

Delivering Effective Paraeducator Support for Students with Disabilities: A Delicate Dance

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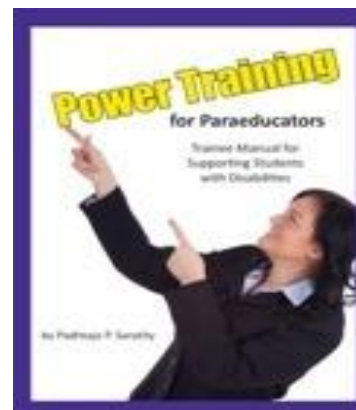
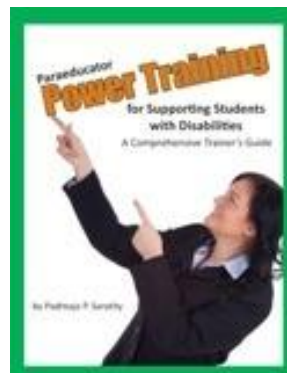


Author & Educational Consultant

Author of multiple books and products (Website: www.infinitepossibilities-sped.com)

■ Paraeducator Training DVD and Trainee Manual

- ‘Trainer of Trainer ‘ DVD with multiple training units
- Paraeducator trainee manual with pre and post assessment for each unit, quizzes, checklists and role-play activities
- Publisher: Legal Digest (www.ed311.com)

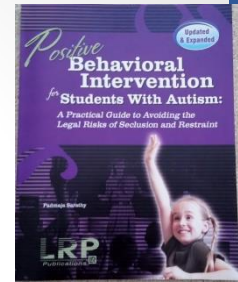


Books and Products

- **Positive Behavior Strategies for Students with ASD:**

A Practical Guide to Avoiding the Legal Risks of Aversives

Publisher: LRP Publications, (www.shoplrp.com)



- **Autism Spectrum Disorders: Seven Steps of Support**

A quick reference guide

Publisher: National Professional Resources, Inc. (www.nprinc.com)

- **Magical Musical Transitions** – A Music CD for assisting children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Marketed by www.nprinc.com)



- **Serving Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities:**

A Guide to Strategies for Successful Learning (Publisher: LRP, www.shoplrp.com)

- ***From Early Intervention... to Preschool Program... and School-Age Services: A Parent's Guide*** (Publisher: LRP Publications,

www.shoplrp.com)

- **Together We Succeed: Building a Better System for Transitioning Preschoolers with Disabilities** (Publisher: LRP Publications,)

- A couple of books are to be released later in 2016.

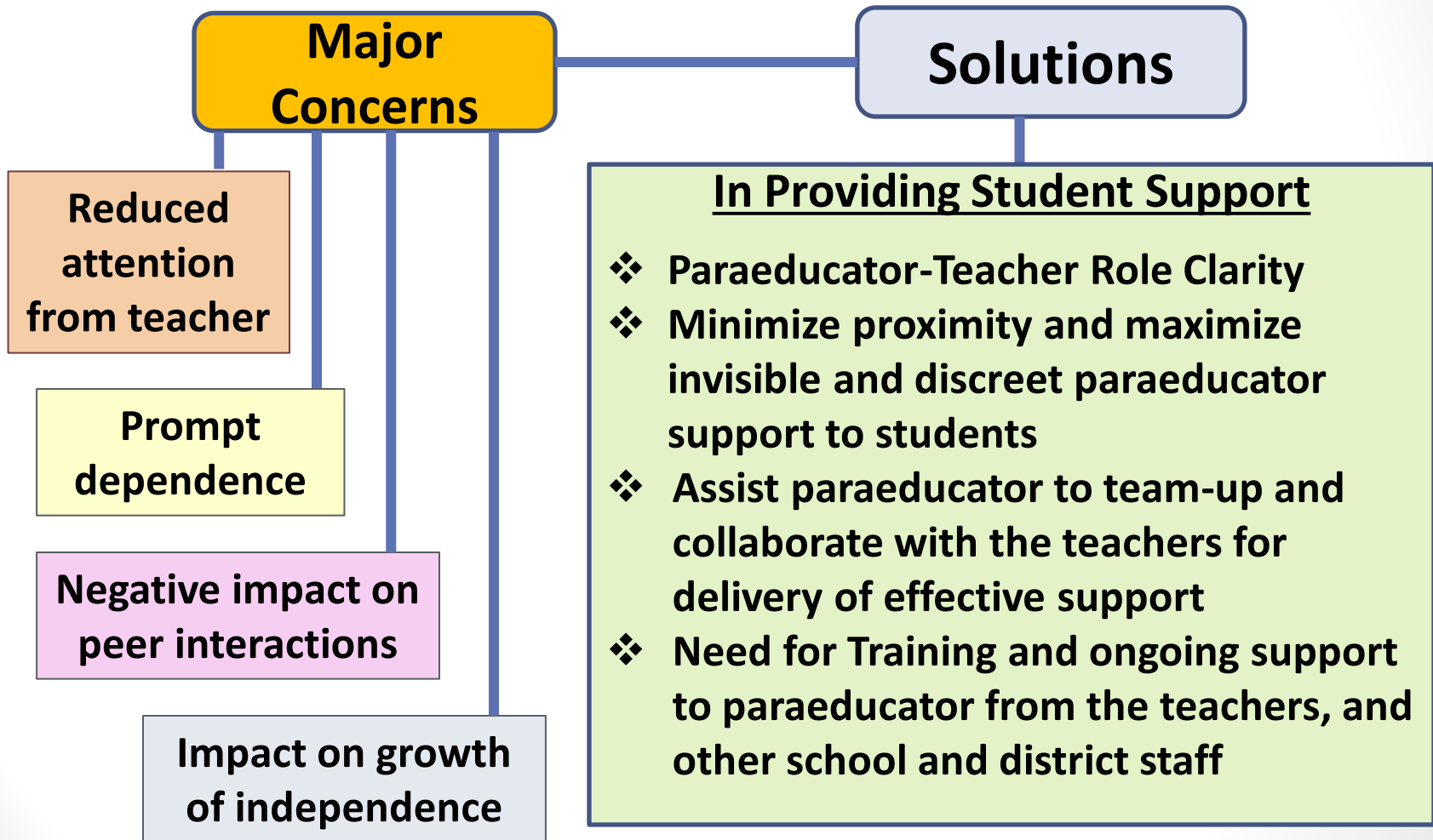
Session Objectives

- This session will illustrate the critical need for paraeducators to deliver optimal and discreet support to students.
 - Achieve a balance between providing personalized support to maximize learning opportunities for students with disabilities while encouraging the growth of independence.
 - Identify action steps to provide student-centered, non-intrusive paraeducator support applying the evidence from paraeducator research.
 - Aided with classroom and student-specific scenarios.

Changes in Roles and Responsibilities

- Paraeducators deliver direct services to children with disabilities:
 - They are providing instructional support in a broad range of academic areas (Keller, Bucholz & Brady; 2007).
 - They are working with students with the most complex educational and behavioral needs with the least amount of training (Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron & Fialka; 2005; Keller, Bucholz & Brady, 2007; and information retrieved on 1/31/2012 from www.paracenter.org/paraeducators/why-train-paraprofessionals).

Delivering Paraeducator Support: Concerns and Solutions



Material adapted from Sarathy, 2012

Paraeducator Support: Unintended Consequences

- Several research studies suggest there is negative impact from excessive paraeducator proximity:

Reduced Teacher Interaction

Classroom teachers may interact less with students because they are already receiving individual assistance and other students are not (Giangreco et al., 2005).

Physical Separation from Classmates

Students may be seated in the back or on the periphery of the classroom with the paraeducator, rather than sitting with peers, effectively isolating them from the class (Giangreco, 2003).

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

Paraeducator Support: Unintended Consequences (cont'd)

Risk of being bullied

Sometimes paraeducator protection from bullies creates a stigma and serves as a catalyst for being bullied.

Broer, S. M., Doyle, M.B. & Giangreco, M. F., (2005)

Unnecessary Dependence

Students with disabilities can be hesitant in participating without paraeducator direction, prompting or cueing.

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

One-on-One Support: Unintended Consequences

The Stigmatization

Students with disabilities can feel embarrassment or discomfort about having a paraeducator; makes them stand out in negative ways (Giangreco, et al., 2005).

Interference with Peer Interactions

Constant presence of the paraeducator may prevent peer interactions. During a four-week observation, a student participated in 32 interactions with peers – 29 of them occurred when the paraeducator was absent, three when she was present (Causton-Theoharis, 2009).

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

Students Voice Their Opinions

- A study examining the perspective of high school students who received paraeducator support in general education classrooms found:
 - A small number of respondents recalled their school experiences primarily with fondness.
 - The majority of students “expressed powerful messages of disenfranchisement, embarrassment, loneliness, rejection, fear, and stigmatization” about paraeducator support. (Broer, et al 2005)

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

Students Voice their Opinions (cont'd)

- The students described the paraeducators' roles in four ways:
 - Paraprofessional as Mother
 - Paraprofessional as Friend
 - Paraprofessional as Protector from Bullying
 - Paraprofessional as Primary Teacher

All of the above perceptions of the paraeducator role raise serious concerns about whether we are helping our students with disabilities or hindering them with excessive and intrusive support. (Broer, et al 2005)

Need for Paraeducator Training: Knowledge Is Power

■ Paraeducator Training is Critical

- When paraeducators were trained, it led to improved outcomes for children in academic engagement, social interactions, inclusion with typical students, student independence, and disruptive behavior (Retrieved on 1/31/2012 from www.paracenter.org/paraeducators/why-train-paraprofessionals).

Essential Components: Paraeducator Training

- The Special Education Basics:
 - ✓ The Law, Disability Information and Learner Characteristics
- Guidance on “How-To” Support Students with Diverse Disabilities:
 - ✓ Behavioral and Social Skills
 - ✓ Academic and Instructional Skills
 - ✓ Optimal support to students in the Autism spectrum
- Paraeducator-Teacher Role Clarification:
- Teaming and Collaboration Skills
 - ✓ Augment student independence

Hands-on and Interactive Learning

*Classroom Vignettes
and Case-Studies*

*Role-Play Activities and
One-to-one Interviews*

**Problem-Solving Activities
Group & Individual**

**Checklists, Quizzes and
Post-training Assessment**

Resources

Classroom Scenario: Caleb

- **The Student**: Caleb, a first-grader included in general education, receives paraeducator support. He is verbal, eager to communicate and have friends, but he has limited cognitive and problem-solving skills. He meets special education eligibility criteria for intellectual disabilities.
- **The Setting**: General education, first-grade classroom.
- **The Scenario**: The teacher is presenting a science lesson to the class. As always, the paraeducator providing one-on-one support to Caleb is sitting beside him in the classroom.
- When the teacher directs a question at Caleb, he turns to the Para. She whispers the answer and he repeats it.
- **Questions to Consider**:
 - *Is the paraeducator support just right? Too intrusive?*
 - *Does the student need prompting? Prompt dependent?*

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

Classroom Scenario: Melissa

- **The Student**: Melissa meets eligibility for other health impairment with a diagnosis of cerebral palsy. A paraeducator is assigned to support her in a fourth-grade general education class. She does not use words to communicate, makes noises, drops things and disrupts the flow of instruction in the classroom.
- **The setting**: A fourth-grade general education classroom - during an English language arts lesson.
- **The Scenario**: The paraeducator moves Melissa away from the other students and brings different material for her to work on. The materials used are not related to the lesson/curriculum used by the other students in the classroom.

Are there ways Melissa could be more involved with her class and in the lesson? Who is making the decisions?

Paraeducator proximity

Concern: In many classrooms, paraeducators are sitting within 3 feet of the student they support.

Paraeducator Perspective: Proximity Concern

I am worried that if I am not next to the student but away from him/her busy doing other things, it would appear that I am not working with the assigned student(s). It will reflect badly on me.

- The belief that a paraeducator's job is contingent upon the student's dependency is something that impedes the development of student independence. It leads to facilitating student's overdependence on the adult.

Responding to the Learner's Needs

- You know that Robert, a student that you support, gets restless easily, exhibiting attention problems. As you watch him, you notice that he is getting fidgety.

You ask Robert, in a soft voice without drawing attention to him or distracting others, “Robert, I want you to run a quick errand for me. Please take this note to Mrs. Swanson in the front office. Thanks.”

- The mini-break gives Robert an opportunity to unwind and to overcome his restlessness. When he returns, he is much calmer and more inclined to focus attention on the work. Be sure to make prior arrangement and inform the office staff and others to expect Robert's visits.

 **An “Aha” Moment!**

A Pinch of Creativity

- Composing sentences and writing essays has been a frustrating experience for John – a student with a learning disability. Instead of assuming that John is “lazy” and has an “attitude problem,” Ann, the paraeducator, decided to approach the problem with creativity and understanding instead of continuously nagging him with instructions to get his work done.

An “Aha” Moment for Ann!

Upon consultation with the teachers, Ann created a reusable graphic organizer tool to help him generate ideas. In addition, she gave him a bank of words from which to compose his sentences. As John responded to the changes and began to write (only a couple of sentences at the beginning), she positively commented on his efforts (without drawing attention to him).

Concern: Dependence on Prompts

Students with severe disabilities may become prompt-dependent when the paraeducator lacks understanding of prompt hierarchy and fading procedures.

- Difficulties with generalization that students with developmental disabilities often have may result in over-reliance on paraprofessionals for cues.

Students may:

- Pay reduced attention to natural cues and instead rely on permission/guidance from the paraeducator.

(Broer et al. 2005)

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

Watch the Prompts!

- Be alert to the prompts provided through:
 - Body language
 - Facial expressions
 - The way the questions are phrased
 - The tone of voice
- Do not inadvertently communicate to the student that his/her response is a correct/incorrect response.
- The student needs to develop confidence in his own ability and to think for himself, instead of watching adult reactions to shape his responses.

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

An 'Aha' Moment

- Sara, a paraeducator in a Kindergarten class, was working with 5-year-old Jonathan, practicing counting skills. At the same time, she was marking on a data collection form the correct/incorrect responses to assess his mastery of counting skills.
- Sara would say to Jonathan, *“Give me four bears,”* while holding out the palm of her hand. As soon as he placed four plastic bears in her hand, she would close her palm immediately, saying, *“Good Job!”*
- Alice, the classroom teacher who had watched Sara’s teaching from a distance, later alerted her: *“Be careful about the accidental prompts that you may be giving.”*

Determining Student-specific Prompts

- Prompts should be individually determined by the learning style/needs of the student, the nature of the activity and the context.
- If a student appears to be getting over-dependent on verbal prompts, switch to gesturing or pointing (e.g., to the computer or the cabinet) or nudging may be more appropriate.
- Visual cues may be more helpful to some students.
- Enable and empower *all* students to experience success in an activity and in completing the task as independently as possible.

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

Strategies to Support the Development of Independence

To ensure the appropriate level of support, here are some questions to consider:

- What can the student do without assistance?
- What can't the student do, requiring an accommodation to complete?
- What can't the student do, requiring assistance?
- What areas can you identify to promote social acceptance and peer support?
- What areas you will target for independence (identified in student's IEP)? (Murphy and Mueller, 2001)

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

Facilitate Student Communication

- Encourage student communication by:
 - Limiting the amount of adult talk.
 - Drawing out student to talk.
 - Providing adequate wait time that allows the student to respond to questions, make comments.
- Create situations to promote student-to-student interaction and communication to occur.
- Follow the “Goldilocks Rule” in your conversations:
 - Not too chummy
 - Not too formal
 - Not the buddy
 - Not the parent (Author Unknown)

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

“Hey Brian, did you tell Alan about your experience at the ballgame that you went to last night? I’m sure he’d like to hear your story. Anyway, I’ve got to run an errand, but I’ll be back and want to hear Alan’s reaction.” — Ms. Murphy

- Ms. Murphy, a middle school paraeducator, did not want her assigned group (students with disabilities) to sit at a separate table in the cafeteria at lunch time. In addition to teaching them rules of interaction whenever she got a chance, she also wanted them to socialize and engage with their nondisabled peers during lunch. She would frequently prompt communication between the students by alluding to an incident or a topic of shared interest. And then she would make herself “invisible.”

These were great “Aha” moments for Ms. Murphy!

- ***Create your “magical moments” with your students!***

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

Action Steps to Avoid Intrusive Support

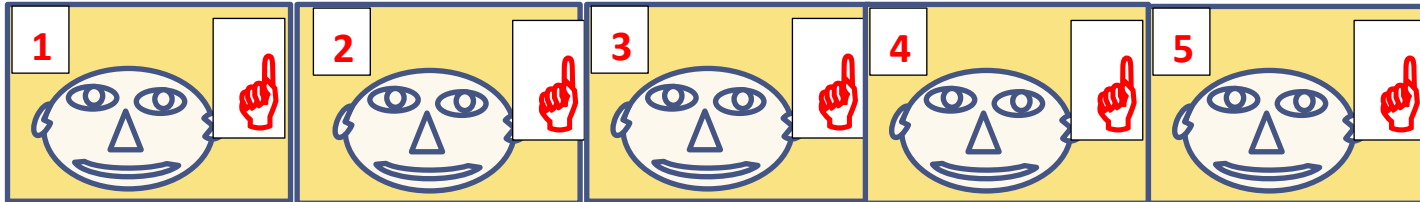
To avoid stigmatization:

- Move out of the way when students are engaged in conversations with classmates.
- Do not sit or have a seat placed next to or in the proximity of the student being supported.
- Avoid carrying materials for the student or writing her name on the paper or completing her work.
- Let the student hand in work his own work, even if it's not perfect (gives him ownership).
- Ask for permission to physically guide a student if you are providing hand-over-hand assistance.

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

Paraeducators

Remember the Five Mantras!



- 1. Get to Know and Connect with the Learner.**
- 2. Engineer a Favorable Learning Environment.**
- 3. Build Up Your Instructional Skill Sets.**
- 4. Help Implement the Adaptations.**
- 5. Foster Learner Independence.**

Choreograph A Delicate Dance

- Paraeducators, in supporting students with diverse and complex special needs, should:
 - Achieve a delicate balance between providing optimal support while encouraging self-dependence.
 - Minimize proximity – be discreet and unobtrusive – to avoid embarrassing and stigmatizing the student with constant presence next to the student helping him/her.
 - Utilize peer supports –a naturally available support– whenever possible.
 - Take steps to avoid intrusive support. Develop a plan and follow it to gradually fade adult support.

Requires grace, elegance and subtlety.



Resources

- Sarathy, P. (September, 2012). *Paraeducator Power Training for Supporting Students with Disabilities: A Comprehensive Trainer's Guide and a Trainee Manual*
- Sarathy, P. (2009). *Positive Behavioral Intervention for Students With Autism: A Practical Guide to Avoiding the Legal Risks of Seclusion and Restraint*. West Palm Beach, FL: LRP Publications.
- Giangreco, et.al (2005). "Be Careful What You Wish for...": Five Reasons to Be Concerned About the Assignment of Individual Paraprofessionals. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37(5), 28-34.
- Broer, et. al (2005). *Perspectives of Students With Intellectual Disabilities About Their Experiences With Paraprofessional Support*. *Exceptional Children*, 71(4), 415-430.
- Causton-Theoharis, J., (2009). *The Paraprofessional's Handbook for effective Support in Inclusive Classrooms*. Paul Brookes Publishing Co., Baltimore: MD

The Upcoming Webinars

The next two webinars in Paraeducator Series:

Webinar # 2

Topic: Teacher and Paraeducator Teaming for Student Success

July 12, 2016 (11 AM to 11:45 – CDT)

Webinar # 3

Topic: The Three Ps for Behavior Support: preventive Strategies, personalized Supports and Positive Strokes

September 29th, 2016 (11 AM to 11:45 – CDT)

Topic: Intervention Strategies for Self-injurious Behaviors

August 31st, 2016 (11 AM to 11:45 – CDT)



Thank You Everyone!
A special thanks to AbleNet University
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