session 3	December 8, 2022 (Date is subject to change)	Increasing Support for Students Beyond the Classroom
Session 4	January 12, 2023 (Date is subject to change)	Addressing Educator Shortages and Parent/Family Engagement in Literacy and Mathematics
Session 5	February 9, 2023 (Date is subject to change)	Highlighting the Best Examples of Putting Policy into Practice

The Literacy and Math series is part of the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to supporting students' academic recovery and ensuring recovery efforts are meeting student, parent, and family needs. As part of that effort, in January, Secretary Cardona laid out his vision for education in America by boldly addressing opportunity and achievement gaps in education.

Through the American Rescue Plan (ARP), the Biden-Harris Administration is investing in evidence-based solutions that are driving academic recovery and providing additional mental health supports. Since education was disrupted in March 2020 due to the global covid-19 pandemic, the Biden-Harris Administration has prioritized recovery for students through multiple efforts. In addition to providing \$130 billion in ARP funds for K-12 education to support the safe reopening of K-12 schools and to meet the needs of all students, the Biden-Harris Administration:

- **Awarded nearly \$1 billion to 56 states and territories through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act** to help schools in high-need districts provide students with safe and supportive learning opportunities and environments that are critical for their success.
- **Launched the National Partnership for Student Success** to recruit 250,000 new tutors, mentors, and other adults in high-impact roles, and support states, school districts and community organizations in establishing high-quality programs.
- **Launched the Engage Every Student Initiative** to support summer learning and afterschool programs with ARP funds, alongside other state and local funds.
- **Launched a campaign through the Best Practices Clearinghouse** to highlight and celebrate evidence-based and promising practices implemented by states, schools, and school districts using ARP funds to support learning recovery, increased academic opportunities, and student mental health.
- **Launched the National Parents and Families Engagement Council** to empower parents and school communities with knowledge about how their schools are using and can use federal funds to provide the necessary academic and mental health supports.
- **Made it easier for families and stakeholders to see how their states and school districts are using ARP funds** by requiring State Educational Agencies and Local Educational Agencies to create plans for using ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, engage key stakeholders as they draft their plans, and make those plans accessible to the public through an interactive map. Previous rounds of relief funding did not require these plans.

## **U.S. Department of Education Awards Nearly \$120 Million Over Five Years to Support Educators of English Learner Students**

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) recently announced awards of nearly \$120 million over five years under the National Professional Development Program (NPD) to support educators of English learner students.

The NPD program provides grants to eligible Institutions of Higher Education and public or private entities with relevant experience and capacity, in consortia with states or districts, to implement professional development activities that will improve instruction for English Learners (ELs). Following the education priorities of the Biden-Harris Administration as stated by Secretary Cardona, these grants align with his call to boldly address opportunity and achievement gaps by investing in, recruiting, and supporting the professional development of a diverse educator workforce, including bilingual educators so education jobs are ones that people from all backgrounds want to pursue.

"I grew up speaking Spanish at home and thrived as an English learner in school thanks to great teachers who helped me realize that my bilingualism and my biculturalism would someday be my superpower," said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. "As our nation grows more diverse than ever before, we must level up our investments in educators who can provide students from all backgrounds with equitable opportunities to succeed. This \$120 million, five-year investment will support high quality professional development and teacher preparation programs across the country. It will also help us grow a pipeline of diverse and talented educators who can help more English learners realize their own bilingual and multilingual superpowers."

These grants can be awarded to educators of ELs including teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals or other educators working with ELs. Professional development activities may include teacher education programs and training that lead to certification, licensing, or endorsement for providing instruction to students learning English.

Educator effectiveness is the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement and success. To improve the academic achievement of ELs, the NPD program supports pre-service and in-service instruction for teachers and other staff, including school leaders, working with ELs. Selected applicants submitted proposals to improve access to culturally and linguistically responsive early learning environments for multilingual learners and that increase public awareness about the benefits of proficiency in more than one language.

“The NPD grants support the professional growth of the education workforce by promoting the skills and critical dispositions of educators and leaders. These grants can enhance the capacity of the education workforce to create equitable learning environments that promote language, literacy and diversity. This work is vital to increase educator effectiveness in meeting the needs of English learners and their families,” said OELA Acting Director Montserrat Garibay.

The NPD program has funded a range of grantees that are currently implementing 182 projects across the country, including the most recent grantees. As the EL population continues to grow, it has become increasingly important to identify and expand the use of evidence-based instructional practices that improve EL learning outcomes.

The Department projects this new cohort of 44 grants will serve approximately 1,638 pre-service and 6,271 in-service teachers.

A full list of awards can be found below:

Name	State	Total Granted Over 5 Years
The University of Alabama in Huntsville	AL	\$2,799,244
University of Alabama at Birmingham	AL	\$2,985,871
University of Arkansas System	AR	\$2,955,256
San Diego State University Foundation	CA	\$2,947,479
The Regents of the University of California, Los Angeles	CA	\$2,944,015

California State University San Marcos Corporation	CA	\$3,000,000
California State University, Dominguez Hills Foundation	CA	\$2,571,938
The Regents of the University of Colorado	CO	\$2,822,251
University of Delaware	DE	\$2,666,354
University of South Florida	FL	\$2,061,703
The Florida International University Board of Trustees	FL	\$2,503,029
The University of Central Florida Board of Trustees	FL	\$2,603,976
Florida Atlantic University	FL	\$1,788,835
University of Northern Iowa	IA	\$1,489,701
Trustees of Indiana University	IN	\$2,999,075
Kansas State University	KS	\$2,940,478
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	KS	\$2,290,405
University of Massachusetts Boston	MA	\$2,946,798
Lasell University	MA	\$2,504,012
Trustees of Boston University	MA	\$2,868,044
National Association for Bilingual Education	MD	\$2,965,801
Grand Valley State University	MI	\$2,705,208
Western Michigan University	MI	\$2,969,991
Wayne State University	MI	\$2,289,939
Southeast Service Cooperative	MN	\$2,716,643
William Paterson University of New Jersey	NJ	\$2,863,634
The College of New Jersey	NJ	\$2,998,231

Board of Regents, NSHE obo Nevada State College	NV	\$2,004,285
University of Cincinnati	OH	\$2,963,816
University of Oregon	OR	\$2,992,611
Western Oregon University	OR	\$2,989,591
Temple University - Of The Commonwealth System of Higher Edu	PA	\$2,998,194
Cabrini University	PA	\$2,981,534
Clemson University	SC	\$2,332,682
BakerRipley	TX	\$3,000,000
The University of Texas at El Paso	TX	\$2,831,807
Region 18 Education Service Center	TX	\$2,812,771
Texas A&M University	TX	\$3,000,000
Stephen F. Austin State University	TX	\$2,530,139
University Of North Texas at Dallas	TX	\$2,761,155
Weber State University	UT	\$2,787,029
Western Washington University	WA	\$2,588,559
University of Washington	WA	\$2,995,811
Board of Regents of UW-System on behalf of UW-Milwaukee	WI	\$2,870,290
Total		\$119,638,185

## **U.S. Department of Education Communicates Vision to Advance Digital Equity for All Learners**

Today, during the National Digital Equity Summit hosted by the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Educational Technology (OET) launched *Advancing Digital Equity for All: Community-based Recommendations for Developing Effective Digital Equity Plans to Close the Digital Divide and Enable Technology-Empowered Learning*. This resource provides recommendations for equitable broadband adoption to support leaders crafting digital equity plans, an aspiration that became an emergency for many schools and families during the pandemic. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law passed earlier this year supports that goal, allocating \$2.75 billion under the Digital Equity Act to ensure that all people and communities can reap the full benefits of the digital economy.

“Digital equity has never felt more urgent. But our opportunity to deliver digital equity has never felt more within reach. The pandemic turned equitable access to technology from an aspiration into an emergency,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. “Students without broadband access or only a cell phone have lower rates of homework completion, lower grade point averages ... even lower college completion rates. Today, there can be no equity without digital equity. Thanks to President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we’re making tremendous progress towards that goal.”

The National Digital Equity Summit will convene nearly 200 equity-minded organizations, state and local systems leaders, federal agencies, and educational technology experts to discuss how broadband investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law can be leveraged to better serve students furthest from digital opportunities and close the digital divide, thereby supporting transformative learning experiences empowered through technology. The summit will be livestreamed and can be viewed [here](#).

“The pandemic illuminated long-standing educational equity gaps and spurred an unprecedented period of emergency remote learning. One of the most critical challenges during this time has been providing the foundational access to high-speed, reliable internet necessary to facilitate



everywhere, all-the-time learning,” said Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Roberto Rodríguez. “We’ve all understood that digital equity is no longer a ‘nice-to-have’ condition, but a ‘must-have’ to ensure that all may fully participate in the digital economy and society of today and tomorrow.”

The new publication also highlights existing barriers across the three components of availability, affordability, and adoption, and provides examples of promising strategies to overcome these barriers. Much of the content was gathered through the Digital Equity Education Roundtables (DEER) Initiative launched by OET in the spring, which progressed national conversations with leaders from community-based organizations, as well as families and students furthest from digital opportunities, to learn more about the barriers faced by learner communities and promising solutions for increasing access to technology. During these events, participants expressed the need to address the three components of digital equity — availability, affordability, and adoption – in order to serve all learners in an equitable manner. Key takeaways from participants are captured in the new Advancing Digital Equity for All resource.

The DEER Initiative, today’s summit, and the new resource are examples of the commitment from the Biden-Harris Administration to address connectivity barriers around the country. Also, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten recently attended a roundtable discussion in Charlotte, North Carolina, hearing directly from school leaders, community-based organizations, and parents about efforts necessary to boost participation in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Additionally, the Department engaged in a back-to-school campaign to promote ACP enrollment, contributed to interagency efforts in streamlining information about federal broadband funding, and published a series of resources to ensure students’ access from home.

Over the next year, OET will build on this progress by fostering a sense of urgency around adoption barriers that impede digital equity in education and cultivating a community of champions who are implementing solutions.

For the latest information on OET’s digital equity efforts, visit DEER - Office of Educational Technology.

## **A Case Study of Compounding Views of Paraprofessional Roles and Relationships in Preschool Classrooms: Implications for Practice and Policy**

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### ***Abstract***

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to extend a previous study by Brown & Stanton-Chapman (2014) by exploring the dynamics between teachers and paraprofessionals in preschool classrooms. Specifically, researchers examined the relationship between eight paraprofessionals' perspectives of job responsibilities and satisfaction in comparison to their assigned eight teachers' perspectives of these same ideas. Data collection included semi-structured interviews of the 16 participants as well as classroom observations and document collection. Four key themes emerged from data collection: responsibilities are often influenced by the level of teacher and paraprofessional motivation; paraprofessionals often assimilate to match the lead teacher's demeanor and perspectives; teachers and paraprofessionals view recognition and appreciation very differently; and the majority of classroom outcomes are primarily influenced by structured school policies. Considering these findings, implications for practice and directions for future research are discussed.

*Keywords:* paraprofessional, teaching assistant, educational assistant, relationship, preschool

***A Case Study of Compounding Views of Paraprofessional Roles and Relationships in  
Preschool Classrooms: Implications for Practice and Policy***

When 28 parents of children with disabilities were asked about paraprofessional supports for their child, 25 percent reported that paraprofessionals made inclusion in school possible (Werts, Harris, Tillery, & Roark, 2004). Additionally, 61 percent of the sample said their child spoke of the paraprofessional at home as much as he or she did about the classroom teacher (Werts et al., 2004). This finding is supported by a rich body of evidence that emphasizes the importance of paraprofessional relationships with teachers (Blalock, 1991; Burgess & Mayes, 2009), students (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005; Healy, 2011) and families (French & Chopra, 1999; Werts et al., 2004). These relationships also play a central role in the academic and social outcomes for student success (Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012). For example, paraprofessional supports have been linked to increased social interactions among children from different backgrounds (Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, Aragon, Bernal, De Balderas, & Carroll, 2004) and to an increase in academic achievement in inclusive settings (Giangreco, Smith, & Pickney, 2006). For these reasons, researchers studied the views and perspectives of paraprofessionals to obtain information on their classroom obligations, job fulfillment, and expertise (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001). Yet, results have pointed to universally negative perceptions of the job of a paraprofessional due to the low wages, ambiguous responsibilities, and power struggles between paraprofessionals and teachers (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014). Researchers studied this phenomenon in order to understand why this job is viewed as undesirable despite the important impact paraprofessionals have in the classroom (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014).

In a recent study of paraprofessional relationships, Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2014) used qualitative observations and interviews in addition to a quantitative survey to explore the relationship between paraprofessionals' perspectives of their responsibilities and the corresponding satisfaction and issues surrounding their job (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014). Three key themes emerged from data analysis: a) there is often confusion over job responsibilities; b) job satisfaction is highly influenced by both monetary compensation and

recognition; and c) relational power dynamics exist between teachers and paraprofessionals (Brown and Stanton-Chapman, 2014). And, interestingly, paraprofessionals and teachers viewed key classroom issues very differently. For example, while teachers often felt paraprofessional pay was adequate, paraprofessionals felt undervalued and overworked for the compensation they received (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014). Findings also indicated that there were additional divergences between paraprofessional and teacher perspectives including: differences in perceived roles and responsibilities between the two groups, lack of perceived appreciation from the paraprofessional while teachers felt appreciation was adequate, and a back-and-forth exchange between paraprofessional motivation and teacher receptiveness to classroom responsibilities (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014). This 2014 study did not explore these views in depth, however, and understanding these differences has potential to inform practice and further understand classroom relationships. The current study will explore this further through an in-depth case study of eight paraprofessionals and eight teachers in order to provide insight into the complexities of teacher and paraprofessional perspectives on multiple classroom issues (Stake, 1994). The present study will also include further analysis of paraprofessional and teacher dynamics and how these perspectives differ between both parties in the five key areas of extant paraprofessional research: skills/experience, job fulfillment, roles and obligations, preparation and coaching, and relationships with teachers and students (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014). Findings from the current study hope to further inform researchers and practitioners about vital issues relating to different perspectives among teachers and paraprofessionals. These findings may provide implications for informing job responsibilities, increasing job contentment, and understanding how relationships function in successful preschool classrooms.

### ***Literature Review: Five Key Areas of Paraprofessional Research***

There are over one million paraprofessionals in PK-12 classrooms across the United States (Ashbaker, Dunn, & Morgan, 2010). Sometimes referred to as an instructional aide or paraeducator, a paraprofessional is an education employee who may not be licensed to teach but executes numerous classroom duties and collaborates with lead teachers for academic and behavioral support (Department of Education, 2012). Despite this definition, the responsibilities

and job requirements vary based on locale (Allen and Ashbaker, 2004). However, there is a growing body of evidence to support paraprofessional efficacy in many roles including: assisting students with disabilities (Werts et al., 2004), collaborating with teachers and parents (Chopra & French, 2004; Giangreco, Smith, & Pickney, 2006), and maintaining and supporting important classroom relationships (Burgess and Mayes, 2009; Lewis, 2004).

Over the past 30 years, a growing body of research has explored multiple aspects of the experiences of paraprofessionals. Several studies investigated paraprofessional assignments with individual students and noted the negative effects paraprofessional-student proximity can have on academic success and peer interactions (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharris, 2006; Skar & Tamm, 2001). The overarching theme from these studies focused on the idea that paraprofessional-student relationships, and the proximity in which these two groups work, vary and can be both beneficial or detrimental for student success (Malmgren & Causton-Theoharris, 2006; Skar & Tamm, 2001). Similarly, studies in this area have also investigated the over-use of paraprofessionals for multiple classroom tasks including: behavior management, instructional planning and delivery, and contact with families (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005; Carter, Cushing, Clark, & Kennedy, 2005). Ultimately, the vast majority of paraprofessional studies focus on five key areas: skills, job fulfillment, roles, preparation, and relationships. This research is succinctly summarized below.

**Skill and expertise.** Research indicates paraprofessionals often lack important teaching skills, formal education, and hands-on experience (Bolton & Mayer, 2008). Additionally, studies have shown that paraprofessionals are attracted to the job hours and benefits, but they are often underpaid (Conway, Rawlings, & Wolfgram, 2014; Johnson, 2016). This generally lures less qualified applicants to the profession (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014). To combat this problem, the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) established minimum qualifications for paraprofessionals by requiring Title I schools to comply with federal restrictions (Nichols, 2013). This included: obtaining a high school diploma, passing a standardized exam, and completing 30 college credits (Nichols, 2013). However, many school systems are forced to hire candidates

who do not meet these requirements due to lack of applicants and low job desirability (Appl, 2006). Additionally, while several studies have alluded to the need for extensive experience and education for paraprofessional success (French, 2003; Picket & Gerlack, 2003), other findings revealed paraprofessional supports can be beneficial despite their level of education or prior experience (Jones & Bender, 1993; Giangreco et al., 2001). Regardless of these conflicting findings, paraprofessionals of all skill and experience levels often leave the profession due to low job fulfillment (Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012).

**Job fulfillment.** The majority of paraprofessional research occurs in the area of job fulfillment. In a survey of 19 paraprofessionals, Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2014) discovered that the majority of paraprofessionals did not feel they were fairly compensated for their work, had no opportunities for advancement, and had limited job contentment (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014). Moreover, it is well documented that paraprofessionals often receive minimal pay (Conway, Rawlings, & Wolfgram, 2014; Johnson, 2016; Katsiyannis, 2000). In addition to monetary compensation, professional fulfillment is often influenced by classroom roles and obligations and varies among paraprofessionals in different settings (Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012). Specifically, paraprofessionals feel they are required to take on too many tasks (e.g., leading small groups, planning lessons, enforcing rules and procedures) leaving them unsatisfied with their job (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005; Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014).

**Classroom roles and obligations.** Paraprofessional tasks and classroom obligations can drastically vary based on geographical location. While some classrooms and school systems require paraprofessionals to lesson plan, to help with curriculum development, and to assist with behavioral issues, others use paraprofessionals in a supplemental role to ‘aid’ the teacher in the classroom (Appl, 2006; Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005). In many instances, the classroom teacher is responsible for delegating specific roles and obligations (Appl, 2006; Giangreco, Smith, & Pickney, 2006). In other cases, paraprofessional obligations are vague and unsupervised (Giangreco, Smith, & Pickney, 2006). One study found that almost 70 percent of paraprofessionals in special education inclusive classrooms reported they made decisions without

asking the lead teacher for advice (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). These ambiguous job descriptions and unclear roles make it difficult to adequately train, coach, and prepare all paraprofessionals similarly (Armstrong, 2010).

**Job preparation and coaching.** With regards to job preparation and coaching, several studies found paraprofessionals receive little training on a variety of classroom responsibilities (Armstrong, 2010; Tarry & Cox, 2013). Teachers and paraprofessionals often feel unprepared for some of the academic and social demands of working with students (Armstrong, 2010). This is especially evident for paraprofessionals who work with children with disabilities (Allen & Ashbaker, 2004). Research suggests that there are benefits to providing training and coaching opportunities to paraprofessionals (Jones et al., 2012). Specifically, several single subject studies provide evidence that adequately trained paraprofessionals have a positive impact on classroom relationships (Rueda & Monzo, 2002) and student engagement (Abbot & Sanders, 2012). However, training does not always happen. Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2014) found that the majority of paraprofessionals did not receive adequate classroom training with more than half of the paraprofessionals reporting they received no training within the last year. This lack of preparation can cause discontentment in the classroom and impact classroom relationships.

**Relationships with teachers and students.** Research recognizes paraprofessional relationships as critical to the overall classroom environment (Blalock, 1991; Downing, Ryndak & Clark, 2000). Paraprofessionals work intimately with teachers, administrators, students and their families, often forming close relationships with all parties (Blalock, 1991; Burgess & Mayes, 2009). The nature of these relationships is often affected by paraprofessionals' perceived appreciation and job satisfaction. Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2014) found this to be true in their recent study of paraprofessional perspectives. Specifically, when paraprofessionals were asked if their classroom teacher made clear expectations for them, 21 percent (n=4) strongly agreed, 37 percent (n=7) agreed, 26 percent (n=5) disagreed, and 16 percent strongly disagreed (n=3). Theoretically, research dating back to 1985 has indicated the critical need for teachers and paraprofessionals to work as a team, thus confirming the importance of positive classroom

relationships (Bennett, Deluca, & Bruns, 1997; Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Lacattiva, 1985).

### ***Multiple Perspectives***

With each of these key areas taken into consideration, a recent systematic review of paraprofessional relationships with teachers, students, and families revealed only 10 out of 28 studies (36%) explored more than one perspective in a study—that is, studies either focused on one particular issue or on the views of teachers, paraprofessionals, and students individually (Brown, 2016). This means 18 of the 28 (62 percent) studies reported one-sided interpretations and understandings of paraprofessional interactions and did not get reports from both sides about classroom issues. Specific to teacher and paraprofessional relationships, sixteen total studies were retrieved and only two (Chopra & French, 2004; Giangreco, Smith, & Pickney, 2006) reported perspectives from the teacher and paraprofessional (Brown, 2016). Instead, fourteen studies relied solely on the relationship perspective from the paraprofessional and did not include confirming or conflicting views from the teachers. This omission is important because researchers could not compare reports from both sides to corroborate or refute paraprofessional statements.

Of the two studies that looked at both teacher and paraprofessional views, Giangreco, Smith, & Pickney (2006) found that teachers reported very different ideas of classroom relationships than their paraprofessionals and both indicated these interactions were often strained due to varying expectations, roles, and responsibilities. Chopra & French (2004) looked at paraprofessional and teacher relationships with parents to determine the extent of communication involved with both parties. Findings revealed that paraprofessionals and teachers viewed communication with parents very differently, and teachers interacted less frequently but in a much more professional, and less personal, context than paraprofessionals (Chopra & French, 2004).

Overall, limited research involved sustained time in the field with the purposes of exploring the nuanced relationships between teachers and paraprofessional and what this looks like in



classroom settings (Armstrong, 2010). Very few studies utilized methodology that allowed researchers to explore relationships over a sustained period of time in order to make assertions about teacher and paraprofessional dealings (Armstrong, 2010; Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014). An in-depth exploration of the perspectives on the paraprofessional and teacher relationship from the viewpoints of both paraprofessional and teacher is missing from the literature and can offer useful insight into how administrators and teachers can best support the hiring, training, support, and retention of paraprofessionals (Lewis, 2004).

### ***Current Study***

The current study extends a study conducted by Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2014) by using a qualitative case study design to examine the relationship between paraprofessionals' perspectives of skills, job responsibilities, training, relationships, and satisfaction and teachers' perspectives of these same ideas. Findings from the Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2014) study indicate there is a difference between paraprofessional and teacher perspectives, but the study did not investigate these views for a sustained amount of time (more than 20 hours). The current study addresses this by thoroughly exploring compounding views of teacher and paraprofessional jobs. Most importantly, it will also fill a gap in the research by comparing multiple perspectives, on the five key areas of paraprofessional research, from teachers and paraprofessionals. The following research questions were addressed:

- (1) What are the skills, experiences, training, and responsibilities of paraprofessionals and teachers, and how does this impact job satisfaction and classroom relationships?
- (2) To what extent are these interpretations shared, or not shared, across teachers and paraprofessionals?
- (3) How do paraprofessionals relate to themselves, classroom teachers, students, and the school community, in narrative re-tellings and through structured observations?

### ***Conceptual and Theoretical Framework***

The present study is informed by both narrative theory (Gibson, 1996) and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986). The interviews arise from narrative theory, or the understanding that humans are rational beings and find meanings in their stories (Andrews, Squire, & Tambokou, 2008; Trahar, 2013). Narratives are a way for persons to make meaning of their unique experiences. In research, this allows for methodical examination of the construction of a participants' stories and responses. In this study, paraprofessional and teacher narratives about their experiences will provide insight into how they make meaning of their respective roles with regards to five key themes: a) skill and expertise, b) job fulfillment and satisfaction, c) classroom roles and obligations, d) job preparation and coaching, and e) overall classroom relationships.

In addition to narrative theory, the study is framed by the theory of symbolic interactionism, which serves as a purposeful lens to examine paraprofessional and teacher identity as well as the formation of interactions among these groups (Blumer, 1986). Symbolic interactionism relies on three premises: (1) human beings use meanings they make to act upon certain occurrences or objects, (2) these meanings arise from the social interactions humans have with one another, and (3) these meanings are handled in an interpretive process “used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). A major component of symbolic interactionism emphasizes that human actions result from their individual interpretation of objects and proceedings surrounding them (Blumer, 1969). In the case of paraprofessionals and teachers, these parties serve as active agents who interpret their environment and respond and behave accordingly. In this study, symbolic interactionism shaped the researchers understanding of how paraprofessionals and teachers interpreted and made meaning of the five common themes in the literature: skills/experience, job fulfillment, roles and obligations, preparation and coaching, and relationships with teachers and students (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014).

### ***Methods***

A qualitative case study design was used to investigate the perspectives of paraprofessionals and teachers on multiple issues including: skills and expertise, preparation and training, job fulfillment, roles and obligations, and overall classroom relationships. The qualitative method was selected because the phenomenon to be reviewed includes complex human interactions between the teachers and paraprofessionals (Peterson & Spencer, 1993). Additionally, Klingner and Boardman (2011) note that many studies in special education do not utilize the correct methods to capture “complicated issues faced in schools” (p. 208). As with all case study research, the goal of this study is to deeply understand the boundaries of the case and the intricacy of the behavior patterns of the bounded system (Stake, 1995). In this instance, the bounded system includes the preschool paraprofessionals and teachers in one school system in a mid-Atlantic state.

### ***Participants and Context***

This study was conducted in eight preschool classrooms across one rural county in Western Virginia. The school district contains 11 elementary schools, three middle schools, and five high schools with a total enrollment of approximately 10,500 students. Ninety-three percent of the school population is White, five percent is Black or African American, and the remaining two percent is comprised of Latino, Asian-American, and American Indian students.

The sample consisted of eight paraprofessionals and the eight teachers they directly worked with. The classroom and participants were selected based on proximity to the researcher’s location and because a previous study was conducted in a neighboring school district (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014).

Table 1

#### ***Paraprofessional and Teacher Demographics***

<b>Paraprofessional</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Years Experience</b>	<b>Teaching Partner</b>
Jessica	51	W	High School CDA	4	Carla
Lisa	57	W	Child Development Associate	16	Amy
Sandra	48	W	Associate	30	Melissa
Rebecca	47	W	BA - Business	6	Hailey
Hannah	50	W	Some college	24	Catherine
Tonya	25	W	Associate	4	Brittany
Sally	45	W	High School CDA	9	Chelsea
Jennifer	34	W	Associate	6	Martha

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Years Experience</b>	<b>Teaching Partner</b>
Carla	26	W	Master's	4	Jessica
Amy	31	W	Bachelor's	10	Lisa
Melissa	34	W	Master's	2 teacher 4 para	Sandra
Hailey	50	W	Master's	10	Rebecca
Catherine	32	W	Master's	10	Hannah
Brittany	37	W	Master's	10 – teacher 5 - para	Tonya
Chelsea	38	W	Master's	14	Sally
Martha	32	W	Master's	5	Jennifer

### ***Data Sources and Analysis***

Data collection concentrated on perspectives of both the teachers and the paraprofessionals who worked directly with them, in their classroom. The objective was to understand both perspectives in order to make assertions and ultimately create overall themes from the settings. In addition to case study methodology, narrative inquiry, as described above, was used to “impose order on the

flow of experience to make sense of events and actions” (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). Narrative theory helped the researchers utilize direct conversations and interview transcripts in order to make sense of the observed events and actions. Data were collected through: a) classroom observations; b) semi-structured interviews; and c) document collection.

**Classroom observations.** A total of 24 classroom observations were conducted (three in each of the eight classrooms). The observations lasted for a total of one hour each, or 24 total hours of observation and were conducted by two researchers in the eight classrooms. Overall, the observations took place over the course of two months and were conducted equally before, during, and after interviews of the participants. During observations, both researchers documented what they saw through detailed field notes in a spiral notebook that were later transcribed. To focus the observations, a detailed observation protocol was established. The researchers also generated post-observation analytic memos that detailed “interpretations, methodological notes, observation notes, theoretical assertions, and high- and low-level inferences” (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014). These analytic memos served to inform the researchers on specific questions or actions to observe the next time they entered a classroom.

According to Schwandt (1997), in qualitative inquiry, reliability “is an epistemic criterion thought to be necessary but not sufficient for establishing the truth of an account or interpretation of a social phenomenon” (p. 137). To establish reliability, Researcher One served as the primary coder and observed in each classroom twice, for a total of 16 hours, and then again in four of the classrooms a third time, for an overall total of 20 hours. Researcher Two, for agreement purposes, observed in four of the eight classrooms twice, for a total of four hours. The two researchers then analyzed the data in order to jointly agree on four common themes or assertions. It is important to note, according to Harris, Pryor, and Adams (2006), these assertions are “general in nature” and reliability comes in the form “that two credible researchers or research teams studying the same or similar contexts will generate consistent overall result patterns, and any variance between result sets will be traceable to documented changes in informants and/or researchers” (p. 9). Additional information on validity criteria are further explained in the data

analysis section.

**Interviews.** After concluding observations, eight paraprofessionals and eight teachers were interviewed with a pre-determined interview protocol informed by themes emerging from observations in conjunction with the five common themes drawn from the extant literature. Researcher One designed two discrete interview protocols (one for the teachers and one for the paraprofessionals) in order to obtain multiple perspectives. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, for a total sixteen hours of interview.

Table 2

*Sample Interview Questions*

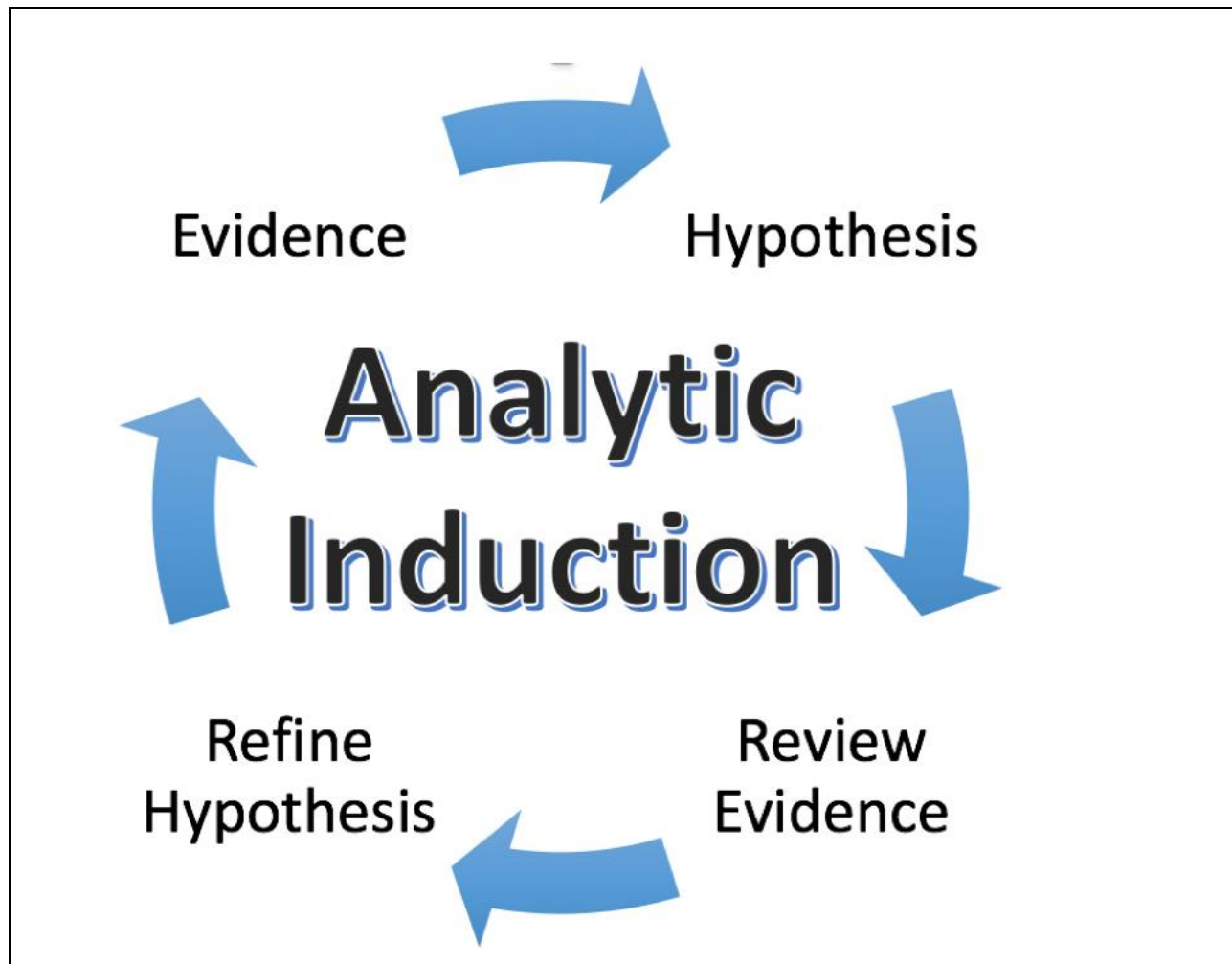
Skill/Expertise	• Describe your educational background: High school/College
Job Fulfillment	• Overall, describe your level of satisfaction with your job responsibilities.
Classroom Roles and Obligations	• What are the responsibilities outlined in your contract?
Job Preparation and Coaching	• What type of training did the you receive before taking this job? (i.e. college training, specific courses, etc.)
Relationships with Teachers and Students	• Explain the importance of having a good relationship with your assistant. What impact does this have on you/him or her/the classroom/and the students?

**Document collection.** Document collection consisted primarily of the school system’s preschool handbook. The handbook is 253 pages and covers all aspects of instruction, responsibilities, relationships within all parties in the preschool program, etc. The handbook specifically covers how to build family partnerships, how to work as a team, procedures for instructional guidance, and necessary forms and other components of the preschool program. In addition to the handbook, several other documents were collected including lesson plans with designated roles and daily instructional notes voluntarily provided by three teachers and four paraprofessionals.

## **Data Analysis**

The same two researchers who conducted the classroom observations conducted the qualitative data analysis. Researchers used naturalistic and interpretive research to seek out meanings of participants. Expressly, this study aimed to gain an understanding of classroom relationships and interactions that took place in eight preschool settings (Erickson, 1986). The data consisted of observations, field notes, the researcher's analytic journal, interview transcriptions, and gathered documents. Researchers explored ongoing qualitative data from the interpretivist paradigm and used the method of analytic induction (Erickson, 1986). Specifically, investigators engaged in an iterative and recursive process where data was continually collected, analyzed, and themes were generated from emerging assertions. Analytic induction, in this sense, was used to form systematic evaluations of social phenomena surrounding the paraprofessionals, and teachers, to develop concepts, ideas, and assertions. Quotations from observations, transcribed interviews, and analytic vignettes were used to illustrate the confirmation of events and validate assertions. A reflective journal was kept to provide trustworthiness for the study in what way?(Stake, 2005).

Qualitative analysis used the following five steps, adapted from Erickson (1986) and Znaniecki (1934): (1) Investigators created a definition of a happening and used this to generate an assertion (i.e. Teachers and paraprofessionals share similar classroom responsibilities). (2) Researchers reassessed observations notes, document collection, and interview data to verify or disprove the assertion. (3) If the assertion was not verified, the investigators examined ways to alter the original assertion. (4) Researchers reviewed supplementary interviews, document collections, and observational notes to facilitate adding additional evidence to the new assertion. (5) Ultimately, when an assertion was not substantiated, the investigators found added information to make a new assertion until there were no data unaccounted for. Furthermore, the same two researchers examined the data and assertions to jointly agree on the collective themes. This process, using triangulation, corroborated the evidence from both researchers, all of the data, and established validity (Creswell, 2002; Stake, 2005). After an assertion was confirmed by evidence, it was called a theme.



*Figure 1:* Analytic Induction from Erickson (1986). This figure represents a visual representation of the analytic induction process.

### ***Findings***

Findings revealed four themes based on interviews, observations, and document analyses. The themes generated in this study were compiled and presented in relation to topics in prior literature and investigated with multiple perspectives in mind. The four themes highlighted (a) the responsibilities and motivation of paraprofessionals in competition with the receptiveness of teachers, (b) the ways in which paraprofessional behaviors assimilate to mimic teacher



behaviors, (c) the mismatch between displayed recognition and appreciation from the teacher, and perceived recognition and appreciation by the paraprofessional, and (d) the governing influence that school, district, and regional policies have on individual classroom outcomes and relationships.

### Theme 1: Responsibilities, Motivation, and Receptiveness

*Teachers and paraprofessionals share similar classroom responsibilities. There is a direct connection between paraprofessional motivation (willingness to engage in specific tasks) and teacher receptiveness (willingness to relinquish responsibilities to paraprofessionals).*

Classroom roles, responsibilities, and interactions are often determined by lead teachers and passed on to paraprofessionals. Lead teachers can either be receptive to help with instruction and classroom interactions or be hesitant to relinquish control. On the other side, paraprofessionals may display strong motivation to become involved in classroom activities, or he or she may require more support and take less initiative. The interchange between these two parties often influences many aspects of the classroom environment.

Table 3

*Examples of the Dual-Connection between Paraprofessional (P) Motivation and Teacher (T) Acceptance/Receptiveness*

	High P Motivation	Low P Motivation
High T Receptiveness	T says in an interview of P, “The way our system works, she pretty much does everything I do. It’s great and	During center time, T asks P if she wants to help lead an art activity. P responds, “No.

	really helpful. The kids treat us the exact same.” (Interview with Teacher 3)	I’m not really good with crafts. You know that.” (Observation in Classroom 5)
Low T Receptiveness	P asks if it is acceptable to begin another story because her group finishes before T’s group. T responds, “You stick to the schedule. Just wait.” (Observation in Classroom 4)	T becomes agitated in an interview and says of the P, “I don’t want her to do anything because she doesn’t know how to do it anyway. Plus, she’s fine just sitting on her butt, so that’s one thing we agree on.” (Interview with Teacher 1)

The above table illustrates four examples of the interchange among paraprofessional motivation and teacher receptiveness to responsibilities. As described in Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2014), motivation is defined as a “paraprofessional’s willingness to perform classroom tasks” (p. 6). Receptiveness is defined as “the teacher’s willingness to relinquish control and allow the paraprofessional to complete classroom tasks” (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014, p. 6). In the occurrence of high teacher receptiveness and high paraprofessional motivation, Mrs. Hailey, emphasized the importance of mutual communication and collaboration. “She pretty much does everything I do. It’s great and really helpful,” said Mrs. Hailey. Mrs. Hailey also made a point to illustrate the positive impact this had on the students in the classroom by stating they treated her and her paraprofessional “The exact same.” (Interview, 4/12/16).

An example of the exact opposite of this interchange can be seen in a teacher with low receptiveness and a paraprofessional with low motivation. Mrs. Chelsea became very agitated when discussing her relationship with the paraprofessional. She made multiple comments about how the paraprofessional “Doesn’t know how to do it anyway” and she does not “want her to do anything.” (Interview, 3/22/16). These remarks were reinforced during a separate classroom observation illustrated in the following vignette:

The students return from specials (art today) and enter the room quietly in a single-file line. Sandra leads the line. As everyone arrives, Mrs. Melissa asks the students to sit on the farm-themed carpet. Sandra immediately retreats to chair in the back corner of the room. Mrs. Melissa begins to ask the students what they did in art, how their weekend was, and other introductory morning questions. One student, who is having trouble sitting still, stands up and walks to the back corner of the room which is adjacent to Sandra. Sandra does not acknowledge him but instead picks up a magazine and begins flipping the pages. Mrs. Melissa carries on with her questioning of the children and then notices the stray student. She appears slightly irritated and says, “Steven. Get back to the carpet.” Sandra briefly looks up from her magazine, rolls her eyes, and then continues to read.

Steven retreats to the rug. He places both hands in the air and begins to wave them around. Only two students look at him. Mrs. Melissa keeps reading. Suddenly Steven begins making animal noises. He snorts like a pig several times and uses his index finger to turn up the tip of his nose (seemingly imitating a pig). Mrs. Melissa glances at Sandra. She is still reading her magazine. Steven, continuing to make the pig noise, starts to get the attention of at least five students. Mrs. Melissa politely asks him to, “Please be quiet during story time.” Sandra again briefly looks up from her magazine, smiles, and lets out a small chuckle. (Observation, 2/23/16).

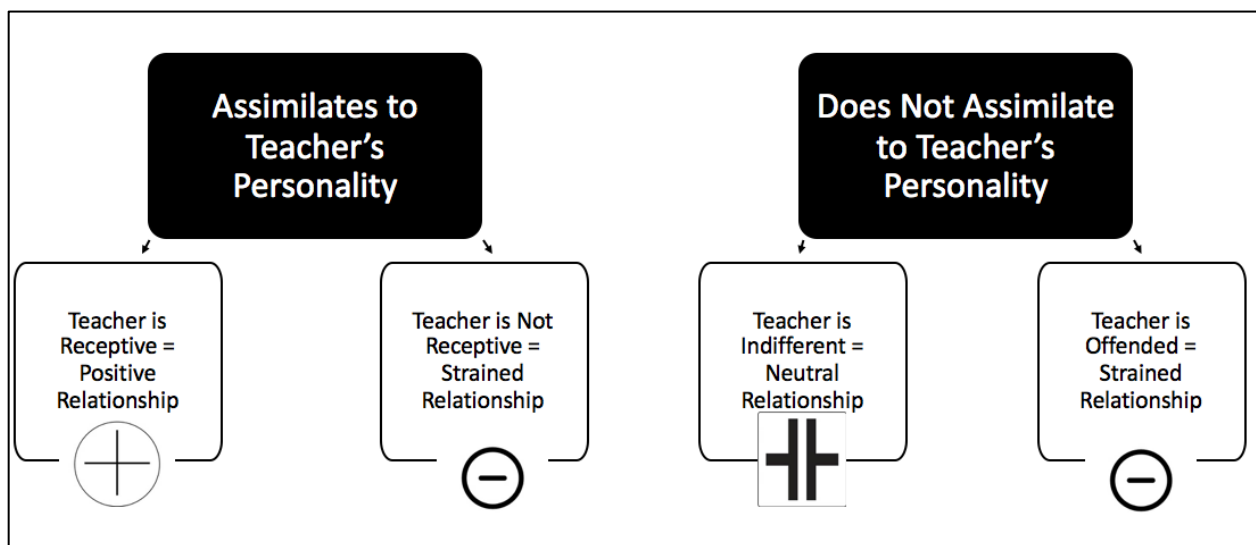
In this vignette, the paraprofessional, Sandra, made no attempt to assist when a student displayed inappropriate or distractive behavior. Similarly, Mrs. Melissa made no attempt to engage Sandra in the classroom activity or ask for her assistance in managing the behavior. This is an observed example of the paraprofessional displaying low motivation while the teacher simultaneously displays low receptiveness to paraprofessional support.

The two other types of relationships are low paraprofessional motivation coupled with high teacher receptiveness and high paraprofessional motivation coupled with low teacher receptiveness. As seen in Table 4, there is a conflict when a paraprofessional displays low motivation but the teacher is receptive to help. For example, in an observation, Mrs. Brittany (the teacher) asked Tonya (the paraprofessional) to help lead an art activity. Tonya responded with, “No. I am not really good at crafts. You know that.” (Interview, 4/5/16). Conversely, in another observation, the opposite was witnessed. In this case, the paraprofessional (Hannah) asked her teacher (Mrs. Catherine) if she could begin another story when her group finished their book. Mrs. Catherine immediately responded, “You stick to the schedule. Just wait.” (Observation, 3/2/16). In this instance, although the paraprofessional took initiative, the teacher was not receptive to her help. Ultimately, this theme of motivation and receptiveness has an impact on the classroom relationship and can be seen in Theme Two.

## **Theme 2: Relationships and Demeanor Assimilation**

*Paraprofessionals often assimilate to match the lead teacher’s demeanor and perspectives. A power dynamic exists between the teacher and paraprofessional which causes the paraprofessional to work not only to please the teacher, but the paraprofessional may actually take on some of the personality traits displayed by the teacher. This is more commonly visible in classrooms where teachers and paraprofessionals have worked with one another for longer periods of time.*

Analogous to Theme One, the interchange between paraprofessional motivation and teacher receptiveness often leads to the formation of the relationship power dynamic in the classroom. Specifically, teacher-paraprofessional relationships can be significantly influenced by the paraprofessional's attitude and demeanor. Some paraprofessionals, especially those who have worked with a teacher for a long time, tend to “act” like and take on personality characteristics of the lead teacher in the classroom. When this happens, teachers can either be receptive or non-receptive.



*Figure 2. Personality Assimilation.* This figure illustrates paraprofessional assimilation to teacher demeanor and personality.

This figure can be further supported through classroom observations and interviews. The following vignette is an example of a paraprofessional, Sally, who tries to assimilate to the teacher's personality by taking on similar views:

The students are engaged in center time. Some are playing with blocks, trains, and barn animals while others are enjoying the art area or water table. A group of three girls play house and have a small disagreement over who should be the “mom” and who should be

the “baby”. Mrs. Chelsea sits with two boys, near the art center, to demonstrate the vocabulary word of the day -- “huffing”. The boys giggle as Mrs. Chelsea uses various objects (sand, paper, cotton, and wood) to see if they move by simply blowing on them. Sally is in the opposite corner of the room helping a student navigate ABCmouse on the computer.

A visitor comes in and speaks with Sally. The visitor says, “Wow. It must be a full moon or something because the kids are off the wall.” Sally smiles and says, “I know! I thought the same thing.” The visitor leaves. Minutes later Sally walks up to Mrs. Chelsea and says, “Is it a full moon?” Mrs. Chelsea quickly replies, “Why? I don’t believe in that. It is not researched-based.” Immediately Sally says, “Oh, I know. Me neither. It’s just a dumb thing people say.” (Observation, 3/2/16).

This vignette represents one example of a paraprofessional agreeing with or assimilating to the teacher’s beliefs. Sally mentioned how “knowledgeable” Mrs. Chelsea is and how they “agree on everything.” (Observation, 3/2/16). This as a strong example of a positive relationship between the paraprofessional and teacher with mutual respect and veneration. In this instance, the paraprofessional is proud of sharing similar qualities with the teacher, and the teacher is receptive to this assimilation. This idea was confirmed with this specific teacher and paraprofessional pair in a subsequent interview with Sally where she mentioned she feels “fortunate to have such a great teacher as a role model.” (Interview, 3/22/16). In a separate interview Mrs. Chelsea commented she is “proud of how Sally is turning into such a great educator” thus confirming this assimilation is seen as positive among both parties. (Interview, 3/22/16).

A very different view of this demeanor assimilation can be seen in Mrs. Catherine’s classroom. In this setting the researcher witnessed Hannah, the paraprofessional, attempt to “get along” with Mrs. Catherine on a personal level. During a candid discussion at the playground Hannah made

several comments to the teacher about how they both liked the same television shows and lived in the same area. One comment was made about “hanging out outside of work.” (Observation, 3/2/16). Mrs. Catherine just smiled and nodded and did not reply to this request. In a subsequent interview Mrs. Catherine told the researcher it can be “frustrating” when Hannah spends too much time “trying to please me” and less time “focusing on her job responsibilities.” (Interview, 4/5/16).

Additional comments from three paraprofessionals through interviews and observations include:

- “I just follow her lead. She went to school, so I assume she is right.” (Interview, 4/5/16).
- “People say I’m a lot like her (teacher). Do you see it?” (Interview, 4/21/16).
- “We tend to get along because we do things the same. Sometimes the kids get us confused.” (Interview, 3/22/16).

These comments illustrate varying views from multiple paraprofessionals but reflect there may be some form of power dynamic which results in the paraprofessional adjusting their opinion and perspectives to meet teacher needs. Perhaps this is why, in some cases, the paraprofessional tries to take on the role of the teacher’s personality in order to “fit in” and get along. Overall, these classroom relationships often impact recognition and appreciation, as demonstrated below in Theme Three.

### **Theme 3: Multiple Views - Mismatch Between Displayed Recognition/Appreciation and Perceived Recognition and Appreciation**

*Teachers and paraprofessionals have contrasting views on several factors including what constitutes appropriate recognition and appreciation. While teachers often state they value paraprofessionals this appreciation is often not “seen” or obvious to paraprofessionals. Contrastingly, paraprofessionals often feel undervalued, overworked, and undercompensated.*

Paraprofessional contentment as a result of both responsibilities (Theme One) and relationships (Theme Two) repeatedly revolves around the concept of recognition and appreciation. These lines become blurred when a paraprofessional does not perceive he or she is respected or appreciated, but the teacher feels he or she is demonstrating outright appreciation. In many instances teachers may believe that their appreciation is noticed when it is often actually undetected by the paraprofessional. Additionally, these paraprofessionals internalize this lack of appreciation causing them to feel devalued and overtasked. Examples of both of these outcomes were present during this study and are described below.

***Views from teachers.*** In conversations with the teachers, seven of the eight made a point to discuss their display of appreciation for the paraprofessional in their classroom. Specifically, Mrs. Catherine stated she often gave “gifts” to show her appreciation. (Interview, 4/5/16). In a conversation with Mrs. Amy she mentioned she “enjoyed working” with her paraprofessional and felt she did a “good job” showing it. (Observation, 2/4/16). Additional comments from the teachers through interviews and observations include:

- “I always tell her thank you. Even if we don’t have time to talk, I just make sure I say at least that.” (Interview, 3/22/16).
- “Every Friday we order lunch. Sometimes I’ll offer to pay for hers. She doesn’t always accept, but I just want her to know she’s valued.” (Interview, 4/12/16).
- “Yea, I think she knows how thankful I am to have her. We have a very challenging class, and I wouldn’t be able to get all of these things done if she wasn’t here.” (Interview, 4/5/16).

***Views from paraprofessionals.*** In interviews and candid conversations with the paraprofessionals only three outwardly reported the teacher engaging in positive affirmation for their work, making statements like “She is encouraging,” “She lets me know when I do



something correctly,” and “She always compliments how hard I work.” (Interview, 4/12/16). The other five assistants displayed very different views. For example, Rebecca stated she “got along” with her cooperating teacher but she never really felt like there was a “mutual respect” or “connection.” (Interview, 4/12/16). Similarly, during a candid conversation, Sally discussed how she works extremely hard for the teacher, school, and students and “nobody seems to care.” (Interview, 3/22/16). Additional comments from the paraprofessionals include:

- “I kind of just do what I’m told. She doesn’t really say much.” (Interview, 4/12/16).
- “I think she does like having me here, but she isn’t really good at showing it. It’s just her personality, I guess.” (Interview, 4/21/16).
- “I think getting more appreciation from her would make the job a lot more fun. I love the kids but sometimes I feel like that’s not enough.” (Interview, 4/5/16).

Due to these competing views, the primary researcher decided to candidly ask one paraprofessional and lead teacher the same question. This pair were chosen for further examination because both the teacher and paraprofessional were very open with their interview responses previously and the researcher wanted to know if different views would be displayed. The question and corresponding answers can be seen in Figure 3. As demonstrated, while the teacher felt she showed appreciation for her assistant through a formal Christmas gift, the assistant did not even remember receiving the gift. Instead, she remembered the teacher did not directly thank her for support in the classroom. This is a robust example of the mismatch between the displayed recognition and appreciation from the teacher and the perceived recognition and appreciation from the paraprofessional. This relationship dynamic was also influenced by school configuration and policies, as seen in Theme Four.

Question: Did you two do anything for each other for Christmas? If so, what?		
	Teacher Response	Paraprofessional Response
	"I spent a lot of time thinking about what to get her. She is kind of funny about receiving presents, but I wanted her to know she was thought of, so I just got her some candy. She loves candy."	"I got her a candle, but I can't remember if she got me anything. Maybe food? I don't know. I didn't really want a present but a card saying 'Thank You' would have been nice."

Figure 3: Comparing Views. This figure represents comparing views, between the teacher and paraprofessional, on the same question of recognition and appreciation.

#### Theme 4: Governing Influence by School Configuration and Policies

*While classroom relationships are often impacted by paraprofessional-teacher relationships, school and district policies greatly influence classroom outcomes. Individual teacher choice and freedom is first and foremost affected by institutional governing policies. Therefore, instruction and interactions between paraprofessionals, teachers, students, and families may vary based on different school system policies.*

Despite the above themes relating to appreciation, relationships, and responsibilities, teachers and paraprofessionals are often at the mercy of their school system. Specifically, district policies often dictate the curriculum (Werts, Harris, Tillery, & Roark, 2004), expectations (Drecktrah, 2000), and policies (Riggs & Mueller, 2001). This means that different school systems may alter paraprofessional-teacher and paraprofessional-student relationships based on their own policies. While some schools may require paraprofessionals to take more of a “back seat” to the teacher, and serve as a supplementary or supportive role, other systems require paraprofessionals to take on very similar roles and responsibilities.

For this study, researchers accessed, through document collection, the school system’s preschool handbook. A component of the handbook shows little difference between teacher and paraprofessional roles. For example, many sections state the teacher and paraprofessional are responsible for the same obligations. Table 4 illustrates an example of these similarities. Additionally, the handbook discusses the importance of parallel collaboration between all members of the instructional team. Table 5 is just one of many examples of how paraprofessionals and teachers in this district are viewed as equal entities with a common goal for student success.

Table 4

*Example of Similar Teacher and Paraprofessional Responsibilities from the Preschool Handbook*

- *Participates appropriately in planning/delivering instructions*  
The assistant will help the teacher plan for the daily schedule, changes in the daily schedule, theme based instruction, and individual differences.  
The assistant will deliver teacher created objectives with individuals, small group, and whole group. Examples:
  - ✓ The assistant will help the teacher plan for his/her role in the daily schedule during the following times of the day: unloading buses, breakfast, transitions, group time, tooth brushing, center time, large motor time, lunch, rest, and the closing of the day.
  - ✓ The assistant will understand and help provide support during changes in the day such as early dismissals, special activities and assemblies.
  - ✓ The assistant will help the teacher implement a teacher planned class theme; help with centers, individual work, small group, and whole group. The assistant may be asked to make teacher directed materials to support the class theme.
  - ✓ The assistant will help the teacher deliver planned activities such as read aloud observations, art, reading to students, assisting students in library, writing dictations given by students, helping students locate and use materials, assisting students to follow and understand directions, encouraging students to work independently, and listening to students.

Table 5

*Demonstration of Paraprofessionals and Teachers as Equal in the Preschool Handbook*

<p><b>Social/Emotional Development</b></p> <p>As teachers and teaching assistants, we want the preschool children in our classrooms to demonstrate school readiness by reaching the following goals: (Preschool Staff developed these goals)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Lifetime learners</li> <li>• Positive outlook on life</li> <li>• Believe they can do it</li> <li>• Self Confidence</li> <li>• Contribute to community</li> <li>• Respectful</li> <li>• Problem solving skills</li> <li>• Responsible</li> <li>• Be their best</li> <li>• Be risk takers</li> <li>• Express themselves comfortably</li> <li>• Self control</li> <li>• Feel safe and loved</li> </ul>
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This district-level policy was easily observed in the classrooms, as well. An example is displayed in the following vignette:

Mrs. Carla quickly arranged the classroom for the read-aloud. She placed two of the same books, *The Three Little Pigs*, in separate areas of the room. Just as she did this, Jessica arrived with the students. They entered the classroom, one by one, and Mrs. Carla said, “Ok. Those in my group come on over!” Seven students walked and calmly sat down on the carpet in front of Mrs. Carla. The remaining eight students walked to the other side of the room, along with Jessica, and sat on a round carpet in front of her. Then, Mrs. Carla and Jessica began to talk.

Mrs. Carla said, “How many of you have ever been to a farm?” The students enthusiastically raised their hands or shouted, “Me!” Across the room, Jessica could be

heard saying, “Have any of you ever been to a farm?” The students shouted and exclaimed, “I have!” Next, Mrs. Carla asked, “Do you know what your house is made out of?” Almost simultaneously, Jessica, talking to her group, asked, “What materials are your homes made from?” After these questions, Mrs. Carla and Jessica each read the book to their respective groups, with both stopping at similar times for discussion and extension activities. (Observation, 3/10/16).

This vignette is an example of the district policy in action. For example, the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) created a policy document to help bridge the gap between research and practice, by providing guidance to all stakeholders involved in the education of young children. Part of the policy on teaming collaboration states the following:

*The quality of the relationships and interactions among these adults affects the success of these programs. Teaming and collaboration practices are those that promote and sustain collaborative adult partnerships, relationships, and ongoing interactions to ensure that programs and services achieve desired child and family outcomes and goals* (DEC Recommended Practices, 2014, p. 14)

In this instance, the paraprofessional took on the same role as the teacher when it came to this academic task. Additionally, there was evidence of collaboration and mutual understanding because the teacher and paraprofessional led the group instruction very similarly, including asking the same extension and discussion questions. This lends itself directly to a policy in the handbook, shown in Table 5.

### ***Discussion***

In this study, paraprofessional and teacher views were investigated in order to discover answers to important questions on skills/expertise, job fulfillment, roles and obligations, preparation and training, and classroom relationships. Furthermore, this study expanded on previous research by using an in-depth approach to include multiple perspectives on classroom experiences. Overall,

the findings support existing paraprofessional research in these five domains (e.g., Giangreco et al., 2012).

**Skills/expertise.** Collective data analyses offered added points to the extant literature. First, research emphasizes the role of the classroom teacher as a supervisor to the paraprofessional (Appl, 2006). Teachers commonly have higher levels of education and are put into supervisory roles based on expertise (Nichols, 2013). While this is the case in many schools, analyses from this study revealed that district, regional, state, and national policies actually have a larger impact on classroom dealings than teacher supervision. It was noted that while several systems may ask paraprofessionals to serve in a supportive role to the teacher, other schools require paraprofessionals to take on additional classroom roles. In this study, the school system investigated set forth a specific policy treating paraprofessionals and teachers as equals. Although the teacher was still the “supervisor,” she was not treated with more respect in the classroom than the paraprofessional with less education. Both were equivalent members in the classroom and expected to perform similar classroom duties including supervision, discipline, and instruction.

**Preparation and coaching.** Similar to skills/expertise, extant research identified paraprofessional education and experience as the major influencing factors on job performance (Bolton & Mayer, 2008). Brown & Stanton-Chapman (2014) discovered that motivation, on both the part of the teacher and paraprofessional, actually played a larger role than formal education and training or coaching. This follow-up study confirmed Brown and Stanton-Chapman’s (2014) findings, in Theme One by recognizing that educational levels and training had little impact on classroom performance but rather “a bigger influence was the ability or inability of the paraprofessional to engage in classroom responsibilities coupled with the desire or unwillingness of the teacher to relinquish control in her classroom” (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014, p. 10). This theme was seen again in the current study as both teachers and paraprofessionals viewed the motivation of the paraprofessional as more important than their previous experience or levels of training. Specifically, the current study found that teachers who allowed

paraprofessionals more freedom and autonomy reported higher levels of successful classroom relationships and outcomes than those teachers who allowed less flexibility. This finding was in contrast to previous studies that documented the lack of training as the major impacting factor for classroom success (Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco, & Pelsue, 2009; Frith & Lindsey, 1982).

**Job fulfillment.** Next, several previous studies discuss the negative impact of minimal pay for paraprofessionals (Appl, 2006). Additionally, Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2014) found that while paraprofessionals feel underpaid, teachers do not always feel paraprofessionals deserve more compensation. In this study, reports from paraprofessionals and teachers alike indicated that both parties are underpaid. While previous research alluded to this as a more pressing issue in paraprofessional research (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014; Katsiyannis, 2000), this study showed that policies, specifically in this Mid-Atlantic region, have made it difficult for pay advances for all members of the school community no matter their job title. Perhaps more importantly, evidence from Theme 3 revealed this fulfillment is also more likely to be impacted by non-monetary compensation and appreciation. While teachers often felt they demonstrated recognition and appreciation for their assistants/paraprofessionals, the paraprofessionals saw these displays of recognition very differently and often felt under-appreciated while over-utilized for classroom tasks. Findings from interviews and observations revealed this mode of appreciation was more significant and discussed more frequently than monetary compensation.

**Roles and obligations.** Similarly, document collection and observation revealed a strong indication that higher officials hold an important influence on all aspects of classroom interactions. Particularly, while teachers often supervise paraprofessionals and dictate their responsibilities, this changes from location to location based on the flexibility and autonomy allowed by each school system. This was further revealed in Theme 4 where the district policy had a larger impact on all aspects of classroom dealings than simply teacher or paraprofessional discretion. In this study, teachers and paraprofessionals had very specific duties outlined in a handbook. This finding is consistent with previous research that outlines national, state, and district policies for paraprofessionals (Armstrong, 2010; Katsiyannis, 2000), but it places an

added emphasis on the importance of structured requirements for paraprofessionals and notes these requirements vary from location to location.

**Classroom relationships.** Finally, the issue of classroom relationships was revealed in all themes. Theme 1 was consistent with Brown and Stanton-Chapman's (2014) research findings. In this theme, researchers found that responsibilities, motivation, and receptiveness impact all aspects of the classroom including curriculum and student contentment. More specifically, when teacher receptiveness is coupled with paraprofessional motivation a dynamic exists that can drastically change classroom occurrences. Additionally, a second finding in the relationship domain was revealed in Theme 2 and included an interesting component on teacher-paraprofessional relationships relating to a power-dynamic. Consistent with previous literature, paraprofessionals and teachers often form close relationships due to their work proximity (Blalock, 1991; Burgess & Mayes, 2009). Explicitly, the current study found this to be true and also found many paraprofessionals, who are often under-trained and under-educated, attempt to assimilate to the teacher's position and demeanor in order to positively impact the overall classroom atmosphere.

### ***Limitations and Directions for Future Research***

This study is not without limitations. First, the majority of this study relied only participant's self-reported data. Although, there is a growing body of work emphasizing the validity of self-reported data (Kuncel, Crede, & Thomas, 2005), researchers paid particular attention to responses that occurred from selective memory (omitting experiences in memory), telescoping (recalling events at the wrong time), attribution (attaching positive events to personal success and negative events to external factors), and exaggeration (embellishing responses and events) (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013). Also, triangulation of data was used to combat validity concerns. Despite the awareness of these issues, it is simply not possible to independently verify each interview respondent's answers.



Second, the overall sample was not demographically diverse. All observation and interview participants were white, female, and ranged in age from 25 to 51. Additionally, the study was conducted in one rural school district in the Mid-Atlantic region. Although findings may contribute to the literature and provide further insight into paraprofessional issues, they cannot be generalized outside of the population and specific bounded system.

With those limitations delineated, future research should emphasize three areas: First, further studies should use larger, more defined and diverse samples. While this study expanded on a previous investigation, future research should continue to explore these same questions with a larger sample size, a different geographical region, and differentiated demographic specifications. Second, future research should explore both case studies and larger survey studies in order to get more in-depth qualitative analysis from case studies and more evidence for statistical comparison in larger survey studies. Third, further research should be conducted on outcomes for schools that utilize paraprofessionals and teachers in different ways, particularly distinguishing between schools that follow or do not follow DEC Standards (DEC Recommended Practices, 2014). Finally, additional research should be conducted on the interplay of these findings including paraprofessional-teacher relationships in multiple settings and the influence of culture and varying demographic categories on these interactions.

### ***Practice and Policy Implications***

These findings have considerable implications for policy-makers and stakeholders in U.S. school systems. This study provides preliminary evidence of different perspectives among paraprofessionals and teachers across almost all domains mentioned in the public-school setting. Throughout the course of the interviews and observations, findings were revealed that could have practice implications, in four primary areas: (a) responsibilities, motivation, and environment, (b) relationships and demeanor assimilation, (c) mismatch between displayed recognition/appreciation and perceived recognition/appreciation, and (d) governing influence by school configuration and policies.

### **Responsibilities, motivation, and environment.**

Research notes that paraprofessional and teacher responsibilities vary from location to location (Appl, 2006; Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014). In this study, although teachers reported higher levels of education and job training compared to their direct paraprofessionals, interview and observational data confirmed that this was not mentioned as an impacting factor for classroom duties. Specifically, teachers and paraprofessionals both made multiple mentions of the impact that motivation and enthusiasm had on classroom activities. There were only two instances where paraprofessionals stated they did not have adequate education to perform the same duties as teachers. With this in mind, policy makers could consider additional factors that contribute to classroom outcomes. Although the United States government has attempted to require paraprofessionals to earn more educational requirements through No Child Left Behind and Title 1 restrictions there are other factors that influence classroom performance (Nichols, 2013). Additionally, according to Katsiyannis (2000), “Credentialing systems are not widespread, and in most cases paraeducators are untrained personnel who are often employed for economic, political or logistical reasons” (p. 303). Taking this into account, policy-makers should look for other ways to determine the impact paraprofessionals have on classroom occurrences (i.e. inclusion, student outcomes, instruction, and discipline) and provide meaningful ways to allocate resources and establish hiring and supervisory procedures.

### **Relationships and demeanor assimilation.**

Secondly, extant research has looked at the ways that paraprofessionals interact with their supervisors and teachers and noted that working in close proximity often influences many aspects of the classroom environment (Blalock, 1991; Burgess & Mayes, 2009). In the current study, researchers found that paraprofessionals often assimilate to teacher behaviors in order to “please” or “succumb” to teacher demands. This has important implications for policy as school systems may want to look at “who” is a paraprofessional, why they chose the position, and what attracts them to this occupation. Additionally, this relationship between teachers and paraprofessionals has important research implications to consider and explore which types of

relationships provide the best outcomes for students in the classroom.

### **Mismatch between displayed and perceived recognition and appreciation.**

Thirdly, this study was among the first to look at multiple perspectives from teachers and paraprofessionals on classroom issues, particularly in the preschool setting. While existing research recognizes many paraprofessionals and teachers are attracted to the profession based on hours and benefits, there is also evidence to show low job desirability based on pay (Appl, 2006). Additionally, research recognizes that paraprofessionals often leave due to low job fulfillment (Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012). Little is known about the rates of paraprofessionals that leave the occupation based on both monetary and non-monetary compensation. Findings from this study highlighted that paraprofessionals and teachers often perceive recognition and appreciation differently. Many paraprofessionals in the study reported low levels of recognition and appreciation from their supervising teacher. Contrastingly, teachers perceived they adequately recognized and showed appreciation for the paraprofessional in their classroom. This finding alone has policy implications for two reasons. First, these outcomes may indicate a need for teacher sensitivity or awareness training in order to provide recognition and support that is desired from the paraprofessionals. Second, school systems may better service their teachers and paraprofessionals and promote job satisfaction by surveying their needs, fulfillment, and desirability for retention.

### **Governing influence by school configuration and policies.**

Finally, the majority of policy implications from this study lie in the governing influence by school configuration and policies. It is important to mention that national, state, district, and local policies all impact classroom operations. Findings from this study indicated paraprofessional and teacher roles, responsibilities, and even overall contentment were based on the district policies outlined explicitly in a handbook. Research has shown that these policies vary based on location (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014; Nichols, 2013). With this in mind, there are important implications for varying school systems to decide in which ways they wish to utilize their

personnel. This has practice and policy implications for all areas to determine which schools are most successful in distinctive domains (i.e. discipline, academics, job retention) based on their use of personnel. Practice may improve if these groups adopt anti-deficit model attitudes and assume that each party has a stake in creating a positive environment and enhancing educational and social outcomes for all children (Song & Pyon, 2008).

In conclusion, more research is needed on paraprofessional roles, contentment, education, and training. This situation is of concern because paraprofessionals work closely with teachers and students but are utilized in many different ways. A few concluding questions that emerge from the data presented in this study include: (a) How can schools best utilize paraprofessionals and teachers collectively? (b) What comprises effective training and education levels for paraprofessionals given their diverse job requirements? (c) How can teachers and administrators plan for successful classroom outcomes while utilizing paraprofessionals in varied settings?

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## ***The Scarlet Letter: Applying a Scaffolded Reading Intervention to Engage Reluctant Readers***

**By Emmett Neno**

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### **Abstract**

A scaffolded reading experience typically involves using specific activities before, during, and while reading a text to help students understand the material in that text and to connect it to their lives in order to foster increased engagement (Appleman & Graves, 2012). Epstein (2020) found that such activities can help students interact with difficult texts that are difficult to understand and that might appear to be difficult to relate to. In this case, a scaffolded reading experience intervention was applied for a senior class in an alternative high school in order to increase the students' engagement with *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 2007). Students were asked to act as social workers in order to diagnose issues with one of the characters, and in the end, this activity increased student engagement and motivation in analyzing and assessing the text as well as in responding to the problems the characters faced.

*Keywords:* Scaffolded Reading Experience, struggling readers, reluctant readers, student engagement, student motivation

### **Literature Review**

Appleman and Graves (2012) examined the importance of using a scaffolded reading experience (SRE) to help students understand and connect to the texts that they are reading; such an experience can rely on activities that are set up to engage students and to consider a text in light of their lived experiences before they read the text, while they read the text, and after they read the text. In particular, helping students connect what they are reading with what they have experienced in their lives can draw them more deeply into a text and give them more interest with what they are reading about than might have happened before (Appleman &

Graves, 2012). More recently, Epstein (2020) noted that a scaffolded reading experience that used methods such as reading a text as a group, creating individualized drawings to depict the text, and asking students to present their personal reactions and thoughts to the text could be used to foster student engagement and to help students understand complex texts.

### **The Current Situation**

The current intervention was implemented at an alternative high school in central New York; the students are sent to the alternative school from a variety of home school districts when the students need or wish to participate in a smaller classroom environment in order to be comfortable and successful in an academic setting. In particular, this intervention was carried out with a class of 12 seniors. In this class, there are a total of five students who are classified with IEPs or 504 plans with needs ranging from learning disability (LD) to other health impairment (OHI) to emotional impairment while the rest of the students are classified as general education students. Nine of the students identify as female while three students identify as male. At the beginning of the year, the majority of the students identified themselves as reluctant readers and writers.

Before the school year began, a decision was made to start by studying a modern translation of *The Scarlet Letter*, a novel about a woman who is persecuted by her religious society for having an affair and a child as a result of that affair (Hawthorne, 2007), due to a variety of social issues that are examined in the novel and that the teacher knew the students would be able to connect with. A number of activities were used to encourage and to motivate student engagement with the novel through activating students' prior knowledge about social injustices at the beginning of the year, and the students began their study of the novel while being strongly engaged with it. However, about five weeks into the school year and after the students had been spending most of the week on a writing project, they came to class and stated they felt the novel was dragging and that they believed they were unable to connect with what was taking place with the characters.

At that point, the teacher made a decision to pause the reading of the novel in order to help the students connect with the protagonist's daughter, Pearl, who was about to be judged harshly by various other characters due to what was considered her abnormal social behaviors.

The teacher believed that the students would empathize with Pearl and her situation if they could connect her circumstances to what they had been through, so a decision was made to place the students in a role that they were familiar with due to their interaction with this type of individual: that of a social worker. A scenario was developed in which the students would be split into small groups and first informed that they were social workers who had just been visited by a young mother who was concerned about her daughter's behavior. In this scenario, the young mother reported that her daughter was often disobedient, that she would throw things at other little children that she would destroy things she played with, that she would grow very angry when others were upset, that she would throw things at her mother, and that she would look possessed. The students would then be asked what diagnosis they would give the mother in order to explain her daughter's behavior.

Then, the students would be given the second half of the scenario in which they would be informed about the child's social experiences in growing up including continually being cursed at by other children, being forced to leave a store upon entering or seeing everyone else exit the store once the mother and daughter entered, seeing others cross to the other side of the street when the mother and daughter approached, and not being invited to any holiday parties or birthday parties or having anyone else come to a holiday party or birthday party that the mother and daughter put together. The students would then be asked how their diagnosis would change based upon their increased understanding of the girl's situation.

To gain insight into other perspectives regarding this intervention as well as to make sure that it would not trigger memories of past traumatic events for any of the students who would be involved in the scenario, the intervention was first presented to the principal and to a consulting special education teacher for approval. Next, two students from other ELA classes were randomly selected and asked to examine the scenario; both students stated that they thought the first part of the scenario was not fair to the child at all, but they added that they appreciated how the second part of the scenario brought up the child's circumstances. The teacher then made enough copies of the scenario for all of the twelfth grade students.

When the twelfth grade students arrived, they were broken into two small groups, provided with copies of the scenario, and given their instructions. During the first part of the scenario, most of the students in both groups quickly decided that the girl in the scenario must be

diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), but one student in each group insisted that the girl was just acting like a normal child. Then, when they were instructed to review the second part of the scenario, the students responded with mixed results: Some stated they still believed that the child should be diagnosed with ASD or with ADHD while others stated they believed the child had just been raised in a bad environment, meaning the resulting behaviors were normal.

In the end, the majority of the students grew most angry at how the child threw things at the mother but did not seem to be punished for doing so. It was at this point that the teacher informed the students that the girl they were reading about was really the character whom they would be studying in the novel that day, and to answer questions about the mother's seeming lack of discipline, the teacher asked the students if they had ever met adults who tried to be friends to their children instead of acting as parents. When most of the students stated they were personally familiar with such examples, the teacher reminded them of how the protagonist had been cut off from everyone else in her society, meaning she had no other friends than her only daughter. As a result, it seemed that the mother might be trying to be kind to her daughter because she did not want to estrange her only system of social support. The students stated they agreed with this point but then became upset that the mother had not chosen to leave where she lived in a colony in the New World so that her daughter could grow up in a better place. When they were asked if they thought that the mother could reasonably leave this place and travel to an unknown place especially when the man she had an affair with remained behind, the students became visibly and verbally upset and argued that the child should be taken away from the mother due to the mother's inability to make wise choices for her daughter. The resulting conversation continued until the end of the period to the point that the teacher was able to read only a couple of pages from the novel with the class before the bell signaled the end of the period.

At the end of the day, the teacher learned that a number of the students had continued to be affected by what they had discussed: During their last period, several of the seniors had gone to their social studies teacher and expressed discouragement with the characters in the novel they were reading or a difficulty in focusing on their work in other classes due to a frustration with the choices that were being made by the characters they had been discussing. The following day, the

English teacher met with the senior class again to discuss the novel, and although the students stated they were not happy with the situations the characters found themselves in, they added that they did not find themselves unable to connect with the characters any longer.

### **Conclusion**

This intervention focused upon applying the concepts of a scaffolded reading experience to a classroom containing reluctant or struggling readers. A scaffolded reading experience typically involves using pre-reading, during-reading, and after-reading activities to connect students' prior knowledge to a text, to engage them by helping them interact with a text, and to help them to understand a complex text by associating it with events students are familiar with (Appleman & Graves, 2012). When specific methods such as giving students opportunities to hear a text read as a group, to draw pictures of a text, or to pose personal questions or reactions to a text are used, student understanding of and engagement with complex texts can increase (Epstein, 2020). In this case, students who cited a lack of engagement with a text were provided with an activity that encouraged them to connect their prior experiences and prior knowledge with the character's experiences, thereby assisting them in understanding and sympathizing with that character. In the end, this brief scaffolded reading activity prompted increased engagement and heightened emotional responses from the students as they began to analyze and to assess the characters and the characters' decisions.

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## **Book Review: Start with Why**

**Frank Andres Lorenzo**

“Start with Why” has the purpose of getting individuals involved by inspiring them to work and adapting the leadership mentality of inspiring one’s mind to go out and about to reach for the stars. In the thesis, Sinek states the fact that many of us start doing something we are capable of and goes on to explain that we as people get to the point to realize the purpose of why is it that we partake in the activities and actions we take part of. One of the main themes is the fact that if you want to be someone to inspire others, it is essential to explain why you want to inspire others. To make an impact on another individual, it is essential that you show them why it’s important to start the path. Another essential theme is that excited employees are the backbone of the most successful businesses. The purpose of that theme is that one has to be motivated and happy where they are in order for the business to work. No company can run efficiently if they have individuals who do not want to be there.

There’s a quote in the book that says “When you start with why, there’s no need for sleazy tactics (Sinek, 2021).” Sinek speaks about how many people are aware of the people out there that use sales tactics to sell you an idea, but when you know why you involved then that sells itself. There is no walking around other additional attempts to convey a message when the technique you have (which is you know the why) is the reason for success and that’s all you need. Another quote that has a strong trait is “Regardless of WHAT we do in our lives, our WHY—our driving purpose, cause or belief—never changes (Sinek, 2021).” This shows the strong trait that one never forgets who they were when they first started. When Sinek introduced this statement, he is showing that a successful person never forgets their roots. “Innovation is not born from the dream, innovation is born from the struggle (Sinek, 2021)” has another strong trait that Sinek explains one must go through struggles to grow as a person and march to success. One’s ideas doesn’t originate from their dreams, but their ambitions through hard times. One weak trait I noticed from the book was when Sinek speaks about love being a problem because he argues that people find it because they think it “feels right.” When speaking about why a



leader reaches out for what they believe in, mentioning something like a personal feeling walks away from the goal of the ambition. There is an argument people love what they do, but there are also people that don't reach for a goal because they love it but rather because they are in need to accomplish it.

When you look at the theories such as Fullan's "*Leading in a Culture of Change*," Fullan has a similar idea of thinking such as those of Sinek in terms of helping many make an impact. Both works stress the importance of opening the doors for others in terms of helping them lead their way to adapting to a goal one would aim for. However, Fullan's theories revolve more around an educational environment while Sinek's theories can work in various environments making it more marketable.

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## **Book Review: Leadership in Special Education**

**By Melissa Goldstein**

The purpose of the book I have chosen for this book report is to guide the reader how to become a great leader in the field of special education. It is a manual to cultivate leadership and a great resource to empower and embrace change in the special education field. As we have learned in Fullen's book there are many ingredients needed to embrace change. There are also many important components that play a role in becoming a leader. Building relationships is a key component of leadership, which both this book and Fullen's book spend a great deal of time discussing. Communication is another ingredient needed to become successful leaders, both in and outside education. The last ingredients leaders need to consider is team building. When done right team building can aid to build a solid team and a successful year.

Before reading this book, I did not have a good relationship with the cafeteria staff at my school. It takes a special person to work with students with special needs and a lot of the cafeteria staff at my school struggle with my students. According to Dr. Cotton (2020) "never look down on anyone's position; these essential workers keep the school running" (p. 64). After reading this book and taking in the concepts discussed, I need to change my perspective on the cafeteria staff. I need to learn how to build relationships with them and understand they are just as important as educators and are what keeps the school running. Talking to them, asking them how they are, and having short conversations with them are all ways to build good relationships with them. Having the understanding that they are not below educators and are an asset to their school is an understatement after reading this book. Building good, strong relationships is the first component of leadership.

The second component that this book and Fullen's book also talked a lot about related to communication. Dr. Cotton states "The most important single ingredient in formula of success is knowing how to get along with people" (Cotton, 2020, p. 52). Communication is knowing how to talk to people. This is the key to building positive relationships, marriages, friendship, and

anything else that relates to human connection. We all have our own ways of communication, but is it effective is the question we should be looking at? When its ineffective, there is failure. Positive communication results in success. In the school setting, communication needs to be clear and precise. Everyone needs to be on the same page and dedicated to the result. Good communication is the essence of being on the same page.

Team building is the last component of leadership that both Fullen and Cotton dive into. Without team building, less can get done. Fullen talks about working together and getting more accomplished when working together. Cotton relates this concept to her personal experiences. She mentions how it is better to have a team working with you rather than against you. This makes for a happier environment for all involved. In the school setting, a lot needs to be done as educators. When the team works together, the jobs can be distributed evenly, and the work can be shared so there is less work to be done by one person.

This book has a lot of strong points that hit home in the education field. The most influential component was on communication. Communication is more than just talking to fellow educators, it's about modeling teamwork, establishing norms, and trusting the people you work with. Trust was something that I personally do not have, especially with my aids. This book mentions trusting your aids, and how there needs to be a mutual trust and respect to be a successful leader. Fullan never mentions this when trust was talked about. I thought that was an interesting difference between both books, because it is an important concept to remember. The other strong point this book spends some time talking about is having a balance. Both Fullan and Cotton mention having a balance, but more so Cotton. Fullan never talks about burnout, Cotton spends a whole chapter talking about burnout and how not to get to that point. She talks about meditation, and to "begin and end your day doing something for you" (Cotton, 2020, p. 35). This statement holds great value and might be the most important thing to do in any occupation to prevent burnout. The only weakness I could find in this book is the power of change. I thought the book would talk about change more than it did. Fullan spends a lot of his book talking about change and the resistance one might get. Cotton does not mention that resistance and more talks about how to become a leader. She opens up about her roles and how she transitioned into her leadership positions as she grew as an educator.

As Cotton says, “Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality” (Cotton, 2020, p. 140). We need a team with great communication skills, teamwork, and great relationships to turn a vision into a reality. This is not a one-man job and requires a team of educators to make dreams happen. Success can be a reality with the right people and the right ingredients in the making. As both Cotton and Fullan clearly states this fact in both their books.

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## **Book Review: Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

**By Tjasia Prawl**

CRSL (Culturally Responsive School Leadership) is a book that Muhammad Khalifa writes to assist school leaders in the creation of an education system which provides a rich multicultural environment minoritized students. Khalifa discusses how traditional leadership methodologies do not properly treat children in urban areas. In teaching underrepresented groups, CRSL considers state policies such as housing and the experiences of specific communities, such as settler colonialism and incarceration rates.

This book discusses how school leaders can support minority students from all backgrounds (regardless of race or ethnicity). Using the insights, he has gained from his own experiences as a Detroit educator, he provides new insights that will be valuable for those undertaking this challenging but critical task of becoming a successful educational leader. Using methodological approaches that criticize assumptions, prejudices, and stereotypes, Khalifa outlines how school leaders can promote inclusion through ideologies, curriculum, instruction, and plans.

### **Main Themes & Key Quotes**

*“Recognizing the historical, oppressive structural barriers that minoritized communities face is a necessary first step to realizing culturally responsive leadership. Community-based perceptions are distinct from school-based perspectives; it is important to trace the origins of these differences, and to discuss their impact on current schooling contexts.”*

Chapter one of Khalifa's book exposes the disconnects between school and community due to educational policy. Khalifa argues that for culturally relevant school leaders to have any real impact on the school, they need to address these causes. Additionally, he noted that schools interpret student behavior according to school-based theories, while students and parents use theories that are based on their local communities. In this chapter Khalifa stresses the importance

of empowering community-based epistemologies among culturally responsive school leaders. Rather than blending traditional leadership models with oppressive legacies, he urges them to integrate community-based epistemologies into school policy.

*“Schools must find ways to present community-based perspectives as real and valuable, and thus, as a way to induce critical self-reflection in staff (and to critique their own epistemologies and perspectives)”.*

Chapter two focuses on self-reflection, a critical characteristic of any leader. Leaders who practice critical self-reflection possess the ability to identify oppression within their own schools through the analysis of data that is available and the analysis of current practices in place. Critical self-reflection in CRSL aims to create a fair and supportive climate for students, parents, and teachers. Khalifa suggests reviewing equity practices to uncover oppressive practices. To avoid blind spots in funding, race, and opportunity gaps, he suggests conducting equity audits that include research-based surveys, data analysis, and policy-making functions.

*“Schools automatically reproduce systems of privilege or oppression, even without intentional effort or thought.”*

As a result of the use of CRSL in Chapter three, Khalifa argues that CRSL can promote inclusive school policies and practices by focusing on spaces. According to him, these spaces should be physically located and tied to the historical and social contexts of the communities in which they are located. Khalifa reasons that school leaders who are culturally responsive must actively fight oppression and privilege by creating authentically inclusive spaces.

*“Their access to power should never be accessible only if they are asked to give up something that White students are allowed to keep”.*

In chapter four, Khalifa introduces the concept of "identity confluence", which implies that academic and community-based identities are co-developed concurrently. He draws a close link between identity and humanization by emphasizing the importance of academic achievement. To prevent minoritized students from being treated as subhuman in school, all student identities should be welcome and protected. Furthermore, Khalifa argues that CRSL is

inherently inclusive and transformative if there is a leader who centers the humanity of their students and their lived experiences.

*“Although one of the key roles of culturally responsive school leaders is to help teachers develop humanizing and culturally responsive behaviors, it is one of the least studied aspects of CRSL.”*

In chapter five, the Khalifa looks at how leaders foster culturally responsive teachers and instruction through rethinking leadership structures and lesson plans in schools. There must not necessarily be a focus on state standards in teacher evaluation tools, but rather on ways to improve teaching and support learning. He also argues that to be truly culturally responsive, community outreach must become an integral part of curriculum and instructional practices rather than an additional part of school leadership.

*“It is not enough to want to fight for equity; school leaders must establish structures that will infuse all forms of leadership with unique community cultural knowledge, epistemology, and perceptions.”*

Khalifa concludes the text in chapter 6 by emphasizing anti-oppression initiatives in educational leadership. It emphasizes the need for school leaders to understand the nature of oppression in school systems as a whole and the extent to which it is often concealed. To achieve greater community engagement, school leaders need to spend more time in each community on their own terms. He lists several steps that can be taken in creating a culturally responsive school that are described in this chapter as part of a three-year school improvement plan. After defining the challenges, the chapter details the ways to promote multicultural school environments despite those challenges.

### **Strength and Weaknesses**

Khalifa has demonstrated the importance of shifting cultural responsiveness from the classroom to the office, as well as insisting on visiting the communities to provide the most effective educational experience. Despite challenging educators to recognize school structures' inherent oppressive characteristics, the Khalifa presents a compelling case for integrating the

community into the process of dismantling them. Khalifa is a strong believer that excellent leaders transform schools, which is a plausible hypothesis that has a lot of flaws. As much as Khalifa provides a clear template for CRSL educators to follow, the discussion of the disconnect between teachers and school leaders, which too often exists between school leaders, was lacking. When communication, ideas, and application are disconnected, it can consistently hinder the understanding and realization of the values that make up the CRSL.

### **Comparison to Fullan**

Khalifa focuses on the urgent need to end oppressive education practices and encourage teachers to teach and schools to function effectively is equal to the urgency for the implementation of anti-oppressive educational practices. In Fullan's text, the focus is more on the development of leadership teams within education and the collaborative efforts that administrators should engage in with stakeholders to build successful teams. Khalifa's text is simple to follow, and he provides excellent resources that explains how teachers, leaders, and district staff will be able to gain a better understanding of and implement the concepts of CRSL through helpful activities, examples, and self-reflections. Fuller's text, on the other hand, I found too confusing and lacking in substance, as it wandered all over the place.

The text of Fullan can be utilized on a supplementary basis for those who are just getting into the field of educational leadership whereas Khalifa's can be used on a more profound level as a handbook for both seasoned and newly-minted educators. These two books include a lot of useful information aimed at helping a school leader who wishes to implement a school improvement plan to put in place and are backed up by research in each chapter.

### **References**

- Fullan, M. (2020). *Leading in a Culture of Change* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Khalifa, M., Milner, R. H., & Delpit, L. (2020). *Culturally Responsive School Leadership (Race and Education)*. Harvard Education Press.



## **Book Review: Hacking Leadership 10 Ways Great Leaders Inspire Learning That Teachers, Students and Parents Love**

**By Kerin Neely**

Leadership within the educational atmosphere plays a huge role in every other aspect of the school day. The leaders within a school can be the key to making the environment pleasant and foster learning for students and staff every day. Students, teachers, parents, and administrators each have their own role to play in creating a positive school culture. Joe Sanfelippo urges everyone in the school system to put their best foot forward in creating a welcoming and fun place to learn and work.

### **Thesis of the Book**

“Hacking Leadership” focuses primarily on the importance of a collaborative effort in schools between teachers, students, parents, and leaders. Sanfelippo puts a large focus on bringing school back to being an enjoyable and fun place for learning and working to occur. This book speaks about 10 different “hacks” to leadership. Being present and engaged is a large part of Sanfelippo’s message in this book. This hack talks largely about how important it is that administrators aren’t just making changes in schools. It’s key to be able to be visible and understanding about any concerns anyone may have and also be engaged in any topics that staff, parents or students may bring up. Sanfelippo’s idea of a great leader is someone that is committed to make conscious changes and understand why those changes are being made.

### **Main Themes of the Book**

The overarching theme of this book is that a good leader makes sure to keep students, staff and parents at the center of the school and the decisions made. The hacks are great reminders of the type of ideas that a great leader should be focused on throughout every day. A hack that stuck out to me personally was Sanfelippo’s advice to “flatten the walls of your school”. This hack focuses on the school’s overall culture and how important and wonderful it can be to shift the school from being seen as a place centered around discipline and training and

really focuses on the joys of learning. This book highlights the utmost importance of collaboration. Sanfelippo makes it clear that nothing good would happen in a school without every piece of the puzzle.

### **Key Quotes**

**“Education hackers challenge the status quo and see a problem as an opportunity to try various solutions.”** This quote stuck out to me because as educators, sometimes we see something happen and know what the usual answer or intervention would be, but occasionally, we have a better idea and want so badly to stray away and try it. This is where great, new ideas are born.

**“Flattening the walls of your school entails eliminating the communication barriers so everyone feels like they are part of the school community.”** As stated previously, flattening the walls of the school really struck a chord inside me. I love that Sanfelippo shines a light on the need for inclusion in order for your school to actually be a positive community. Being welcoming to all people that come through the doors is key. \

**“A good teacher is like a candle- it comes itself to light the way for others.”** I’m sure all educators can relate to this quote. As educators, we realize how important our jobs are and we love every second of it. Unfortunately, we sometimes give too much of ourselves in the process.

### **Weak and Strong Points**

While I love the theme of this book making schools an enjoyable and collaborative effort, I do think that it can be a little bit far-fetched to expect everyone in a school (students and parents included) to work as one unit. While it would be amazing, that does seem like a bit of a utopia. I do think this is my only issue with this specific book. While the hacks can be useful, and have a wonderful message, it is naïve to think a school can run without those constant hiccups. I do love the message that the book sends though. Knowing that there are leaders out there that wholeheartedly care about the students and teachers to want to create a school environment like that really warms my heart.

### **Compared to Fullan**

As stated in Fullan's book, "Leaders have to provide direction, create conditions for effective peer interaction and intervene along the way when things are not working as well as they could." This quote reminds me of the quote I mentioned earlier from Sanfelippo. **"Education hackers challenge the status quo and see a problem as an opportunity to try various solutions."** Being able to recognize the issues happening and know the ways to solve them is such an important part of being an educator and a leader. Both Fullan and Sanfelippo recognize this fact and really highlight it. Fullan also shined a spotlight on leaders being present and engaged with their staff which, in my opinion, can make or break a leader in education. Sanfelippo also made sure to include this as one of his "hacks". I do think that Fullan's "Leading in a Culture of Change" is a little bit more realistic in terms of what your school can really be as a leader, but I do believe they are both extremely similar in topic and content.

In conclusion, "Hacking Leadership" is a heartwarming book for any educator, and it really made me see leaders and leadership as an act in a different light. Sanfelippo does a wonderful job explaining the role of a leader in education and sharing exactly what he sees as the most important pieces of the puzzle.

### **References**

Sanfelippo, J., & Sinanis, T. (2017). *HACKING LEADERSHIP : 10 ways great leaders inspire learning that teachers, students, and parents love*. Times 10 Publications.

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