

Perceptions on Paraprofessionals; working with students with special needs in elementary
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Abstract

Perceptions on Paraprofessionals

There is a lack of research on the role of paraprofessionals in schools and most of the research that has been done was done in the United States. There seem to be many advantages to paraprofessionals working with children with special needs, however, there are many issues as well on the roles of paraprofessionals (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli & MacFarland, 1997; Giangreco, 2003). The current qualitative study used a phenomenological action research approach to explore and understand their roles as well the advantages and disadvantages of the role of paraprofessionals in schools in this particular school board. The study interviewed six paraprofessionals, one administrator, two teachers, one special needs teacher, two sets of parents, two children with special needs and two atypical children. Data from this study supported the idea that, similarly to the United States (Patterson, 2006), while there were many advantages to working with paraprofessionals in schools, there are also many barriers and disadvantages with respect to the implementation of the paraprofessionals and the way inclusion is currently being organized and implicated.

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Perceptions on Paraprofessionals

In the United States of America and Canada, every child is entitled to an education regardless of their cognitive, social or physical development stage. In fact there is a law in place that supports and protects children's legal right to attend school on a regular basis. This law is on the Quebec government website and is entitled the "Education Act". Historically, typically developing children and children with special needs were segregated from each other. Children with special needs were confined to another school or classroom. Currently it is more common to see children with disabilities being included in mainstream classrooms.

Along with the idea of inclusion comes the hiring of paraprofessionals or integration aides as extra help for the students in the classroom who struggle. According to Stockall (2014), there were over 450,000 employed paraprofessionals in public and charter schools in the United States alone in 2012 and that number was said to be on the rise. According to Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008) these "...paraprofessionals are being perceived as key service delivery providers for educating children with disabilities in many schools across the USA" (as cited by Minondo, Meyer and Xin 2001; Giangreco and Doyle 2002). There seems to be many challenges presented with paraprofessionals and their roles in the classroom as expressed in many previous research such as Patterson, 2006, Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli and MacFarland (1997) and Giangreco (2003).

There is not much research done surrounding paraprofessionals in the educational field in Canada, especially not in the public-school system. The present study therefore uses a phenomenological action research design to explore this phenomenon and hopefully provide the school board with vision of change if and where change needs to be implemented.

Review of the Literature

According to some of the literature, the concept of inclusion is a growing phenomenon that has moved to the forefront of education. Hunt et al. (2004) describe inclusion as a concept that lacks one specific definition in terms of education. However, they do explain "...there seems to be [a] consensus about some common features of inclusive programs" (p. 123). The first feature of inclusion is simply described by these authors as one where there are students with disabilities who are part of a classroom that contains typically developed children. The atypically developed children in the classroom receive support (such as paraprofessionals) to achieve their educational goals. The second aspect of inclusion programs these authors mention is that the support provided for atypically developed children are provided through a collaborative team. Thirdly, these authors argue that there are periodic evaluations to make sure the children's goals are being met. Adding to the discussion on inclusion in the US, is the IDEA act (2004) that requires that all children with disabilities be placed in the least restrictive environment for their education and are entitled to an individualized education program (IEP) and paraprofessional support in the classroom. The child is placed in a regular classroom with children who are not disabled as long as the child's IEP does not require other specific arrangements or services that can be achieved satisfactorily, the child should be placed in mainstream classroom with the above mentioned support.

However, there are barriers that prevent inclusion from being successful. Glazzard (2011) discusses many of these barriers. For example, he claims that if anyone involved in the process (e.g., administrators, teaching staff) do not possess a positive attitude and belief in the principles of inclusion, then any attempt at inclusion will fail. Glazzard (2011) makes it clear that "practitioners' values influence the ways in which inclusion is implemented on the ground" (p.

57). He believes that teachers need to be able to reflect on their beliefs and style of teaching to be able to be flexible and meet the needs of all their students regardless of their issues. In addition, teaching styles of professors that do not adapt to every individual student's needs and abilities, may promote conformity rather than inclusion. This author also argues that there needs to be support from the school in order for inclusion to be successful. Glazzard (2011) attempts to convey the idea that inclusion should be seen as a process as opposed to a change of state in order to be effective. Lack of teamwork between all those concerned (i.e., teachers, administrators and parents) was also seen as a barrier to inclusion.

Glazzard (2011) states that the leading barrier to inclusion involves the pressure for schools to achieve the standards agenda and students taking standardized tests that impact the schools and the results of their students. This author believes that the schools see the lack of progress in students with disabilities as problematic because they negatively impact the school's scores. Glazzard (2011) continues to list more barriers to inclusion such as parental resistance (e.g., the fear of their child being bullied) and training of educators to work with special needs children; he reports that most teachers felt they were not trained and lacked skills and resources to work with these students.

The large increase in the implementation of the inclusion policy has resulted in many more paraprofessionals being hired (Patterson, 2006). Paraprofessionals are defined in the literature, as those who are with the students in schools, assisting them in their academics, physical, emotional or social needs. Other terms used for paraprofessionals include, teacher assistants, paraeducators and integration aides. This support can facilitate successful education of these children.

Factors for Effective Usage of Paraprofessionals

Throughout the literature, the main factor for effective use of paraprofessionals is a collaborative team environment. There are many factors that play a role in creating a collaborative team environment. According to Patterson (2006), the successful implementation of paraprofessionals in classrooms involves several elements. Some of these include a clear and defined job description for paraprofessionals, continuous training and supervision of those paraprofessionals, adequate financial compensation and the classroom teacher needs to be organized and possess strong time management skills. Carnahan, Williamson, Clarke and Sorensen (2009) add to this discussion by suggesting that there must be a shared philosophy among the team members, effective communication, regular meetings, monitoring and evaluation. Ratcliff et al. (2011) believe that a strong relationship between teachers and paraprofessionals is important and can be achieved by valuing paraprofessionals, involving them in the planning and review and regular meetings between paraprofessionals and teachers.

Hunt et al. (2004) expressed that rather than focusing on what they cannot achieve, a collaborative team including the paraprofessionals' and parents' input was seen as an effective way to support children in an inclusive setting. These authors believe a collaborative team is successful because it permits everyone involved to express their thoughts and to contribute valuable information while feeling heard and appreciated.

Present Issues/Barriers of Usage of Paraprofessionals

A main issue of working with paraprofessionals is that the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals are not clearly defined creating a chaotic environment where everyone has their own perceptions (Patterson, 2006). This chaotic environment creates negative emotions, concerns and most importantly, failure and negative impact on the students.

Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli and MacFarland (1997) expressed that it is necessary for teachers dealing with children with special needs not to rely on the paraprofessional to educate the child and to have faith as well as realistic but high expectations of children with special needs. While, Giangreco (2003) explains that an overworked and stressed educator may feel relief from having a paraprofessional in the classroom and that it is important that educators do not misinterpret this and view it as relieving them of their responsibility to educate all students effectively. A general issue is that paraprofessionals are not always educated or trained properly. In fact, most of the time these professionals simply possess a high school level of education and very little training thereafter. It is important to remember that paraprofessionals are not trained in programing and educating children. Therefore, it does not make sense for general educators to “ [turn] over the education of their most challenging students to [paraprofessionals], many of whom [are] high school educated, [have] no previous classroom experience, and [have] minimal training” (p.12). It is unfortunate that the research indicates that even though society understands that this is a particularly important issue, it remains a common problem.

Another issue that arises is that the general educators who are monitoring paraprofessionals and are responsible for the education of students with special needs claim to also be lacking appropriate training and confidence to complete such tasks. Most research studies such as Giangreco et al. (1997), have expressed this idea as a major problem because of how much general education teachers rely on the paraprofessionals and expect them to educate children with special needs. These authors suggest that “many [general education teachers expect] capabilities and performance from [paraprofessionals] that [are] potentially unrealistic” (p.14), which produces negative outcomes for the children with special needs.

An aspect that needs to be addressed is the idea of proximity. Research has indicated that close physical proximity of the paraprofessional to the student is not always effective and it can actually be very detrimental to the child. Giangreco et al. (1997) described eight major reasons why proximity could be detrimental to the student. These reasons are attributed to “interference with ownership and responsibility by general educators, separation from classmates, dependence on adults, impact on peer interactions, limitations on receiving competent instruction, loss of personal control, loss of gender identity and interference with instruction of other students” (p. 11). Overall, it seems that a paraprofessional must be aware of when to be close to the child and when to create space between them.

Stemming from the idea of proximity is the issue of leaving class and spending more time with the paraprofessional than with the mainstream classroom teacher. This is seen as a negative for many reasons, one of which was described by Glazzard (2011) as “...detrimental to pupils’ self-esteem and fosters a climate of dependence” (p. 58). Giangreco et al. (2005) also believe that the closer the proximity (especially if it is unnecessary) the more likely peers will not interact with the student and the more likely teacher engagement will plummet.

Giangreco et al. (2005) add to this discussion by listing five main challenges with paraprofessionals. They explain that paraprofessionals are the least qualified to teach students and yet they are the ones who are responsible for teaching students with the most complex needs. They also discuss the possible negative effects that can be experienced by students, such as being separated from the class, stigmatization, loss of control, dependency and interference with peer and teacher relationships. They also discuss the possibility that students will be less engaged with their teacher. Finally, they explain that parents may report that their children are not

receiving the type of service they expect and deserve, and the use of paraprofessionals may interfere with the attention to needed changes for the school.

Research Gap Related to Understanding Paraprofessional Support

In order to fully understand all the issues with paraprofessionals and education, and how to improve on paraprofessional support it is important to look at the situation through the perspectives of all the stakeholders (parents, students, general education teachers, special needs teachers and paraprofessionals). However, research indicates there is limited research on the role of paraprofessionals, especially in young elementary students as it is difficult to assess all of the stakeholders' perspectives. Therefore there is a lack of an in-depth examination of the role of the paraprofessional, which leaves many gaps in understanding how paraprofessionals are helpful to students. The reasons for this gap are unclear, however some possibilities may include the lack of research being easily accessible to practitioners and there may be philosophical differences between different school systems (special needs and inclusive) and stakeholders' perspectives.

Parents' Perspectives

As primary caregivers to the students, parents' views on paraprofessionals are important for many reasons, one of which being that the paraprofessionals are with students on a daily basis. Parents have a right to know who is interacting with their child when they are not present especially when their child has special needs. To address this issue, Werts, Harris, Tillery and Roark (2004) interviewed parents who had a child with special needs in an inclusive classroom and they reported that most parents spoke about the paraprofessionals positively. In fact, these authors stated, "parents perceived paraeducators as an important part of their children's education" (p. 238). Their study indicated that the majority of parents claimed that their child spoke about the paraprofessional almost as often as they spoke about their main educator. From

an outsider's point of view, this may be seen as an advantage because it shows that there is some type of relationship between the student and the paraprofessional as well as the child informs the parents of what's going on during the day. However, others might view this as an issue, believing that the child is spending too much direct time with the paraprofessional instead of being with the class (as they should be in an inclusive setting, the point being inclusion not segregation). Nevertheless, there were parents in the study who reported that they did not know much about the day-to-day academic process of the paraprofessionals with their children. These parents expressed that they only knew information about the paraprofessionals based on the children's views of the paraprofessionals' personalities. However, this study mainly concluded that the majority of the parents believed that having a paraprofessional present was a positive and helpful aspect promoting inclusion and providing extra help to their children. All the parents in the study did not believe cutting paraprofessionals due to budget issues was even a plausible idea. The only areas where parents painted a slightly less positive view of paraprofessional were the need for paraprofessionals to be better trained and the need for better communication between them and the paraprofessionals; the need for more paraprofessionals was also expressed.

One way for parents to know more about the paraprofessionals working with their children would be through developing relationships with them. Chopra and French (2004) reported that the research on relationships between parents and paraprofessionals lacked quantitative information on the types and nature of these relationships. These authors interviewed parents, paraprofessionals and special needs teachers at three different locations. Based on these interviews Chopra and French (2004) came up with five different types of relationships that were described as "close and personal friendship, [routine extended interaction, routine limited interaction], minimal and tense" (p. 242). An example of the close and personal

friendship relationship was the type of relationship that existed outside of school and did not revolve around the child and while in school the interaction was professional and limited. Chopra and French (2004) articulated that the routine and extended relationship was one where the two parties interacted daily and extensively, but conversations revolved around the child and school. The routine and limited interaction relationship was conveyed in the study as one that included daily interaction between both parties but conversations were short, professional and always to the point. An example Chopra and French (2004) used to describe the minimal relationship type was the idea that there was little communication between the parents and the paraprofessional and that they rarely (could be as low as once a year) met face to face. Finally the tense relationship type was described as one where there was very little communication and very rarely saw each other face to face, creating an environment of apprehensive communication and interaction between the two parties when they did see each other or needed to interact.

These relationship types were revealed through the parents' interviews, which Chopra and French (2004) grouped into the five specific types. In the category of close and personal friendship relationships, one parent expressed the joy of this type of relationship especially because she was able to obtain information that she felt was lacking from her correspondence with the main teacher as well as believed that the paraprofessional did more than what was expected. The parent expressed that the paraprofessional "...had gone above and beyond the line of duty..." (p. 245). An example of how parents felt about the routine limited extended relationship type was described by one mother who reported that she appreciated speaking with the paraprofessional about the child's behaviour as well as educational program and that the paraprofessional was the person she communicated with the most. However, she also expressed that she also spoke with the main educator and explained that she believes it is necessary to

speak directly to all parties involved to avoid broken messages and to create success for the child (Chopra and French, 2004). The “routine limited interaction” was described by a parent as one where she never really spoke with the paraprofessional about her child’s academic functioning. One mother, whose relationship with her child’s paraprofessional considered a minimal relationship, she communicated that she trusted the paraprofessional who worked with her child and that she possessed a positive opinion of the paraprofessional (Chopra and French, 2004). Lastly, according to Chopra and French (2004) in the tense relationship “...parents expressed that the paraeducator was ‘doing a good job’ and that her input was beneficial in the child’s education...[however] the paraeducator admitted to being uncomfortable around the father” (p. 248). For the most part it seems as though the paraprofessionals interviewed in this study shared similar reactions and feelings as the parents.

Another way for parents to form an opinion of their child’s paraprofessional is through observation. One parent participant in Giangreco et al. (1997)’s study reported that she felt the paraprofessional was too close to her child all the time and that perhaps it would better academically and socially for the child if he separated more from his paraprofessional. Another issue that one mother in this study expressed was that most likely due to the proximity factor, “the teachers tend to kind of let the individual [...] kind of run the program” (p. 11). Chopra and French (2004) have also reported that there are times when it is perceived that parents put too much pressure on the paraprofessionals and if something fails, parents do not like the program or the program needs to be readjusted, the parents are quick to blame the paraprofessional.

What’s missing? It is still unclear how parents truly feel about paraprofessionals and how they can be an active participant in their children’s educational experience. Many studies have suggested that parents simply do not know much about the paraprofessional working with

their child and have not been given the opportunity to get to know the paraprofessional. It is important for parents to feel part of the team and to interact with the paraprofessional who is with their child throughout the day. Instead of parents receiving information from others such as the special needs teachers or the classroom teachers, they would hear it directly from the paraprofessional. Perhaps a future study should focus on parents' perceptions of their needs and wants to facilitate positive interactions with paraprofessionals. Parent perspectives of paraprofessionals whose children are in the classroom but are typically developed students, who do not need the aid of a paraprofessional should also be researched.

Students' Perspectives

This section is an important section but complicated as well. The problem is that students with disabilities are not always able to verbally communicate clearly; therefore, researchers struggle to obtain their perceptions. Researchers rely on what they believe are the perceptions of students with disabilities through observations and the perceptions of typically developed students. There are students who are considered high functioning who still have a paraprofessional with them, however, there is a lack of research using these specific children as participants. For example, Hanline and Correa-Torres (2012) researched the experiences of children with severe disabilities in preschool, and they obtained information through interviews with parents and other children in the class. Nonetheless, they reported that peer interaction is essential for children with severe disabilities and that having a paraprofessional present for extra support was imperative.

Tews and Lupart (2008) interviewed students who had a disability and were assigned a paraprofessional. In this study, participants were asked to list the roles and responsibilities of a paraprofessional. The participants' answers were summed up in the following themes; "academic

assistance, administrative work, social assistance and classroom assistance” (p. 43). This study also expressed that students in their study have defined four different kinds of relationships with paraprofessionals “...consisting of the paraprofessional as mother, friend, protector and primary teacher” (p.40).

There are both positives and negatives outcomes that came from these relationships. One participant expressed relief in having a paraprofessional assigned to them because the paraprofessional was able to explain to others the details about the specific disability of the child, which helped the child create friendships with other children in the class (Tews and Lupart 2008). In fact, in this study, the majority of participants believed that their peers possessed positive views of the paraprofessional. However, there were some participants who thought the opposite to be true. One participant explained that because the students in the class did not like the paraprofessional, the participant struggled to make friends. The majority of the participants in this study also expressed that they spent most of the time at school with the paraprofessional while others stated they spent more time with their peers and a small percentage believed they spent equal time between the two.

Students with disabilities also struggle with autonomy. Some paraprofessionals do everything for their students and as seen in Tews and Lupart (2008), it can make a student angry and feel helpless. At the same time, some students believed that their paraprofessional did allow them freedom and space to complete tasks by themselves.

As mentioned above, proximity is an issue impacting the successful implementation of paraprofessionals. Interestingly, Tews and Lupart (2008) found that some students felt comfort and preferred that their paraprofessional remain in close proximity to them all the time, others preferred only some of the time while some preferred more space. The authors believe that this

could be attributed to how comfortable and competent the student felt in completing tasks on their own. Expanding on this concept, seven of the eight participants in this study expressed that having a paraprofessional with them was important and imperative for their success. Participants explained that they like the paraprofessionals' personality and were grateful for their assistance in academics. They also explained that they disliked the feeling of being different than their peers and that paraprofessionals sometimes lack understanding and jump to conclusions too quickly (Tews and Lupart 2008).

Tews and Lupart (2008)'s study also found that students with disabilities felt they spent more time with their paraprofessional than their classroom teacher. Participants expressed that they used the paraprofessional to help them remember information and to put the information from the teacher into simpler terms. Finally, Tews and Lupart (2008)'s study also expressed that some of its participants felt that the paraprofessional was only there for them, while others believed that the paraprofessional was there for the whole class.

What's missing? As mentioned above, more research is required including students with disabilities as participants. Understandably, experiences of each child will be different depending on the severity of their disability and presumably other factors too. However, it is still important to obtain their perspectives because they are at the center and their perspectives may help researchers understand how they may express their perceptions or their daily experiences with paraprofessionals. Obviously, parents still need to be present in the decision-making as the students are still young, but understanding students' perspectives, for example by including at least high functioning students with disabilities who can voice their opinions, may go a long way.

General Education Teachers' Perspectives

General educators have expressed positive and negative opinions regarding paraprofessional. Giangreco (2003) has stated that the main emotion general educators have conveyed when learning that they will have a paraprofessional in their classroom was that of relief. He explains that most teachers believe that the special needs educators along with the paraprofessionals will be the ones who "...take care of the planning, adapting, supervision, and instructions [... and all the general education teachers need to do] is be a gracious host" (Giangreco, 2003, p. 50).

An interesting factor that affects the successful implementation of paraprofessionals is that teachers lack confidence in supervising paraprofessionals who are older than they are or who have more experience in the workforce than they do (McGrath et al. 2010). As described by Giangreco et al. (1997), many teachers also report that " "[they] do not have the training to work with these high needs kids" (p. 12), thus leaving the education of these children in the hands of the untrained paraprofessionals. Glazzard (2011) also shared this view.

Sosinsky and Gilliam (2011) conducted a phone survey of mainstream early childhood classroom educators. Most of their research focused on the effects of the different educational background of teachers and paraprofessionals. They found that when there is a small difference between the levels of education, general educators believed that the assistant teacher (also known as paraprofessionals) played an important role in the classroom and teaching duties. The opposite is true when the discrepancy in education was greater. Another factor that these authors believe affected the relationship between teachers and paraprofessionals is that of culture. Different cultures possess different values and expectations, and when working in a team environment, culture plays a huge role. Culture can either hinder or improve the relationship. Nonetheless, these authors found that classroom teachers believe that assistant teachers are useful for

supervising the students, cleaning the classroom and other general responsibilities and less responsible for the teaching duties, regardless of the educational differences. Interestingly, teachers in this study have expressed that they do not have enough planning time with the paraprofessional, which hinders the process of a team environment.

What's missing? There is limited research that focuses on the relationship between teachers and paraprofessionals on a deeper level rather than a vague description. Research into the teachers' understanding of roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals and information on teachers' perspectives of team collaboration is lacking.

Special Education Resource Teachers' Perspectives

Special resource educators' classrooms contain only special needs students, it is a small class and they supervise the paraprofessionals in the classroom. Special educators' perceptions of paraprofessionals have differed in the literature from the perceptions of main educators. The most likely reason is that special educators seem to have more of an understanding of all aspects of special needs education and the role of paraprofessionals is generally viewed as a support for them. Special educators are also described in the literature (Giangreco, 2013) to be extremely preoccupied with paperwork and are unable to be in the classrooms observing the students and paraprofessionals as much as they would like to be. Interestingly, Giangreco and Broer (2005) expressed that their special educator participants stated they could not answer the question on how paraprofessionals spend their time because they felt as though they did not know enough to produce a confident answer.

As mentioned above, Chopra and French (2004) interviewed parents and paraprofessionals and concluded that they are five types of relationships between them. Interestingly, they also interviewed special resource educators on their perspectives and thoughts

about these relationships. One special needs resource teacher expressed how important it is for paraprofessionals and parents to communicate because she felt as though they had more information to share with the parents on a regular basis than she did. However, this special needs teacher also stated that she reminded the paraprofessionals that it is the special educator's job to analyse, interpret, provide potential solutions and diagnose the students and it is the paraprofessional's job to simply relay the information of the day. She explained that this served as a protective factor for parents to avoid overwhelmed feelings or lose hope for their child. Chopra and French (2004) also explain that this particular special needs teacher felt that should the paraprofessionals spend too much time with one particular student they tend to become too close and comfortable with the parents and overstep their boundaries.

What's missing? The research on special resource educators' perspectives and perceptions of paraprofessionals are unclear and fragmented. To my knowledge, there are no studies that focus on special resource teachers and their perceptions of paraprofessionals. This is a major issue because they play a huge role in the students' lives and the paraprofessionals' roles on a daily basis in an inclusive environment.

Paraprofessionals' Perspectives

Giagreco et al. (1997)'s study explained that overall, paraprofessionals felt as though the main educator in the room was not doing their job properly and that the teacher did not understand the role of the paraprofessional. For example, one participant (a paraprofessional) believed the main educator in her classroom assumed that the paraprofessional was responsible for educating the child with special needs, which was later reinforced when the main educator expressed during a meeting that it was not her role to educate the child in question. To make

matters even more complicated for the paraprofessionals, Patterson (2006) found that paraprofessionals felt that classroom teachers were not prepared or well organized.

Chopra et al. (2004) found that paraprofessionals believed they filled the role of connector between the "...parents, the students, and other members of the school and community" (p. 221). One participant in this study, a paraprofessional who has a comfortable relationship with parents, believes that some teachers (especially new teachers) are unhappy that parents approach the paraprofessionals for information instead of them. This paraprofessional believed that perhaps there is some resentment from the teachers towards the paraprofessionals because of this. Another paraprofessional in this study resented the school administration because the administration did not approve of paraprofessionals "...interacting freely with parents and students" (p.224), out of fear that they may release confidential information. In fact one paraprofessional completely ignored the request of the administration for paraprofessionals "to avoid contact with students and their families in public" (p.224), because the participant believed that it would negatively impact the paraprofessionals' relationship with the students and parents.

Interestingly, 59% of participants in Patterson (2006)'s study indicated that they felt what they had to say was viewed as important and they were consulted on anything that had to do with the child they were working with. In addition, many participants in her study indicated the need for everyone to work together as a team. There were also participants in this study who indicated that they felt that they were a part of a team and felt supported which they attributed as crucial to their success with students.

Patterson (2006) interviewed paraprofessionals to examine how they perceived their roles and responsibilities. Participants in this study indicated that they were responsible for some sort

of teaching (whether it be to their specific student, groups of students or whole class instructions). Although the majority of the paraprofessionals (81%) expressed that they enjoyed the added responsibility, 77% resented the school because they felt the school expected them to complete this role without providing sufficient instructions and financial compensation (Patterson, 2006). Paraprofessionals also indicated that they were expected to do clerical work and though almost all of them were willing to help out, a majority of them felt as though they were not treated as equals (to the teachers) (Patterson, 2006). They were also completing tasks that the teachers simply did not want to do. Paraprofessionals felt that the schools believed that they were responsible for children who exhibited any type of inappropriate or unacceptable behaviours. Participants in this study believed that the classroom educators assumed that the primary responsibility of paraprofessionals was to take care of the students who were acting out even if it was not a student with special needs or a student in their class. One paraprofessional in particular was upset and felt as though the teachers forget that paraprofessionals are there for one child in particular and it is the teachers' job to keep the class calm. Another participant stated that as a man he is seen by the school as a bodyguard and is annoyed to have to leave what he is doing to go and take care of other things such as children's behaviours or a fight (Patterson, 2006).

Paraprofessionals have expressed dissatisfaction in the fact that nobody, including themselves, know exactly what their roles and responsibilities are. They have indicated that a proper job description would be useful for everyone to know what their job entails and therefore there were be no unrealistic expectations from the school administration or teachers (Patterson, 2006).

As described above, paraprofessionals viewed one of their responsibilities as dealing with students' behaviours irrespective of whether they are special needs students or even in the same class as the paraprofessional. Patterson (2006) found that paraprofessionals believed they needed more training in behaviour management strategies in order to complete this task.

Paraprofessionals in this study also indicated that they did receive training by the district; however, the training was only on the topic of academics, which they expressed as useful, but they still craved training in behaviour management. One participant in Patterson's (2006) study indicated that there is a need for consistent training in behaviour management because the behaviours are always changing and children seem to be getting away with a lot more and are not affected by being sent out of the classroom.

Giangreco and Broer (2005) expressed that according to answers from their surveys, only 15% of paraprofessionals were concerned with their proximity to their student and the potential negative effects of unnecessary proximity. These authors' findings from their surveys re-iterate what has already been known about paraprofessionals' perceptions of their job, such as spending a lot of their time performing teaching duties and the lack of teacher involvement with students with disabilities. Another example is that 75.51% of paraprofessionals disagreed that they interacted more with the parents than the classroom teacher. However, there are aspects of their data that has produced interesting findings that may not fit with what most research has indicated. For example, 83.11% and 85.23% of paraprofessionals indicated respectively that they are not asked to provide students with academic support when they feel they are not skilled or uncomfortable and they are not asked to provide other types of support such as behaviour support for students where they feel unskilled or uncomfortable (Giangreco & Broer 2005).

Giangreco (2013) also alludes to Broer's (2003) negative emotional states of paraprofessionals. One emotion is that of ambivalence and exploitation. It is believed that paraprofessionals feel this way when they are asked to perform duties of the main educator for lower compensation. It is against educational laws to have paraprofessionals, who are not properly trained in education, to be responsible for the education of students. Conversely, paraprofessionals who have been to university and possess a high level of education have reported feeling frustrated when not being able to assume some teaching duties. Another emotion reported by paraprofessionals is the feeling of being disrespected and the low morale if they are not being utilized to their full potential and if their capabilities are not being acknowledged (Giangreco, 2013).

What's missing? It is important to acknowledge that the above information is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the voices of paraprofessionals. Studies are lacking on the perspectives of paraprofessional in all aspects of the field ranging from relationships to job descriptions and job satisfaction. There is also little research on paraprofessional in early childhood as well as on paraprofessionals in schools in Canada. Interestingly, there is also a lack of research on the difference of perspectives between paraprofessionals that are employed by the school and paraprofessionals who are privately employed. The reality in Quebec, however is that in public schools, paraprofessionals are employed through the school board. On the same note, in early childhood classrooms, the parents employ paraprofessionals privately. Another area worth investigating is how paraprofessionals feel about the organization they are employed by. In Montreal, Quebec, most paraprofessionals are employed by the school board and they come from a variety of educational backgrounds, often in special and child development areas. Most private

schools employ paraprofessionals who are part of an organization such as CROM in French and West Montreal Re Adaptation Centre in English.

Limitations

As mentioned previously the IDEA 2004 act states that children with disabilities are entitled to support in the classroom from paraprofessionals. The literatures, such as Patterson (2006) argue that the number of paraprofessionals being hired recently has gone up. Considering these factors, it is important to make sure that everything is running smoothly. The only way to gain a holistic picture of such environment is to obtain the views of the environment by all involved. The limitation however, is that the research on this, especially the research on paraprofessionals' perspectives is little to non-existent, therefore a holistic picture is lacking. Another limitation is that most of the research conducted focuses on higher elementary and high school level children with severe disabilities. It is rare to come across a study that was conducted using early childhood participants or even less severely disabled children (e.g., high functioning autistic children).

Most of the literature in this review was conducted in the United States. While the USA and Canada do not differ terribly in many respects, they are still two different countries with their own set of laws concerning education. There is limited research on paraprofessionals in Canada. Another limitation to this research is that most of the research lack the voice of paraprofessionals. This is a limitation because without the participants' perspectives it is not possible to understand the daily experiences and process of the role of a paraprofessional.

Discussion and Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, this review focused on the principles of inclusion in educational settings while mainly focusing on the perceptions and perspectives of all involved

(teachers, parents, paraprofessionals, children). Everybody involved in the student's education have an opinion regarding paraprofessionals (including paraprofessionals themselves) and these opinions do differ. However, it is important to consider the different views of all the stakeholders. For example, is it okay that parents do not know much about the person who works with their child on a daily basis? (Chopra and French, 2004). Is it helpful to students that they do not feel comfortable with some of their paraprofessionals? (Tews & Lupart, 2008)

Another issue is the idea that some teachers perceive that it is not their responsibility to deal with children with disabilities in their classroom. Every child is entitled to a proper education and it is unfair and disrespectful to leave the education of the children with the most complex needs to the people who are not qualified to teach. Ignoring the child with special needs also isolates them from the group, which is contradictory to the principles of inclusion. Teachers must also work together with the paraprofessional and acknowledge their capabilities. The teachers and paraprofessionals must develop a strong collaborative relationship.

The job satisfaction problems that paraprofessionals report is also troubling. How can one be expected to deliver their best work if they are completely unsatisfied with their job and the way they are treated? Based on the present literature, paraprofessionals have expressed that they feel taken advantage of and are underappreciated for all the work they do (ranging from helping the children with special needs to performing clerical tasks for teachers). By examining the perspectives of the parents, students, general education teachers, special needs teachers and paraprofessionals a clearer picture may emerge that may inform inclusive practices. These perceptions need to be addressed in order to move towards a more collaborative team approach of working with paraprofessionals in the classroom.

Present Study

The present study focused on the perspectives of paraprofessionals in educational settings and how their services can be effectively utilized in order to best meet the challenges of special needs children in elementary. It is important to explore these perspectives because they provide information on what is actually happening on a day-to-day basis, as well as, the advantages and disadvantages of these issues.

The first step into understanding the above is to primarily understand the perceived perspectives of the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals. This information provided the researcher with a well-rounded account of the role of paraprofessionals while providing enough insight to examine the advantages and disadvantages of paraprofessionals in the classroom. The data collection was also useful in providing information for possible improvements to the profession of paraprofessionals.

The present study used the following questions to guide the research:

- To explore how paraprofessionals and others who worked with them perceived their role
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of paraprofessional working with children in the classroom?
- What changes/improvements the paraprofessionals report that may be helpful in paraprofessionals doing their jobs better
- How others who worked with paraprofessionals feel things should be working better

Method

The present study used a qualitative approach to examine the perspectives of both the paraprofessionals and of the different stakeholders supporting and educating children with special needs in elementary schools. The main focus was on the data obtained from the

paraprofessionals themselves, however, the researcher collected data from other groups of participants to add a holistic picture. This study undertook a phenomenological and action research approach as it attempted to understand how paraprofessional support functions currently and to uncover the best possible method to utilize paraprofessional support in elementary schools.

Recruitment and Participants

The current study focused on recruiting participants from one well known school board in Montreal, Quebec. The school board provided access to their schools. The researcher chose one school in particular, which, from this point on, will be known as the main school of recruitment. The researcher also used word of mouth to recruit participants and obtained four paraprofessional participants from four different schools. Therefore, in total there were five schools represented. In addition, the children, the parents of the children, teachers, a special education technician and administrative employees were also recruited to participate in the study. These participants were all recruited from the main school of recruitment.

The particular school board was chosen because of their inclusive policies. According to their website, they have a special needs advisory committee in place which is used to advise the school board of the policies for working with and educating children with special needs. The school board has documents posted on their site which are helpful to parents of children with special needs, as well as their current policy of dealing with students with special needs and inclusion. They also have information with links to the Autism Spectrum Disorder Center of Excellence, as well as the Centre of Excellence for Mental Health.

Participants were recruited through word of mouth and chain referrals. The school board allowed access to their schools in which the school administrator referred the researcher to the

participants. In total, there are 6 paraprofessional participants, 1 administrator, 1 special education technician (whose title in the school of recruitment was behavioral tech), 2 sets of parents (one mother and one mother and father), 2 main educators, 2 children with special needs and 2 children without special needs. The different groups of participants allowed the researcher to receive rich meaningful data which can be used to make inferences and purposeful conclusions.

The main participants were the paraprofessionals (integration aides). Below is a brief description of each paraprofessional's criteria and experience. This information is crucial to the study's depth as there are differences ranging in years of experience as well as types of backgrounds.

Para 1. Para 1 started off working in the daycare setting at schools before she became a paraprofessional. This allowed her to gain access to the way the system of elementary schools functioned. Prior to her working in the school system, this particular para earned a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, and had previously earned a degree in Early Childhood Care Education. She believes she was well prepared to be a paraprofessional. "Yeah, I'm very trained... I have everything, so yeah, I think I'm a little over qualified (chuckle) but it's ok, I don't mind...". Para 1 seemed confident in her ability and knowledge of the role of a paraprofessional.

Para 2. Para 2 worked at the same school as para 1. (These two paras were the only two that worked at the same school). This para has a degree in Human Relations, and mentioned that raising her own two children was also training for the role of being a paraprofessional. She also explained that she had training in ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis) therapy which is a type of therapy used for children with autism. Para 2 did not elaborate much on her background.

Para 3. Para 3 has been a paraprofessional for 22 years. Prior to that, she worked in the field of childcare, more specifically, in a group home and treatment centers. In total, she has about 40 years of experience. Her perspective adds an interesting aspect to the findings, as she speaks about the past and present of the role, as well as, the challenges which a mature para is faced with. For example, she mentions that the job becomes harder and more demanding with more experience. "...I mean, it's not as easy as it was (hahaha) before I was pretty good at chasing kids around the school if I needed to, but you know, umm, yeah so...". She also brings a perspective from someone who was in the system when there was said to be fewer children with special needs. "...I- I would've thought that it wouldn't of like, I didn't know, I guess that it would, we would, have so many special needs kids like I didn't think that would ever come to be, right?".

Para 4. Para 4 started out as a behavior tech in the system prior to leaving the organization and starting her own business as what seemed to be a private paraprofessional. At the time of the interview she had recently re-entered the system as a paraprofessional. She brings an interesting perspective as she speaks of her re-entry into the system and all of the frustrations that come with it. "...coming back into the system, its tough, because you know I'm not in charge (laughs), so basically I need to, to work and I need to get these people on board.". She seems to be frustrated with the way the system functions more than the other participants. This could potentially be attributed to the fact that she previously owned her own private business in the field.

Para 5. Para 5 has been working in the school board for 7 years. Prior to the interview commencing, para 5 informed the researcher that she had previously gone to school to be a special care counselor and has training in ABA therapy. This para also has training in the

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children) program. She seemed confident that her "...training and [her] experience surpasses the role as an integration aide, currently..." and she is "... always kind of looking for room to, you know, move up in hierarchy I guess within the school board...". Between her experience and desire to move up in the system, she brings an interesting perspective to the findings.

Para 6. Para 6 is the mother of an autistic child, which added the thought-provoking perspective to the findings, of not only a paraprofessional role, but also the role of the parent. She attributed her role as a parent to a child with autism, as one that prepared her for the role of the paraprofessional. "well I had previous training because I have a child with autism so I had a lot of training so (ahahaha) I didn't really need training...". It is interesting to note that she seems protective over the parents.

"...you know the school board tells parents all the time how oh they're going to be support, they're going to be supported by specialists, speech therapists, and occupational therapists and this and that, and the amount of occupational therapy and speech therapy they get is ridiculously little. You know... there are a lot of unrealistic expectations of parents, big time... we could be teaching them that but we're gonna you know blame the parents all the time you know....".

This intertwined role of being a parent specifically of a child with autism, and being in the role of a paraprofessional, added a diverse evaluation of the role of a paraprofessional.

Considering this study used qualitative approaches of phenomenology and action research, the type of sampling used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allowed for the selection of participants based upon the amount of detailed information that could have been

provided by the participant (Hays & Singh, 2012). This type of sampling method made the most sense for this study and was completed using the criteria below.

The study searched participants of all different ages and of all different experiences, including the amount of time employed. The criteria that was used for recruitment was that the participants must be connected to the specific school board. For paraprofessionals, teachers, special educators and administrative staff members, this would mean that they must be part of the school board. However, if they were part of the board but did not possess a job at the time of recruitment, they were still considered for the study. The parent participants were those of students who used the paraprofessional support. The students were both those who used the support and those students who did not use the support. They are in the same classroom and interact daily with the paraprofessionals and students.

Procedure

Data collection was catered to each subgroup of participants. The study collected data using semi-structured individual interviews for each group of participants. This allowed for mostly open-ended questions and rich discussion (Appendices A, B, C, D, E and F). The open-ended questions allowed for the study to truly capture the thoughts and perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon (Appendices A, B, C, D, E and F). For the adult participants, the interviews took place in either the school they were employed in, their house or the public library in a private room. Each interview took place on a day and at a time most convenient for the participants. The interviews took place only once per participant and lasted anywhere from 20 to 47 minutes and were audio recorded. Prior to the interviews, all adult participants were provided with a letter that explained the purpose of the study, along with what was expected from them as

well as an informed consent form, which all participants needed to sign in order to participate. The children participants were verbally asked for their consent. (Appendices A,B,C,D,E and F).

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the researcher and research assistant transcribed the interview data. The data was analyzed using Microsoft Word. The transcriptions were initially broken down into tables for the purpose of analyzing the data.

The data was primarily analyzed based on the themes of the questions found in appendices A, B, C, D, E and F. The research assistant did not analyze all the transcripts. She only analyzed the paraprofessional transcripts due to time constraints. There were numerous meetings between the researcher and the research assistant to discuss the coding which allowed for a reliable analysis. The main forms of coding used were descriptive coding, value and emotion coding followed by mapping and pattern coding. The researcher and assistant met after each level of coding to ensure greater reliability.

Descriptive coding is one where one word or phrase is used to indicate the basic theme or topic of the passage (Saldana, 2013). This allowed for later grouping of the data into themes, which helped the researcher to describe the findings and come up with a plan of action for change and improvement.

Considering that the present study explored a phenomenon by obtaining different parties' perspectives, it made sense not only to use descriptive coding but emotion and value coding as well. Emotion coding is useful to label the emotions that the participants have expressed or seem to have felt during the data collection process. Saldana (2013) explained that this type of coding is useful for studies "...that explore intrapersonal and interpersonal participants experiences and actions" (p. 105). Simply put, this is exactly what the present study did by exploring the different

perspectives of a profession that is very complex, intrapersonal and interpersonal. Value coding added to the analysis by allowing the researcher to examine the participants “values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives... (Saladana, 2013, p. 110). This type of coding was extremely useful as the current study focused on the perspectives in order to obtain answers to the research questions.

Following this, the researcher mapped all the codes into a list of categories by using code mapping. Saladana (2013), explained that mapping the data into categories allows for later condensed data of “...themes and concepts [that are] central [to the study]” (p. 194). This is simply another way to condense and provide the researcher with valuable data. Finally, the pattern coding was used to group all the data together and place them into main themes that appear in the data. At the same time, the researcher explored these main themes within the themes of the research questions, which is why pattern coding was useful. According to Saladana, (2013), pattern coding is useful in “[identifying] similarly coded data” and [Organizing] the corpus into sets, themes, or constructs and attributes meaning to [them]” (p.266).

The researcher addressed credibility measures in the following way. Data triangulation was used because the researcher collected data from numerous groups of participants to create a holistic picture. Investigator triangulation and theory triangulation was also addressed in the sense that the researcher had a research assistant who also played the role of a second investigator, as she aided the researcher in analyzing the data as mentioned above. The researcher also went back to the participants to clarify what they meant by certain statements, when needed, which addressed the issue of member checks. The researcher also made sure that

the write up contained significant and detailed descriptions by using many quotes from the participants which provided an evidence base for all interpretations and conclusions made.

A final consideration of the data analysis was the researcher bias. The researcher is employed as a paraprofessional for younger children, which is why this particular topic was of interest to her. Along with this come both advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that because the researcher is a paraprofessional, it created a bond with the paraprofessional participants, making them feel comfortable in expressing themselves. Another advantage is when interviewing the children; the researcher has experience dealing with children and once again provided the participants with some form of comfort. There are also some disadvantages but the main one happens to be the same as the main advantage; that is, being a paraprofessional in the field. Being in the same occupation can allow for personal biases to come through during the duration of the research thesis. A way to make sure the researcher avoided researcher bias was through the fact that there was a research assistant for the whole duration of the research. The researcher and research assistant met on a regular basis to go over the data and made sure they both came to an agreement on the findings.

Findings

The results of this study were gathered from interviews with six paraprofessionals, two teachers, one behavioral technician, two sets of parents (one mother and one mother-father combination), four children (two with special needs and two without, ranging in age) and one administrator. The participants were from all different schools from the same school board. This diverse group of participants possibly included diverse perspectives and experiences on paraprofessionals in elementary schools.

The findings have been sorted into sections by participant groups. Each section will begin with a brief description of every participant's background or mandate. Following these descriptions, each section will explore the themes and phenomena that have emerged from the reported perceptions of the participants, and guided by the following research questions:

- To explore how paraprofessionals and others who worked with them perceived their role
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of paraprofessional working with children in the classroom?
- What changes/improvements the paraprofessionals report that may be helpful in paraprofessionals doing their jobs better
- How others who worked with paraprofessionals feel things should be working better

The findings of this study will represent and reflect both the positive and negative aspects of the role of the paraprofessional as explained by all the diverse groups of participants. In addition, participants described the strengths and weaknesses of the systemic issues that they considered important. Although there seemed to have been a lot of confusion and challenges which were reported by the different participants about the role of the paraprofessionals in the system, there seemed to be a consensus that paraprofessionals are extremely important in schools. Participants described the role of the paraprofessional as a critical component of the integration of children with special needs in inclusive classrooms.

Parents of Children with Special Needs

The parents that were interviewed for the current study were those of the two different children with special needs participants. Child 1's parents (mother-m and father-f) both participated in the interview, although the father was present only part of the time. Only child 2's mother participated in the interview. It should be noted that child 1 seemed to be using the

paraprofessional aide much more than child 2. This seems to show that child 1's parents are more informed about the aspect of paraprofessional and extra help more so than child 2's parent. Evidence of this will be seen throughout the findings in this section. This section could potentially reflect how parents perceive the role of the paraprofessional and how they understand the process of integration and support for the child with special needs.

Parents 1-m,f. The Parents of child 1 included both the mother and father. The interview took place at their home during the evening. The mother and researcher sat down together in one room while the father was continuously leaving and returning throughout the interview as he was cooking dinner in the kitchen. This was the first year that they placed their child in a public school. In previous years, their son attended a private school. Therefore, this was their first year dealing with the public system and paraprofessionals within the public system. Nevertheless, they seemed to be confident in most of their answers, most likely due to the fact that they are very involved parents and the aide assisted their son on a daily basis. Parent 1-f was a volunteer in the school during this past year.

Parent 2. Parent 2 was the parent of child 2 with special needs and the mother was the sole parent present during the interview. The interview took place in the later afternoon once the child finished school. The interview took place at their home. Parent 2 did not share as much information as parents 1 did, however this could be attributed to the fact that there were two parents in the first interview. She also explained that she was not as informed about paraprofessionals. Her son used the support of the paraprofessional from the beginning of the year until mid-year, as he was trailing in his abilities in the French language compared to other children in his class. Parent 2 was simply informed of this by the educator and was told that he will be receiving extra help if she consented. It is unclear to what extent she was involved as a

parent in the school. Although, it was clear that she was one person removed from the situation as she explained she had no contact with the paraprofessionals and relied on the main educator for information.

The definition of inclusion. Both participants briefly explained what their understanding of inclusion was. Parent 2 expressed the idea of inclusion in general terms when she articulated that “it was about fitting in ... that’s my understanding of you know.... That’s how I would look at it” (parent 2). While parent 1-m expressed inclusion more in terms of her own son and therefore more personally: “that he feels included” (parent 1-m), while the father shared: “...that feels like participates as equals, like everybody else” (parent 1-f).

Parent perceptions of the basic roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional.

Parents 1 and parent 2 spoke and described how they perceived the role of the paraprofessional. Parents 1 expressed that a paraprofessional was someone who was there for general classroom aide as well as an aide to assist their son to comprehend and express himself: “Someone to help...in all manners (parents 1-m) ... someone who assists my son to comprehend and express whatever situation he is in” (parents 1-f). While Parent 2 expressed a paraprofessional as someone who the educator in the classroom assigns the child to, so that the child is assisted without disrupting other students: “so the teacher decides that he needs someone other than the teacher to get him in class and bring him out so that it doesn’t disrupt with the teaching” (parent 2). Parents 1 articulated that the role of the paraprofessional, in regard to their son’s particular case, was to make sure their son was stable and comfortable in his learning process “...to make sure he is comfortable, to help him through a process, (parents 1-f)”. Parent 2 also spoke about the responsibility of paraprofessionals in a general fashion: “...I am assuming the integration aide is there to you know help students ahh... bring them back up to pace with the other

students...” (parent 2).

Parental confusion regarding paraprofessionals. During the interviews with the parents, there seemed to be some confusion concerning the difference between an educator and a paraprofessional, as well as bewilderment regarding the training and hiring of paraprofessionals. The first aspect was the confusion of the difference of roles and responsibilities. Interestingly, parent 2 seemed to be concerned about the educators’ feelings of being overwhelmed while parents 1 seem to be concerned with the children’s intake of information. Parent 2’s articulation seemed slightly puzzling as well. She began with expressing the idea that there should be a balance in who educates the child with special needs because the teacher is overwhelmed and no student, whether he/she has special needs or not, should fall behind, nor a student who is atypical and excelling, be penalized:

.... and they have a large number of kids in their class and I don’t think kids that are... falling behind should...be penalized just because they are falling behind but the kids that are excelling should also not be penalized because they havebut if we have the help...there are teachers available, I would never say, I don’t think anybody should say no. it just relieves less stress for the teacher basically (parent 2).

Conversely, in the same response, she claims that because paraprofessionals are not always present, they should not be expected to educate the children without guidelines and information provided previously by the educator regarding the child in question:

“...it depends if the aide is not there in the class all the time to know where the you know other kids are at, I am assuming the teacher needs to let the aide know where the child is at and maybe provide them with guidelines on what they should be working on...”.

Consequently, it is unclear as to whether parent 2 believes the educator or the paraprofessional

should be educating the students with special needs or perhaps it depends on the needs of the child. In spite of this, it may be plausible to assume that her response appears to indicate some sort of balance between the two.

Unlike parent 2, parents 1's response seem to be more cohesive. When asked to what extent the paraprofessional should be teaching the students with special needs or adapting the work for them, parents 1-m's first response was: "none. well I think the teacher needs to teach it... and then I think the aide needs to reinforce it" (parents 1-m). She elaborated on this aspect by articulating that there are many children in the classroom with all different academic levels, and the educator should be aware of this and teach while keeping this in her mind. Parents 1-m seemed to want to assure that her thoughts were being understood and she elaborated:

...I think the children should have a concept of what is trying to be taught, even if they don't get it, they should understand that there is a new concept and then the aide... if the aide needs to teach the concept that's okay but at least she is not coming in with okay today we are going to learn.... and then the kid is kinda of looking like I've never seen that before it's Chinese (parents 1-m).

A second aspect of confusion concerning the difference between an educator and a paraprofessional regarded whether the paraprofessionals are educators. Both parents 1 and parent 2 expressed that they believed the paraprofessionals were educators who either could not find employment as a main educator, or educators who specialized in children with special needs. Parents 1-m stated: "...I don't know if they go through the same as a teacher....and they are an aide because they can't get a teaching job... (parents 1-m) while parent 2 expressed, ...I would think that they were teachers... and just specialized like to some degree with children that have

ah, more difficulty like different degrees of issues (parent 2).

Emerging from the confusion above is the aspect of the training, hiring and background of paraprofessionals. As other participant groups have expressed, parents do not seem to know who is working with their child, moreover, whether or not the person in question is properly educated to do so. Neither parent participant knew what the training process, hiring process or background for a paraprofessional was. It is unclear whether this is a system failure, or simply the lack of concern by the parents as one would assume that an educational institution would contain high standards for being employed. One parent specifically articulated that if she wanted to know about a paraprofessional she would simply inquire through the school, and she was adamant that she would be provided with a response: "...I'm sure if we asked the school they would provide us this information, we just never asked the school" (parents 1-m).

Parent 2 replied that she did not possess the knowledge of the training, background, or the hiring process. Parents 1 also shared their thoughts on this topic:

... I sure as hell hope someone coming to work with someone like my child with all the difficulties that he has is not just coming out of high school and you know they babysat...like I certainly hope there is a background of you...know... (parents 1-m)... but as long as you have courses...a specialty...you don't need a degree but to do a course or a handful of courses that relate to specifically working with children or with children with special needs.. (parents 1-m).

Parents 1-f expressed his concerns with this issue of confusion in which he stated:

doesn't mean that they are...in a study program or not... but I ... can tell you ... I've seen competent aides working at the school and I don't know what they go through to get into the schools but I can say that.... they probably have had some sort of training to get

them to work (parents 1-f).

His thoughts surrounding the issue appear to suggest that he has confidence in the school and the system. He seems to trust that they are completing their job search properly and taking these factors into consideration and stated that his views are based on his volunteer work at the school.

Individualized support of children. Every child is an individual and requires their own type of support, personalized to their situation. Parent 2 expressed that the main educator decided that her son needed the extra help and she simply agreed because it was evident that her son was failing behind in French class.

Parents 1 shared that they were more included in the process of making support decisions for their son and attributed it to the idea that they were extremely involved and always inquiring about him.

we are the type of parents that make sure we are. So I can't speak for other people but we are the type of parents that during the school year, we called and we asked for a meeting. Partway through the school year we asked for a meeting... I think that if we didn't ask for updates, I don't think we would get them nearly as often... we wouldn't get them nearly as often as we do (parents 1-m).

Relationship between parents and paraprofessionals. Neither parents were said to have had any relationship with the paraprofessionals that work with their children. Parent 2 expressed that she might have exchanged some pleasantries with the paraprofessional when she would pick up her son from school but that was the just of it all:

...I knew who she was and when I would go pick him up I would see her and we would exchange a few words. and I believe when I went to get his first report card she came in and sat for a couple of minutes....I don't...I don't know her personality or ...I just know

her from hi or bye or if I ...I never even asked my son if she was nice because I mean...he he liked her, he was doing his work ... (parent 2).

While parents 1 articulated they had no relationship at all with the paraprofessional and relied on the behavior technician in the school to relay any information back and forth.

No [relationship with the paraprofessional] because all my interactions is through the behavioral tech ...the behavioral tech...so he's been working with her. and she is been our... so she speaks to the aides and then she will speak to us. so if he wasn't working with her specifically, so we have regular updates. I don't necessarily believe we would get any updates as to the actual work that he does with the aides... like she's our middle person right, so, and because she works with him on a daily basis we're in communication regularly. So she will say to me oh he worked with a today and they worked on math. and I would be like okay, whereas I don't know that I would know that except from my son. I don't think I would know that he worked with an aide otherwise (parents 1-m).

Interestingly, parents 1-m elaborated on this thought by expressing that she believes it would be overwhelming for a paraprofessional if the parents were to be in constant communication with them as they already possess enough individuals they must answer to. Nevertheless, she does express that if the behavioral technician was not present in the system, she would like a relationship with the paraprofessionals even if it is simply an email once a week informing her on the progress of her son.

Level of satisfaction with the paraprofessionals. Parent 2 expressed that she possessed “...nothing but praise” for the paraprofessionals and she “...was more than grateful that they were available at the school to help [her] son out” (parent 2). Parents 1 were content with the work their son was completing with the paraprofessionals, specifically stating advantages to

having a paraprofessional as “the advantages...is that it helps the student feel more confident. make the student understand better...” (Parents 1-m). However, they did express certain concerns such as lacking aides, lacking aid time and lacking consistency to which she attributed to the “...lack of time and lack of resources because multiple students need multiple aides (chuckles)” (Parents 1-m). She elaborated by expressing the following:

...my challenges with the aides is that there are not enough aides (laughs)... see working with the aides he has, that was never an issue, I knew exactly what they were trying to do, I just don't think they were given necessarily sufficient time to work with him to get it done but I always knew what the expectations was. She worked with math with him today, so today they worked on the class math to get him through this. Tomorrow it could have been the English project. there was no a ...consistently. in it was only this subject or only ... (Parents 1-m).

It appears as though the level of satisfaction of the parents depends on how involved a parent is within the process as opposed to simply trusting the educators and the system. This is based on the level of satisfaction of the participants and the amount of knowledge each one possesses. Evident as well is the fact that parent 2 explained throughout the interview that she was not really involved with the process and relied on and trusted the educator. Parents 1, on the other hand, described themselves as “...those parents who are constantly asking” about the situation (parents 1-m).

Parents need for information. Parent 2 expressed that there was nothing more that she would particularly like to know about paraprofessionals as she seemed to be content with her communication with the main educator. However, parents 1 articulated that there was, in fact, one factor in which they would like to gain more information:

...their background or do they work specially with hostile kids like my son is... you know where is the reference of when they are working with somebody... (parents 1-f).

Parents 1-m was adamant that she should have the right to know who is working with her child. However, as viewed previously, she admitted that she never took the time to pose these questions to the school.

I'm sure the school would give us that information if we asked we just never asked. I'm sure cause as a parent I have a right to that information. Someone is working with my child I would like to know their background. If I'm agreeing to allow someone to work with my child I have a right to ask their background. like if you are going to work with my kid academically well, what is your basis for working with them academically (parents 1-m).

There appears to be a lack of understanding or knowledge from the parent participants about what the paraprofessionals actually do throughout the day or the amount of time spent with their child. Somewhere the radio waves are crossed and perhaps that is something of importance that should be addressed by either the school board or the schools themselves.

Students

The current study interviewed 4 children. The children ranged in age and grade level. All four children attended the same elementary school, the same educational institution as para 1, para 2, administrator, behavioral technician, teacher 1 and teacher 2. This particular elementary school was the main institution of recruitment.

Child 1 without special needs (C1-WSN). C1-WSN was six years old, male and recently completed kindergarten at the time of the interview.

Child 2 without special needs (C2-WSN). C2-WSN was eight years old, male and recently completed Grade 2 at the time of the interview. He is the sibling of C1-WSN.

Child 1 with special needs (C1-SN). C1-SN was an eleven year old male who had recently completed Grade 5 at the time of the interview. He used the support of the paraprofessionals on a daily basis. C1-SN happens to be the child of parents 1 participants.

Child 2 with special needs (C2-SN). C2-SN was a seven year old male who recently completed Grade 1. C2-SN only used the support of paraprofessionals from the beginning of the year to mid-way through the year. He was provided the support at the suggestion of his main educator in order to aid him in his quest of learning the French language. It is important to note that at the time of the interview the child did not remember the extra help he received during the school day (although his mother informed the researcher that he did receive the aid). He happens to be the child of the parent 2 participant. C2-SN was a student in the classroom of the teacher 1 participant.

Children's perceptions on paraprofessionals. Children without special needs differed in their views of paraprofessionals than children with special needs. The children without special needs explained to the researcher why they believed the paraprofessionals were present. Both participants reported that they believed the paraprofessionals were present because there were children in their class who were struggling. C1-WSN informed paraprofessionals were present "cause there are kids who have hard times" and they spent most of the time "out of the class" (C1-WSN). However, he did admit that they are present for numerous children and they make it easier to play with children who receive the support "because they are helping" (C1-WSN). C2-WSN seemed to be in consensus with C1-WSN. C2-WSN was more descriptive about his

personal experience as well with the paraprofessionals in his classroom. He explained the following as to why paraprofessionals were present in his classroom:

there is four kids in my class who need to catch up on stuff so she is there to help them so they could catch up in French and there is also one kid who comes from Israel and she doesn't speak English or French so she is there to help her learn English and French.

He continued to articulate that he is not able to provide much information as most of the time they are not in the classroom, rather “most of the time [they are] in the solarium” (C2-WSN). Interestingly, C2-WSN expanded on his thoughts as to why paraprofessionals make it easier to work and play with the children who receive the aide when he expressed: “...she is helping them solve problems and helping them on their work” (C2-WSN). Both these participants appear to understand the reasons behind the paraprofessional support of certain children while at the same time they do not appear to have any negative emotions, thoughts, concerns or remarks.

C2-SN informed the researcher that he simply did not remember much, if anything at all, about the support he had received from the paraprofessionals earlier on during the academic year. However, C1-SN expressed that he remembers receiving support daily from the paraprofessionals and most of the time it was pleasant. He explained that he finds the paraprofessionals to be “... very funny, very characteristic, like, it feels like when I'm talking to them it feels funny!” (C1-SN). He voiced that the only time he does not enjoy the paraprofessionals is when “...[he] get angry [he] start yelling at them” to which he elaborates the reason being that “sometimes they just don't get [him] and [he] get upset” (C1-SN). It appears that perhaps some of the paraprofessionals that were providing support to this particular child made him feel upset at certain points throughout their time together. For some reason or another

the paraprofessional did not understand the needs of the student. Anybody could become frustrated if they are not understood or if they do not understand a concept set forth by somebody else. This feeling is relevant in everyone, not just by those with special needs.

C1-SN did express that when the paraprofessionals are present and providing him with aid, it is normally outside of the classroom.

It is apparent that there is not a vast amount of information provided by the students and therefore no real conclusions can be assumed. However, it is interesting to see the responses that these children provided and how informed about the situation they appear to be.

Teachers

Both teacher participants were recruited from the main educational institution school of this study. These educators were working at the same school as all participants except for paraprofessionals (para) 3-6. Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 were both female.

Teacher 1. Teacher 1 has been employed as a teacher for 25 years and at the time of the interview she was teaching Grade 1 French Immersion in the same school where para 1 and para 2 worked. Prior to working in that school, she worked in another school for another school board. She taught in a closed classroom where, “everybody that fell two years behind...everybody who was coded was not sitting in the regular classroom.” During the interview she seemed comfortable, relaxed and chuckled or laughed frequently. She seemed quite confident in her answers and was eager to share but cautious of what she was allowed to share due to confidentiality.

Teacher 2. Teacher 2 has been employed for 12 years as a teacher and at the time of the interview she was teaching Grade 2. She did not inform the researcher on the subject she was teaching but it is believed that she was teaching French. When the researcher visited her class in

the past she heard the students and teacher speaking French. Comparably to para 6, teacher 2 has a child who has special needs and she explained that it is different being a parent of a child with special needs than educating a child with special needs

Educators' definition of inclusion. Both educators described inclusion in terms of what it meant to them, and were adamant that the definition of inclusion was dependent on specific factors. Teacher 2 expressed the definition of inclusion as: "...well inclusion depends on what school you're in or different things" and then continued to express what inclusion meant to her:

... definitely kids with different needs in a classroom but not necessarily identified as kids with special needs...so they sort of follow the regular routine and try to kind of include them as much as possible which sort of identify them as they have needs that need to be addressed (teacher 2).

Interestingly, teacher 2 defined inclusion, as including children with and without identified diagnoses. Perhaps she meant that as educators and support staff, it should be known who the children with special needs are, nevertheless, that does not mean that the other children in the classroom need to know. Perhaps she felt as though having the classroom students be aware of who the children with special needs are, may stigmatize these children, and therefore, interfere with the inclusion process.

Teacher 1 explained that at the previous school board where she was employed, inclusion meant nothing as inclusion did not exist. While at this school board, the meaning of inclusion as defined by teacher 1 is simply that "...everybody just goes according to the age... just everybody gets into the same classroom according to their age." Teacher 1 went into detail as well about whether children with special needs were segregated in an inclusive classroom. She shared the following:

its a very a hard question... you know why? because it depends on the cases... if you ask me this year...I really believe they are segregated...there is one kid no one plays with him...the other two kids... people kind of...oh ya she doesn't know the answer...kind of would say that even if they are little.... last year I would tell you, you would not even notice...so really... its...its almost like a case by case...(teacher 1).

Teacher 1 did not elaborate on why she believed this was the case or what the real issues were that stem from these feelings of apprehension. She simply expressed the above idea as a fact. Conversely to the other groups of participants, the above seemed to be the only concern that was brought into fruition by either educator about the challenges of inclusion.

Teachers' perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of teachers and paraprofessionals. According to both participants, the first step when having a child with disabilities in the classroom is to set up an IEP (Individual Education Plan) along with the resource teacher. Teacher 2 expressed the IEP is where the teacher creates goals and expectations for specific children in relation to the regular course content. Teacher 1 explained that the above is not an easy task to complete. She does not know the students very well at the beginning of the year and therefore must attempt to form a relationship with them quickly: "that's my responsibility...to get to know the kid fast because I have to set up an IEP and I have to meet with other professionals".

Upon completion of the IEP, teacher 1 explained that she would meet with the paraprofessionals and discuss the child or children in question: "...so I set up the IEP, I meet with paraprofessionals at the beginning of the school year... or every time I might change the objective on the IEP, so every term..." Interestingly, para 2, who is employed in the same school as teacher 1, explained previously such meetings were lacking. Possibly para 2 did not work in

teacher 1's classroom or perhaps there is another reason why these two participants reported such a difference.

Teacher 2 articulated that paraprofessionals are the ones who help to facilitate the process. In her classroom, paraprofessionals' responsibilities are to help children with the completion of their work and to circulate with all children in the classroom so as to not single anyone out.

——Although teacher 2 explained that she adapts the work, she also expressed that the aides follow through with what's written on the IEP. This could potentially suggest that conceivably the aide adapts the work based on the IEP written by the educator as opposed to the educator who is actually adapting the work. Teacher 1 rationalized that in her classroom, she explains the work to the paraprofessional and that the paraprofessional will then work with that child with their specific goals and expectations: "I will explain it to the paraprofessional and she will work ... like either in the class or outside the class with the specific objective to this kid...". This statement appears to imply that the paraprofessional might be taking on the responsibility of educating the students or student with special needs. Yet, teacher 1 expands on this certain thought later in the interview when she was asked if there was a balance between the paraprofessional and the educator in the educating process of the students with special needs:

...its my decision and its my duty as a teacher to do that and as a professional because she didn't study you know... how to teach the math...so you really have to make that previous decision and then you tell her what to do...(teacher 1).

Teacher 1 and teacher 2 seem to deviate from each other as to what is expected from the paraprofessional. For example, teacher 1 mentioned the idea that aides are there to work with the children with special needs in and out of the classroom, while teacher 2 seem to be more focused

on the aide helping everyone in the classroom. This could potentially cause confusion amongst the paraprofessionals, having to constantly change how they work, and what is expected of them, based on the educator with whom they are working. Interestingly, as seen from Para 1 and Para 2 who work in the same school as both educator participants, the paras are not always in the same classroom, therefore the context of the classroom may affect their roles and responsibilities with the children they work with.

Another interesting finding as described by teacher 2, was the idea that she plans her day around the time slots that a paraprofessional will be present in her class. Teacher 2 expressed that she plans what she believes to be the harder work for students for when a paraprofessional will be in her class, because that way the students will have extra help.

The role of teaching the children seemed to be expressed differently by both educators. Teacher 2 expressed that in her classroom there is a clear distinction between who is the educator and who is the paraprofessional. Teacher 2 seemed to apply throughout the interview that the paraprofessional simply helps facilitate the process, but she is the one who creates, adapts and teaches the curriculum. Teacher 1 seemed to have a slightly different view because she explained that who teaches the children depends on the grade level.

well when you're teaching younger grades... lets say...k...you teach it first...but when it comes to older grades...like when I was teaching grade five, six.... sometimes you don't teach it because its like really not...with what we are doing in the class.... their objective are so so different than what's happening in the class, that its the aide, the paraprofessional who has to teach it (teacher 1).

Once again, the opinions of the educators seemed to differ from each other. The mandate of the paraprofessional (defined in the paraprofessionals' perspectives section), seems to be that they

repeat the instructions of the activity to the children and not teach the child. The mandate does not differ based on the grade a child is in. Therefore, a paraprofessional (by mandate) does not have to teach the children. However, it is possible that the mandate does not reflect the reality of the situation and perhaps needs updating.

Educators' perceptions of the qualities, characteristics and skills of paraprofessionals. Similarly to other participants in the current study, both educators expressed that patience was a skill that was required to be a paraprofessional. Both educators articulated that a paraprofessional should have an educational background. Nevertheless, their definition of what type of education differed. Teacher 1 explained that paraprofessionals should have "...school smarts..." as to not rely on the educator to explain, for example, the "...the math problem before..." the student to the paraprofessional. While teacher 2 explained education as having a "some background because not everyone can just be an aide...". However, teacher 2 did expand on her thought of education later on in the interview. She communicated that perhaps a paraprofessional should have some education, not necessarily on the elementary school curriculum but rather on how elementary schools function. She further explained that if a paraprofessional does not possess such a background, they should take the initiative to seek help to learn the functions of elementary school.

...but at least have some basic knowledge of how things work in elementary school, ah classroom as well too... or if not to find the workshop or tools to help the person follow the routines in the school (teacher 2).

Moreover, teacher 2 expanded once again on this topic when she expressed:

make sure that it understands the subject...so maybe it sort of handle along...so its not necessary for me always be able to teach the integration aide of how to sort of go about

handling a math problem or a French problem (teacher 2).

Teacher 1 seemed to agree with the idea that a paraprofessional should possess the quality of “taking initiative”. She appears to express that “...having a lot of initiative...” was important because although she attempts to greet the paraprofessional and explain what she would like accomplished that particular time frame, “sometimes in life ...in everyday life... sometimes it happens...” where she is preoccupied at the moment and cannot greet and explain the task at hand to the paraprofessional. Therefore, the paraprofessional should be able to take some initiative, “...so... they will know where to get the stuff and doesn’t have to...always rely on me...”.

Teacher 1 and teacher 2 articulated that having an understanding of children with special needs was required to be a paraprofessional: “...make sure they understand the background of what the child is dealing...” (teacher 2). Teacher 2 stated:

“understanding children with special needs... so some experience working with children with special needs or having an openness to working with special needs helps...but of course ah...experience helps us both too...”.

Another quality that both educators appeared to express was being able to work as a team. Teacher 1 explained that she “... like[s] to think of [relationship with a paraprofessional] ...as a team”, which suggest that a strong quality to possess would be the ability to work as a team player. Teacher 2 is more adamant than suggestive when she outright expressed that a paraprofessional “...[needs] to be a team player... wanting to work with the classroom teacher, parents or who ever...”. A final characteristic communicated by teacher 1 was “...a sense of humor that will... not make everything so tragic, that would be important”. This is an interesting characteristic considering some para participants expressed that this particular profession could

be heartbreaking at points. A final thought articulated by teacher 2 dealt with the idea of flexibility and collaboration:

flexibility and collaboration...because sometimes not everything sort of follows a certain routine plan...if there are certain children who are acting out or misbehaving...then there is plan b that I have to go through...but flexibility has to go along with it (teacher 2).

Disadvantages and advantages of the role of a paraprofessional. There appeared to be a slight lack of commitment to responding to this particular themed question by the educators as they were trying to respond from their viewpoint of the role. Teacher 1 and teacher 2 differed in the way they expressed the disadvantages and advantages of the role of a paraprofessional. Interestingly, teacher 1 communicated disadvantages of the role, while teacher 2 articulated advantages of having a paraprofessional present in the classroom. The disadvantages were described as being underpaid, not having the education to create better pay, and always dealing with children who don't understand as well as always dealing with issues the children have. The advantage of having a paraprofessional in the classroom was simply defined as having a positive effect and as helpful in facilitating the learning process of all the students in the classroom.

Weaknesses and strengths of the system. One major weakness that both educators mentioned was that there simply are not enough paraprofessionals. Teacher 2 expressed that she "wish[ed] there were more aides" while teacher 1 expressed "...we don't have enough in schools...we really don't...". Another weakness that was brought into fruition by teacher 2 was the idea that the Board needs to know who and how many students are diagnosed with a code in a particular school in order to provide the correct support.

Teacher 1 brought up a similar idea to other participants in that there needs to be a

standard of requirements for those the school board hires as a paraprofessional: “well at (school board name) ...they don’t have people that are former, you know...like they went to school to be a...integration aide...”. Finally, teacher 1 articulated a twofold weakness in the system by communicating the idea that parents of students with special needs have no clue who works with their child and in turn the paraprofessionals receive no recognition.

Strengths and potential improvements. Both educators did not appear to have much, if anything, to say about the strengths in the system. In fact, teacher 2 did not mention any strengths and teacher 1 specifically expressed that there were no strengths and that the only positive was the atmosphere created by the paraprofessionals themselves

no... its the girls themselves that make.... you get to know the person...and its the person that you like...but I cannot say its because of the system.... no...(teacher 1).

However, teacher 2 believed there are potential improvements that could be put into place as long as there are financial resources available: “oh there is many things that could be put into place, whether if there are enough financial resources to do so is another story...(laughs)...”. Teacher 2 expanded slightly on this though by sharing one major improvement which she described as:

...in an idealized world you would have more integration aide time to facilitate the students in the class...and not necessarily just have one integration per one student if you have seven or eight special needs students in a class for one aide for one hour a day (teacher 2).

No matter the participant group in the current study, it appears that most, if not all participants mentioned in some form, either gaining more time with the paraprofessionals in the classroom, or gaining more paraprofessionals would be the best and possibly the most plausible potential

improvement.

Support and relationships. Some paraprofessional participants expressed that the support they provide to the educators was dependent on each individual educator and could and does change from educator to educator. Therefore, it was interesting to note what two different educators claimed they needed for support and intriguingly both educators mentioned different yet similar aspects. Teacher 1 mentioned she needed support dealing with behaviors of the students. Teacher 2 expressed the need for paraprofessionals to be present in the classroom working with students with special needs more often than they already are.

While teacher 1 expressed support needed when dealing with behavioral issues specifically and teacher 2 simply expressed the need for more support time with the paraprofessionals, it appears as though they are similar in that you would need to have more support time in order to have more support with behavior. Both educators communicated that one challenge they face is that they do not have simple access to the paraprofessionals when they are not in their classrooms, “oh no never...never” (teacher 1) and “no I don’t...no, no” (teacher 2). This leads to issues when a student with special needs has a meltdown. When inquired about what both educators would do when a student had a meltdown, teacher 2 shared:

well we rely on our colleagues...so if there is an outburst, either my colleague or administration that would be a plan b” and “we have behavioral tech as well too who would sort of come to intervene too if the behavioral tech is available.

The school that employed both these educators seems to possess a supportive environment, one with a teamwork atmosphere. The apprehension is, what happens to the other schools where the environment may not be as strong? There is also the concern of what happens if everyone, the other educators, the administrator, and the behavioral tech, are all preoccupied and cannot attend

to the meltdown. Where does that leave the classroom and the student in question? What happens if a school does not have a behavioral tech? Is there always a Plan B in place in every school or does it appear to simply come down the educator in the classroom to handle the situation on his or her own?

Stemming from the idea of support is the way in which support service decisions are made for each particular individual student. Teacher 1 did not express much on this situation as she simply stated that support service decisions “are always made by a whole team.” However, teacher 2 expanded on this idea and explained the hierarchy and how the decisions were made:

well support services are sort of down through the resources and the school board...so they sort of comes to terms with that... and the administration of course because the administration is involve with the resource team too, and figure out how many hours are allotted bases on the needs of the school and the classroom (teacher 2).

Relationship between educator and paraprofessional. Teacher 1 and teacher 2 both expressed that they normally have positive relationships with the paraprofessionals who work in their classrooms. Teacher 1 articulated that she had one bad experience, but it did not take place at a school within this particular school board. Both educators believed that the relationship they have with the paraprofessionals that work in their classroom, affects the students in the room both positively and negatively depending on the type of relationship they demonstrate. Teacher 1 shared:

...because I always had good relationships...apart from that one...and that was a long long time ago... I guess because if you are not comfortable with the other person and you don't get along ...I'm pretty sure the kids would sense that.....I would say yes that I feel that the kids... would be affected, yes (teacher 1).

While teacher 2 shared:

ahh positively because if they see that I'm interacting positively with the aide and I treat the aide as a team player... I don't introduce the person as an aide ...I introduce them as Madame and ... they think ohh its another teacher as oppose to an aide... and then the students don't figure out till one or the other who is the classroom teacher and who's not because they, we are all helping together.

The importance of a paraprofessional possessing the quality of being able and willing to work in a team environment was shown through teacher 2's response. A positive relationship is one that appears to involve teamwork and according to teacher 2, slightly disguised. It would seem that being referred to as a Madame which allows the students to believe it is simply another teacher, would not do harm to anyone involved. Rather, it could potentially have a positive effect on the paraprofessionals and their value.

One major aspect of the relationship between educators and paraprofessionals according to both teacher 1 and some paraprofessional participants, is knowing who is considered the boss, knowing the hierarchy. This involves the aspect of a paraprofessional going into the classroom, knowing one's place and remembering that the classroom belongs to the educator. The paraprofessionals must not overstep their boundaries. Teacher 1 shared a situation where a paraprofessional overstepped their boundaries, which led to a negative experience.

...so she would call on other kids like when it was not her business, she would like scream at kids in the classroom or like bang her hand...ya I worked with a girl like that... Although, this particular educator did gain something positive from this experience nonetheless: "...mind you I learned and I will never let anyone else do that..." (teacher 1).

Relationship between educators and students. The data received from both educators'

interviews did not provide a clear explanation regarding their relationships with their students. Teacher 1 explained briefly partial ideas that could be viewed as expressions of the relationships. As previously mentioned, teacher 1 described that she was given the task of getting to know the children quickly and forming a relationship with them in order to be able to create the IEP.

I have to set up adaptation or modification for all the school work I have to do; I have to find the strategies that are going to be helping my student.... but that's very hard because the first time you do that, you don't really know them cause you see only...like you meet them and then a couple of weeks after you have to set up the IEP... [I have to] get to know the kid fast (teacher 1).

This appears to indicate that teacher 1 believes she has some kind of relationship with the students with disabilities, however, it lacks the description of what that of relationship entails. This educator does mention during the interview, as well, that she takes care of the students with disabilities when the paraprofessional is not present in the classroom. She articulated that when teaching, she always has the needs of the children with special needs in the back of her mind until the paraprofessional arrives.

.... I'm...always teaching but in my head I have whatever he needs for him to be able to do what we are doing until the aide arrives. so once the aide arrives, like she kind of takes over him and depending on his mood she will either leave with him or she will stay in the classroom if its something that he can do with us.... we ...they come and they go... (teacher 1).

This statement could be an indication that the educator believes that her responsibility and perhaps relationship with the child is only important for when the paraprofessional is not there, and to create the IEP. Once the paraprofessional arrives, it seems as though the responsibility of

the child or children and the relationship with the child or children seems to fade. On the other hand, it could simply be viewed as aid for the educator, providing some type of relief.

Relationship between paraprofessionals and parents. Both educators communicated what they believed the relationship between parents and paraprofessionals were at that moment in time or should be. Previously noted, teacher 1 expressed that parents are unaware of who works with their child during the school day other than the main educator. This would appear to indicate that teacher 1 did not believe that there was any relationship between the parents and the paraprofessionals at the school in which she is employed. Teacher 2 seemed to provide a slightly different response. Rather than being concerned with whether or not there was an existing relationship, she articulated that there needs to be a team force rather than a direct relationship between both parties. She elaborated by expressing that the resource teacher should be the liaison between the paraprofessionals and the parents.

...they should be included as a partner shouldso I wouldn't say...I don't know in terms of relationship with the parents but there's a team force...so I mean...the resource team teacher is the liaison to the parents...(teacher 2).

This statement could signify that teacher 2 believes there does not need to be a relationship between the parents and the paraprofessionals. It could also suggest that she believes, at the very least, the parents should know who the person is who is working with their child, while still relying on the resource teacher for a connection. Teacher 2 believes the paraprofessionals are a valuable asset to the team surrounding children with special needs.

An interesting factor is that of meeting with the parents. Teacher 1 did not mention any of her thoughts on the aspect, however, teacher 2 briefly spoke about it. Teacher 2 viewed the idea of having the paraprofessionals present at the meetings could potentially be overwhelming for

the parents because there were numerous paraprofessionals who work with each child. There could potentially be five paraprofessionals, the resource teacher, the main educator and the parents present at one meeting. On the other hand, if the paraprofessionals are not present at the meetings with the parents, then how is it possible for them to form a relationship with the parents? It would appear that it becomes the responsibility of the resource teacher and/or the main educator to inform the parents who the paraprofessional(s) is or are that are working with their child, and perhaps allow the parents to decide whether or not they would like to meet with them. The other aspect that becomes the responsibility of the resource teacher or main educator would be to inform the paraprofessionals of the pertinent information from the meeting, which is needed to better aid the child in question. Teacher 2 explained that this is the responsibility of the resource teacher, when she is present at the meetings.

...depending on how it goes and who the student is, usually if its the teacher then the teacher and the resource teacher would relate with the integration aides...sometimes the resource teacher is not always available to be with the teacher to meet with the parents depending on when the meeting is... so yes depending on the nature of the meeting... depends on what the message is...not everything could go back so it depends on what the message is per say...but what's necessary for the development of the child or the ...to help the child... yes it is... (teacher 2).

Educators need for information. Teacher 1 and teacher 2 were both questioned on what more they would like to know about paraprofessionals. Interestingly, their responses were similar yet they seemed to take different perspectives. Teacher 1 articulated that there was nothing more that she seemed to want to know about the paraprofessionals, but rather she expressed that she wanted the board to hire paraprofessionals with more of a background in the field of education.

Teacher 2 stated that she would want to know more about the paraprofessionals' experience working with children with special needs. This knowledge affects her decisions on how and what to prepare for the paraprofessionals in order to best work with the students with special needs in her classroom.

Special Ed Technician/Behavioral Technician

The current research study recruited one special ed technician from the main school of recruitment. The population of this particular education institution, including the special ed technician herself, referred to the position by the title of behavioral technician. However, the official occupation title is special ed technician. For the purpose of the current research, the position or participant will be referred to as behavioral tech 1.

Behavioral Tech 1. Six months prior to the time of the interview, the employee in question had recently been promoted from a paraprofessional (integration aide) to a behavioral tech. This participant has 25 years of experience in the field. She also worked in a school for children with special needs for 9 years, as well as obtained a Master's Degree. The behavioral tech considers herself to be in a "...unique position..." as a result of her prior experience and education (behavioral tech 1). The behavioral tech was employed by the main school of recruitment, similar to the two teachers, parents, children, administrator and para 1 and 2 participants. Unlike para 3, this participant explains this position is one that is only offered in two schools within the board at the time of the interview.

The definition and challenges of inclusion. The behavioral tech defined inclusion while seemingly inferring that true inclusion does not exist. She articulated while laughing that her "... understanding of inclusion is that um...anyone with any level of ability or disability can attend the same environment or the same school, ...that's inclusion in the true sense" (behavioral

tech 1). Upon further investigation, the participant expressed that integration simply does not work due to lack of resources. There was also mention of the idea that there are potentially better placements for certain children with special needs where they would benefit more than in a regular inclusive classroom.

Similarly to other groups of participants in the current study, such as most of the paraprofessional participants, it seems that they are expressing that there should be a cut off placed on who should be allowed to be integrated into a public school and who would benefit more from attending a school strictly for children with special needs. The interesting factor then becomes who has the power to allow or disallow a child with special needs into a public school. Moreover, what would the criteria of judgment be, and how would it be possible to avoid any type of corruption?

The definition of a paraprofessional. The behavioral tech defined a paraprofessional as the ones who are there to not only support the children with special needs but to support the educators as well. She articulated that paraprofessionals were present in classrooms "... to support the teachers the best [a paraprofessional] can and then in addition obviously to support the kids in the classroom to help them to reach their full potential to do what they have to do" (behavioral tech 1). The aspect of the role of a paraprofessional in which they are present to support the educators is an interesting one. This aspect seems to be the first answer provided by some of the participants as the definition of a paraprofessional and yet based on findings from the paraprofessionals in the current study, there are educators who do not want a paraprofessional in their classroom. If paraprofessionals are truly present to support the educators as mentioned by the participants, then why would an educator refuse the assistance? A possible explanation could potential be described as the simple fact that those educators who do

not want a paraprofessional in their classroom, might also be the same educators who do not believe in integration and inclusion.

Educating the children with special needs. Similarly to other participants in the current study such as teacher 1, the behavioral tech believes that the duty of educating a child with special needs does not simply fall upon the main classroom educator or the paraprofessional assigned to the child. She believes the education of a child with special needs depends on factors such as the level of functioning of a child and the level of needs of the child. For example, she iterated:

cause I ...think a lot of it depends on the student and the type of student you are dealing with...and I think the higher needs students...so kids with autism or I guess lower functioning autism or...the higher the needs of the student, I think the less teaching the teacher actually does...that's my belief, unless they are in a closed class

Behavioral tech perceptions of qualities, characteristics and skills of paraprofessionals. The most common characteristic viewed throughout the analysis of the current study is that of patience. Following the trend, the behavioral tech mentioned patience as an important skill one must possess to fulfill the role of a paraprofessional. Interestingly, the behavioral tech used the term “taking initiative” in regard to preparing materials for the children with special needs that have been assigned to a paraprofessional. She does explain that this is simply not the responsibility of a paraprofessional, however, one must take initiative and complete such tasks, otherwise it may not realistically be completed.

...you also have to be able to take initiative because ahh you know in the true sense of the word we are not supposed to prep materials and do things like that for the kids.... the reality is you have to. umm...because as much as the teachers are supposed to do it for

you, they are caught up with what they have to do and they may have two or three or in some school more kids who have different needs and they are on different curriculums and things like that...so if you need something done, sometimes its just easier to do it yourself... (behavioral tech 1).

This account is interesting as most paraprofessionals either explained they do not complete these tasks, or they do even though it is the mandate of the educators. It is therefore thought-provoking that other positions in the educational institutions are aware of the situation, and although it appears as though the situation is not right, there is no apparent problem solving solutions in the works. This idea could potentially be another reason why some participants such as the behavioral tech do not believe integration and inclusion function properly.

Other characteristics articulated were the ability to be a good negotiator as well as having confidence in oneself, to know in any given situation what would be best for the child in question, and to stand up to the educators.

Disadvantages and advantages of the role of a paraprofessional. The behavioral tech seemed to list similar disadvantages as the paraprofessionals expressed. Those disadvantages were "...the pay isn't great [and] the hours aren't great..." (behavioral tech 1). She communicated that a paraprofessional is only entitled to a maximum of 25 hours per week of employment.

Another disadvantage that was strongly argued by the behavioral tech as well as some paraprofessional participants was that the amount of experience one has is not taken advantage of, and paraprofessionals are not asked their opinion much, if at all.

The advantage of the minimal work hours was also expressed by the behavioral tech. She articulated that "...if you have a family it fits into a family life style very nicely, you know especially if you have school aged children..." (behavioral tech 1).

Intriguingly, the behavioral tech verbalized an advantage that no other participant in the current study mentioned. This advantage was that of a learning experience. She claimed that if you are someone who is interested in children with special needs and you are just starting out in your career of special education, then the paraprofessional occupation is a great position to begin with, as one will learn a lot in a short period of time.

Weaknesses and strengths in the system. The major weakness in the system as reported by this particular participant was similar to other participants in the study. The behavioral tech admitted that the hiring process and what are considered to be the required qualifications to be employed as a paraprofessional, are lacking. It appears the behavioral tech is in agreement with other participants who expressed that all one needs to possess is a high school leaving certificate in order to become a paraprofessional.

The apparent problem reported by the behavioral tech stems from the idea that the standards are very limited for a position that entails working with a vulnerable population. It seems to fall on the behavioral tech to train them even though this role is not part of the mandate for the behavioral tech.

This participant appeared to drift apart from most of the other participants' opinions when she claimed that an advantage to the system was that the school board provided training. The behavioral tech elaborated on this notion while at the same time providing confusion in her response as she claims the school board provides training but not when you are in the position.

...umm ...this school board is pretty good with training, they offer a lot of training on professional days. we have two mandatory ones a year where we do all different sessions so on all different topics... so there is training by the school board but there isn't a lot of training when you come in cause you come in you are put with a student and your expected to go figure it out (behavioral tech 1).

It is unclear whether this participant believes the training is a strength or weakness in the school system and therefore could potentially infer that it is a weakness by the amount of confusion, especially by someone who has spent the better part of their working experience in this particular school board. Moreover, the behavioral tech articulated once again in the interview "...[that] there is not a lot of on the job training we will say..." (behavioral tech 1).

Behavior tech's views on the potential systemic improvements . The behavioral tech provided certain ideas for improvements in the system. In the above section, it was explained that the behavioral tech seemed to provide confusion on whether or not the training should be considered a weakness or a strength in the school system. However, as the behavioral tech was articulating her thoughts on potential improvements she seemed to clear a few things up.

...can I go back for a sec to some of the training that ...I said the school board offers a lot of training but a lot of the training they offer doesn't always meet the training that's required, there is not always a match...and it would be nice if they would sometimes ask the integration aides what kind of training are they looking for, rather than just boom boom boom... (behavioral tech 1).

This new statement by the behavioral tech would imply that perhaps the idea or amount of training offered is a positive strength. This is similar to what para 2 had expressed in her interview as well as some of the other participants. The behavioral tech continued her thoughts

on improvements to suggest that paraprofessionals should use the extra money the board offers to better their training.

Interestingly, the behavioral tech was only the second participant to bring up the idea of feedback as a support and improvement for the role of paraprofessionals. She articulated that it was important to possess an individual in the school that paraprofessionals have easy access to, and that provide feedback to the paraprofessionals.

Finally, a third potential improvement which was similar to other participants such as para 4, was the idea of educating the educators and having them more open to integration, inclusion and paraprofessionals.

Relationship between behavioral tech and paraprofessionals. The relationship between the behavioral tech and the paraprofessionals appear to be described as a positive one by the behavioral tech. She claimed that because she recently held the position of a paraprofessional, she felt she understood their thoughts and desires, and used this knowledge to create a positive environment. The positive effect that apparently derives from this is simply by treating the paraprofessionals well. The behavioral tech believes this will make them content, which she inferred would make them work better. She was the first and only participant to bring this type of aspect to light, which is surprising because one would assume this to be the case. The behavioral tech inferred that paraprofessionals who are content will work better and the children will benefit.

Relationship between educators, parents and paraprofessionals. The behavioral tech intertwined the relationship between all three of these players. Similarly to a lot of other participants in the current study, she believed that a paraprofessional's relationship with parents

or involvement in the meetings, was dependent on the relationship between the educator and paraprofessional.

...as an integration aide not really...if you have a really good teacher and if you are working very intensely with they will invite you to come to their parent teacher conferences, most teachers don't do that (behavioral tech 1).

It is noteworthy that the behavioral tech does not believe parent and paraprofessional involvement is a common experience. Other paraprofessional participants in the current study shared similar thoughts. It appears to be common knowledge and common practice amongst the schools in the school board, as not all participants were employed in the same school, for educators to be the ones to invite paraprofessionals to meetings with the parents. Consistent with this notion would be the idea that it is not a common experience in the school board institutions.

Administrator

The current study interviewed one particular administrator participant who was employed by the main school of recruitment. Similarly to the behavioral tech, there is only one administrator participant, which may imply that these particular groups of participants may not be representative, it is significant to report as they provided an interesting perspective given the variety of experience they possessed.

Administrator 1. The title of the administrator was the Vice Principal. She possessed 5 years of experience as a vice principal. Prior to being employed as a vice principal, she was employed as a teacher for 11 years and prior to that she was employed as a paraprofessional for a short period of time. During her career she was employed as a resource educator as well. She has experience in both high school and elementary school. At the time of the interview she was pregnant and was about to take her maternity leave. The administrator had a background that

most individuals do not possess: “so I got like a little bit of ...a snap shot that a lot of people don’t get, like usually you don’t have the variety of the experience that I have...” (administrator 1). This particular administrator was an asset to the current study as she has a variety of experience in different roles and therefore could potentially provide an interesting perspective. The administrator was recruited in the main school of recruitment.

The definition and challenges of inclusion. This particular participant defined inclusion as a concept in which all children, no matter their level of academic ability, are placed in the same classroom environment following a similar curriculum: “...inclusion is having students with various learning... learning abilities...from learning difficulties all the way to enrichment in the same classroom, following similar curriculums, even modified curriculum but in the same classroom environment” (administrator 1). Interestingly, this administrator does not seem to believe that the concept of inclusion, as it is presented and utilized in the present moment, is beneficial nor functional. The main concern that she seems to be portraying is a lack of resources: “...inclusion...I say that with a heavy heart because we... it might work if we had the right resources...” (administrator 1). Stemming from this idea is the lack of paraprofessionals. The administrator explained that there are simply not enough paraprofessionals employed, and therefore children who are coded and entitled to a paraprofessional end up having to share a paraprofessional with other children who may or may not be coded. The administrator summed up the major concerns of inclusion that will be later expanded in the following administrator subsections. She articulated:

...a lot of people hate inclusion because the idea of it is great but if you don’t have the right training for the integration aides and you don’t have the right skills...and you don’t have the right amount of integration aides, then is inclusion really successful?

(administrator 1).

This particular participant raised one meticulous important question at the end of her interview. This question should be placed at the forefront of any possible improvements for inclusion. The question was: “that’s really the question...who... quote on quote pays the price for that? is it the ...the school, the parents, the teachers, the paraprofessionals or is it the kids?” (administrator 1).

Administrator’s perceptions of the basic roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals. The administrator defined the term paraprofessional by the main roles one would complete. She articulated that a paraprofessional was one who:

... works with the teachers to try to fulfill a child's IEP and give assistance to the teacher with students that have the special needs.... they are not there for disciplinary, they are not there for I mean unless that’s in the IEP but, they are there to assist the student in their learning and help carry out the objectives in an IEP that the teacher has already either worked with the resources teacher or prepared materials for them to work with (administrator 1).

Basically, the administrator seemed to imply that a paraprofessional is an aide for both the educators and the students.

The vice principal defined what she believed are the roles of the paraprofessionals and whether or not these roles were part of the mandate of a paraprofessional or that of a teacher. She acknowledged that paraprofessionals are on the front line working with children with special needs which she then explained can cause issues as to who is responsible for different aspects between them and the educators. The main issues where that there seems to be a distortion of responsibilities in adapting the work for the students and coming up with strategies to complete such work with the children: “ohh the aides are like the front line workers so they’re the ones

who are sometimes sadly making up all the curriculum of the student, which is not really part of their mandate". (administrator 1). The statement above seems to be in line with what was reported by the paraprofessional participants for the most part. The one main differentiation between the two, would appear to be that most of the paraprofessionals did not explain this task as an aide taking initiative, but rather by the idea where if they did not complete such tasks and take initiative, it would not be completed (see paraprofessionals section).

Vice principal's views on the roles and responsibilities of vice principals. The administrator explained that she was very involved with the process of inclusion and integration in her educational institution. She claimed one of her roles was to support the resource team as well as the educators and students. She expanded on this thought by explaining the different possible ways in which she accomplished this role.

...hmm...that could be facilitating workshops or ...helping the day to day, like there might be students who are not coping well in the inclusion model and supporting them or providingmy office was frequently a place where students could ... as you saw could come and work with an integration aide or without an integration aide...umm... just to refocus or just to change the setting...or frequently integration aides or teachers would bring the students to me so that I could help them refocus or re shift and help them come up with goals that are suitable for them... so that would be kind of my role....(administrator 1).

Administrator's perceptions of the qualities, characteristics and skills of paraprofessionals. Similarly to other participants, this particular participant articulated that a paraprofessional who possesses background education in subjects, such as special care counselling, is an asset. Other characteristics, qualities or skills a paraprofessional should possess

according to the vice principal participant was that of a love of children, understanding that all children are different and will behave differently and should always be learning. The main skill that seems to be appearing in all the different participants' explanations is that of flexibility. This particular participant explained the idea as the key ingredient needed to be a paraprofessional. Moreover, it appears to be of great importance to note that every child is unique even if they possess the same disability and therefore every child needs to be dealt with differently which focuses on their learning abilities and capabilities.

Disadvantages and advantages of the role of a paraprofessional. Correspondingly to all the other participants in the current study, the administrator communicated the income as one of the major disadvantages to the employment of a paraprofessionals. Interestingly, she attached the idea of wages to the level of education of a paraprofessional providing this as a reason for the level of revenue, while continuingly suggesting the salary is still a disadvantage even for those who have reached the top of the pay scale. A second disadvantage described by the administrator was the idea that there are those who are employed as paraprofessionals and perhaps this employment is not what they should be doing. She stated "...I think a disadvantage is that you know there are some people who have unfortunately become permanent to ...its not maybe their calling in life so that's probably not a good thing..." (administrator 1). This would appear to be an issue given the fragileness of this particular occupation.

A third issue expressed by the administrator, was the aspect of not only are some paraprofessionals in the wrong field, but the idea that if a paraprofessional does not enjoy their surroundings, which include the individuals, then issues will arise. A final disadvantage was the hours the paraprofessionals worked. The vice principal expressed "...their hours ...to be permanent like that...they don't have full time hours...like its crazy..." (administrator 1).

Advantages. The vice principal did not report any aspects of advantages of the particular role of a paraprofessional. However, as will be described in the next subsection, she did mention advantages in the system. This is particularly interesting as it implies one of two potential insights. The fact that she left out advantages could infer that she simply forgot to mention any, or it could suggest that she does not feel as though there are any. The only other explanation could be simply that as a vice principal and not a paraprofessional, she is unsure of what the day to day advantages are in the role, such as ones noted by other participants (relationships with students...etc.). However, the fact that she was once a paraprofessional would provide a dent in this potential explanation as one would assume she would know the ins and outs of the occupation.

Weaknesses and strengths of the system. The main weaknesses articulated by the vice principal were the training and incentives for the occupation. This participant elaborated on these two weaknesses by explaining that the training is not what it should be to produce the best possible trained employees. Moreover, she communicated that the individuals who have more education and would do very well in the paraprofessional position, lack incentive to apply for the position, especially because of low income. As a result of the above, this participant explained that there are simply not enough paraprofessionals, and expands her thought by articulating that it is because of the way that the paraprofessionals are allocated.

Another interesting weakness in the system that was conveyed by the administrator was the fact that paraprofessionals are unionized. She claims this to be an issue because of the paraprofessionals who tend to count minutes and hours instead of going with the flow of the child. A final weakness was the effective deployment of paraprofessionals not being as easy and plausible as the administrator would appreciate it to be. The issue is the lack of paraprofessionals

employed, and the lack of hours of paraprofessional time handed down from the board to the schools. When the researcher inquired about the effective deployment of the paraprofessionals, the administrator stated the following:

...well I mean that's hard... I'm scheduling them for next year and I'm trying to do this as effectively as I can with the number of people and the number of hours I have...but in reality its not effective because the kids that need aides for the whole day will not...they will have it maybe for an hour or two...maybe everyday. so its not really, there are too many kids with special needs that you do the best with what you have but its not adequate (administrator 1).

Strengths. The advantage communicated by the administrator was the idea that paraprofessionals are invaluable in an educational institution that implements an integration and inclusive policy. She explained the following:

I think without integration aides, schools that do inclusion ...I don't know how the school would function, I mean you need those extra people to help the teachers...manage the class...like...manage...all the different kinds of learners, with only one adult in the room, trying to manage a variety of learning abilities is very difficult. its very challenging...even with two people sometimes its very challenging... I don't ...I think it becomes extremely challenging to have no integration aides ...they just allow for that learning to be better quality (administrator 1).

Considering the amount of information given by the paraprofessionals on how they, as individuals, do not feel valued in their role, it is thought-provoking that the one advantage that this administrator articulated was how invaluable they are.

Support and relationships. Support. The administrator voiced that the principal needed

to be supportive, and work with the vice principal in order for the latter to feel supported. She explained as well that the regional director from the school board must also be supportive, which in her experience, was the reality.

Relationships. Stemming from the aspect of support, is the relationship between the vice principal and the paraprofessionals in her educational institution. These two ideas are connected as the main characteristic of their relationship appeared to be support, as described by the vice principal. She explained that she worked closely with the paraprofessionals, and she was present to provide support of any kind whenever they needed it. The administrator made sure to provide the paraprofessionals with a space they could use should they need to work in a quiet area outside the classroom with students. She implemented an open-door policy, always there to listen and be a liaison between the paraprofessionals, as well as others (the parents, the teachers...etc.). Moreover, the administrator does mention that the relationship between an educator and a paraprofessional is also important and does affect the students in the classroom. She expanded on this thought by explaining that children can feel the tension in a room similarly to how adults can, which creates a negative working environment for all involved.

Administrator's information needed. This particular participant did not have anything more that she wanted to know about when it came to paraprofessionals. However, her response to this particular inquiry was stimulating and noteworthy. She explained that it was not what she wanted to know more of, rather, she wanted to make it clear that the training for paraprofessionals was not good and there was a great need for better professional development. This was shown by most participants as something the school board appears to be lacking in.

Paraprofessionals

The mandate for paraprofessionals from the school board. The mandate from the board is a two-paged document that details the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the paraprofessionals. Anything else should be considered going above and beyond. The concern seems to be that this is simply not the case and the mandate is simply not reality. The basis of the mandate is expressed by the following paragraph taken directly from the document:

The principle and customary work of an Integration Aide [(paraprofessional)] consists of supporting the integration in the regular classroom of identified students with special needs. She/he facilitates the progress and global development of the preschool, elementary and secondary students with special needs, as well as ensuring the well-being and safety. She/he works in close collaboration with the Teacher(s) responsible for the students with special needs in creating an environment conducive to learning and encourages the independence of students with special needs. She/he interacts naturally with all students of the regular class as necessary to promote the independence for students with special needs.

The mandate lists in more detail the roles and responsibilities of a paraprofessional in order to carry out the facilitation of learning for students with special needs. Below is a basic condensed list, see appendix A for the full list.

A paraprofessional is supposed to apply the strategies determined by the educator with the help of the resource team and/or special education technician.

A paraprofessional is supposed to ensure the safety of students with special needs with the help of the resource team and/or special education technician.

A paraprofessional is to inform the educator(s) if the behavior of the student with special needs becomes an issue for concern.

A paraprofessional is supposed to encourage the student with special needs to interact with their peers.

A paraprofessional is supposed to deal with the behaviors that may be challenging of students with special needs by using the strategies that educators have established with the help of the resource team and/or special education technician based on the IEP of the child.

If outlined as a need, a paraprofessional is to greet the child with special needs at their arrival and stay with them until they depart from the premises.

If outlined as a need, a paraprofessional is to help the student during transitions, recess and lunch period in their movements and supervision as part of their work hours.

If outlined as a need, a paraprofessional is to aide the child with special needs in dressing and undressing.

A paraprofessional is supposed to help a child with special needs prepare and eat their food while respecting the rules of hygiene. The paraprofessional may also be required to assist the child with toileting.

A paraprofessional may be requested to partake in the creation of the IEP of a student with special needs as part of their work schedule.

A paraprofessional may be requested to partake in meetings with the parents as part of their work schedule.

A paraprofessional may be required to organize materials and assist the organization and carrying out of activities as directed by the educators with the help of the resource team and/or the special education technician.

A paraprofessional may create portfolios or work for the students with special needs under the teacher's direction and may note observations of the student's behavior as well.

A paraprofessional supports the integration of students with special needs (see full list for more detail on how).

While some of these points are clear, others seem to be potentially vague. For example, it is not clear what it is meant by the mandate that a paraprofessional should organize materials and carry out activities based on the teacher's direction. This could imply that paraprofessionals are sometimes required to prepare material and teach, or perhaps it implies simply that aides are there to reiterate what the educator has already explained and help the child organize their material. Adding more confusion, the document later states that to support the integration of a student with special needs, a paraprofessional is supposed to repeat the instructions expressed by the educator and aid the child in following those instructions through.

The definition and challenges of inclusion. Inclusion was described differently amongst the paraprofessional participants. Three paraprofessionals spoke about the definition of inclusion more generally:

...Uh regard- uh- children coming into umm regular elementary schools that you know with special needs (para 1), [and] Inclusion, my understanding is uh to uh that all kids regardless of their academic ability is able to go to a public school has the right to go to a public school (para 2).

While others spoke about it in terms of their role in inclusion.

...as it pertains to my role within the school board I include..., any students aged five to twenty-one years old ...within a mainstream classroom. so you know they can, they can vary with any you know disability and the severity.... (para 5).

Interestingly, all participants gave a simple definition of inclusion and yet they were very descriptive on its challenges. Para 4 referred to inclusion as an "... idea ... that sounds great...". Para 1 also referred to inclusion as an idea however, she seemed to focus on the children with differences being educated alongside those without difficulties but not on how these interventions would take place. All three Paraprofessionals in some form or another expressed that certain children would benefit more from special classes or schools. It seemed that they did not feel that their role as paraprofessional benefitted certain children in their care. Para 2 expressed she believed "... the system is failing the kids because ...those with...really intense needs can't get it in- in this type of setting". When asked to clarify what she meant by this statement on a later date she explained:

I think what I was trying to say was that even though the public school system accepts all students (no cut off), the public school environment is not always the best fit for certain students. The students with extreme behavior difficulties often take aide time away from the learning disabled students who don't always get the aide time they deserve. I think the system fails when we really aren't the best fit for certain students and their needs.

The paraprofessionals explained that they are not always present with the children. They also explained that there is not enough funding for each child who is coded and some children are not identified but they also need support. Even in one of the schools where one of the paraprofessionals worked, she explained that ; "...our school's very lucky well lucky we have a lot of needs but we have...an aide in every class, full time...", she later explained that "[the students are] not getting the total support that they deserve, any more" and even though they have paraprofessionals in one classroom and not moving around all the time, she expresses "... we have that but that's because there's three or four kids in the class, not because there's just

two...”. She added the idea that “...unless they’re physically aggressive, that’s the only time they’ll get a one to one...” (para 3). There were other concerns about support that were articulated by the participants as challenges to inclusion that will be later discussed in the sub section on support.

The definition of paraprofessionals and their basic roles and responsibilities.

The paraprofessionals in this study explained in how they described the roles and responsibilities. A minority of these participants specifically referred to the idea that a paraprofessional is the person who facilitates the inclusion process and assures that the children are able to learn. The majority of these participants discussed the definition of paraprofessionals in terms of their roles: “...we’re like, care taker, psychologist, educator all mixed up into one you know, we do so many things, we do a lot of OT work, we uh, it’s incredible, uh...” (para 1) and: “...Uh to support the teacher in the in the classroom” (para 2).

There seems to be a lot of variation in the participants’ responses regarding their roles and responsibilities, indicating that perhaps the mandate of a paraprofessional is too loosely or vaguely defined. Two participants spoke about the safety of both the students they were assigned to work with as well as all the students in general as their main role and responsibility. Other participants spoke about the numerous roles paraprofessionals have and how it is normally dependent on the teachers and the children they work with. Five out of the six participants presented a list of daily routines such as preparing a schedule, taking children out of the classroom to provide extra help, dealing with behaviors etc. There seems to be many tasks that a paraprofessional completes in the five hours a day they were present with the children. One participant did not elaborate on her daily duties as much as the other five, rather she

communicated her main role on a daily basis: "... support the kids... with their academic work, and then sometimes just putting out fires with kids with behavior problems" (para2).

Participants were inquired specifically about whether they spent time doing specific tasks such as clerical support, supervision of all students and the student they were working with, personal care, implementing instructions planned by the paraprofessional and behavior support. Four out of the six participants claim not to complete much paperwork, while two claimed either it varied or they completed a lot of paperwork. Five out of the six participants claimed to not supervise all the students in the classroom all that much. The task of behavior support of the students the paras worked with as well as all the students in the class provided interesting responses. Four of the six participants claimed that behavior support of the student or students they were assigned to, as well as all the students in general was a common task. When asked, they responded with: "Oh probably like 80 percent" (para 3) and "definitely" (para 4). Interestingly, the remaining two participants had a different perspective on this task. One participant claimed that she only dealt with the behaviors of the children she was assigned: "...that takes up...a big chunk of the day" (para 2). However, the only time she helped the teacher deal with other students' behaviors was upon request. The final participant mentioned that she was only responsible for the behavior support of the child she was assigned and only intervened with other students if it regarded her assigned student. She adds to the discussion by suggesting that one would need "...to have a really high functioning child to be asked to be responsible for the other kids as well" (para 6). This is interesting considering that the other five participants did not mention the level of functioning of their assigned child or children in regards to whether or not they provide behavior support for others as well. Behavior support of all the children is not listed in the mandate for paraprofessionals. Perhaps some teachers expect them to

take care of all behaviors, or perhaps it is simply based on the paraprofessional's discretion. Regardless, there seems to be different perceptions as to the role and responsibilities of paraprofessionals.

Implementing instructions planned by the paraprofessionals seemed to be another task that numerous participants claimed was part of their day. Four participants claimed specifically that they implement instructions that they themselves have planned:

not all the time... sixty-seven percent of the time it's definitely what I've prepared" (para 6), "I pretty much, for the most part I adapted the work myself" (para 4), "ahh, quite often" (para 5) and "Umm, yeah I would say a lot" (para 3). While one participant claimed it was dependent on "...teacher to teacher, different teachers have umm, uh **sigh** different levels of interest..." (para 2).

The final participant was adamant that teaching the students was the teacher's job and she would re-iterate if the child did not understand. Once again, the variations in the answers instill the idea of confusion amongst what is considered the mandate of the paraprofessionals. If implementing instructions planned by the paraprofessionals is truly not considered part of the mandate, as it does not appear to be, then why did the majority of the participants communicate that this was a task that they completed and performed habitually? Perhaps there is confusion between the actual written mandate and the implementation of the mandate.

Another aspect of the daily routine that was discussed in the interviews was the schedule of a paraprofessional. How often, and for what period of time are they with one or more than one student in a classroom? It appears as though some participants spent their time at work divided amongst numerous students in different classrooms, while others were in the same classroom all

day but with numerous students. "...well my schedule changes, could change every half hour... it- it just going from classroom to classroom working with different students..." (para 2).

Another aide shared that sometimes in the school where she is employed, there are two paraprofessionals in a class, yet it's because there are many children who need help and there is no one-to-one support. Only one participant seemed to express that she was with only one child throughout her work day. She constantly referred to a single student and made no mention of moving around or being responsible for more than one student. It appears as though the commodity of one-on-one support is not a common aspect in the role of paraprofessionals.

Paraprofessionals' perceptions of the mandate of the teacher versus the mandate of a paraprofessional. Participants expressed aspects that were part of the teachers' mandates that they themselves implemented. One main aspect was the idea of teaching the students and adapting the work. Participants stated that it is in the teachers' mandate to teach the children, adapt and modify the materials. However, numerous paraprofessionals reported that they were the ones who accomplished this task for numerous reasons, such as helping out the teacher or it was the only way it would be fulfilled.

One participant articulated an interesting concept when she added the factor of neediness of the child. She claimed the lower the functioning and the more needs a child has, the more likely the aide will be responsible for the teaching. Additionally, there was the idea of supervision of all the students in the classroom. Four of the paraprofessionals reported they only supervised the whole class as a favor to the teacher and not very often or for long periods of time. While two participants communicated they either do it all the time: "daily one hundred percent of my job... oh ya big time, ya..." (para 5) or they feel as though they do it occasionally.

The question as to who was responsible for the children came up in the interviews and was expressed in different ways, creating confusion. One participant expressed that she shares responsibility of the child and their personal care with the teachers. Another idea that was articulated was the aspect of how interested the teacher was in inclusion would dictate whose responsibility the student really was. There was also the idea that the more confident you are in what you do as a paraprofessional, the more you will be left on your own to do everything for the students: "...I think sometimes if you are too confident, then they just give you, oh no you could just do it then" (para 4).

Paraprofessionals' perceptions of qualities, characteristics and skills of paraprofessionals. The participants relayed many different ideas of what type of qualities, skills or characteristics one should possess in order to fulfill the role of a paraprofessional. Although similar in their responses, there were discrepancies and variations. One main characteristic that was mentioned by all except one paraprofessional was flexibility. While some participants outright expressed the idea by using the term flexibility, others discussed it in a more rounded fashion:

...you have to come here and be ready like I don't know what's gonna happen today, it's one those jobs where you don't know" (para 1) and ... "you have to listen you have to be able to just follow their lead...(para 3).

Another main characteristic mentioned quite often was that of patience. Four participants out of the six mentioned this idea. Three participants acknowledged it in terms of being patient with the students. One paraprofessional mentioned it in terms of not only with the students but with the teachers as well:

...because unfortunately, often...well I won't say often! but there's a few times where I've run into teachers that are not open to having children with special needs in their classroom (para 5).

Patience and flexibility were the two aspects that were mentioned the most, and therefore seemed to be the most common and crucial. However, there were other qualities, skills and characteristics that may not have been mentioned by every participant but appeared to be relevant nonetheless. Two participants spoke about loving children:

...you have to accept and I look at them and I say oh, oh he's quirky, I don't say oh he's weird, oh look at that, look at how he you know misread that, he didn't get that and I- I ju- I- I- it's I look at it as a charming thing I don't look at it like oh god here we go again you know... you always have to have a love for them... a love for and appreciation for children as a whole... Cuz if you don't you have no business being here...(para 1).

Interestingly, only one participant mentioned specifically that a paraprofessional should have good communication skills as well as be a team player. A paraprofessional appears to be a profession that deals with students, but also with other adults such as teacher. It would make sense to assume that being a good communicator and being able to work in a team would be important characteristics.

Other characteristics that were mentioned were organizational skills and planning. (para 6), "and you have to be creative, you have to think outside the box" (para 4) as well as having dedication for the children. Finally, one participant made it a point to mention that prior experiences or courses in certain disabilities were important.

Disadvantages and advantages of the role of being a paraprofessional.

Disadvantages. One of the main disadvantages of the role of paraprofessionals appeared to be

the income. Five out of the six paraprofessional mentioned that the income is very weak and therefore, a great deterrent of the role. Simply put, they expressed that the income would not be a reason for someone to choose the role of a paraprofessional. As an example one participant shared: “the pay sucks! I mean hands down, I mean you can barely make a living off of this, but I’m not doing it for that, you know what I’m saying?” (para 4).

Another major disadvantage to the role of a paraprofessional was the lack of job security. There were many factors shared as to why there is no job security which will be summed up in the section on weaknesses and strengths in the system.

Another participant shared the same idea when she expressed that the job was stressful and there was no job security. A third main disadvantage that was mentioned often was the hours of the job: “We can only work a 25-hour week, five hours a day, that’s our job description...” (para 1) Although there was mention from some participants about the positive side of working only 25 hours a week, most participants who mentioned the amount of hours had nothing but negativity to say. There seemed to be two central reasons given as to why this was a disadvantage. The first reason was that they are not considered full time (reasons for this will be explained in the section on the system itself). The second reason was the fact that the paraprofessionals do not work the same amount of hours that the children are at school. Basically, it was explained that the integration aides work a maximum of 25 hours per week which works out to 5 hours per day, while the school day is obviously longer than that. Therefore, not only were they not full time, they were not present with the children who need them for the whole day, creating possible issues. One of these issues appeared to be having to work with a child you are not familiar with, because they are having a crisis and their aide has already finished working their allotted hours for the day. It then became very challenging for the

aide to figure out how to properly deal with a child she or he does not really know which is not an easy task.

Advantages. The advantages seemed to be more about the benefits of the role. When the participants were discussing the advantages, the whole atmosphere of the interview seemed to change. The participants seem to express so much joy in what they do and so much love and happiness. A common expression was that "...there's nothing like it, it's very rewarding" (para 1). One participant described this feeling when she mentioned that "...when a child hugs you and when a child tells you, that they love or they- they- their face lights up when you walk in the room...there's nothing like that" (para 1).

Participants explained that the smallest success of the children, the smallest steps forward, the confidence building...etc. reaps the biggest rewarding feelings. Additionally, one participant explained that this was something that she loved to do and she felt as though she was making a difference which seem to be her idea of a reward.

As previously discussed, most paraprofessionals did express that the amount of hours in their work day was a disadvantage, but, there were two participants who explained that this fact was actually an advantage to them. One participant simply expressed that her advantage of her role was "...having my summers off (laughs)" (para 6). While the other participant spoke about family life and being able to spend quality time with her children. No matter what the disadvantages seemed to be, the advantages seem to be strong enough to overpower the bad and keep the paraprofessionals doing what they claim to love to do.

Weaknesses and strengths of the system. *Weaknesses.* To expand on some of the above disadvantages, one of the weaknesses in the board was said to be the idea of hours the aides work during the week. Participants explained that the board bases the amount of hours each school

gets based on the amount of children coded attending a particular school. However, as one paraprofessional explained in great detail, the paraprofessionals were not allowed to work more than 25 hours a week because the board does not want to make them full time. The reason for this being that the school board does not want or potentially can't afford to insure the paraprofessionals, and therefore by law they cannot be present in the building as full time staff.

Another weakness that seemed to be mentioned as a disadvantage to the role as well as a weakness in the system was the notion of job security. At the time the interviews took place, the way the system supposedly worked was based on seniority. First, there is seniority in the school that a paraprofessional works at, therefore depending on how many hours the school is allotted, there is a list of who gets assigned their hours. Once that is complete, there is another round of seniority which is within the school board. Apparently, those that do not have many hours from the year before need to go to what is entitled, priority poll, and hope to find a job there. One participant went into great detail when she expressed her frustration over this topic.

... it's called priority poll and you bid on a school, on a position that you want, but that's September twelfth, school starts probably just after labor day. isn't that, like it's a little, it's not right, I mean like, really, it's just shocking, and everyone else probably finds out at end of august which is last minute. you know how anxiety provoking, and if you're really respected and you're really valued...you know they have to revamp that (para 4).

Clearly, this particular paraprofessional believes that the fact that you only find out about having a job or not so late into the end of summer and so close to the beginning of school, potentially affects one's view of being valued and respected by their employer.

Other issues that were mentioned were the ideas of the hiring and job description of paraprofessionals, lack of training and specialized education. Additionally, participants brought

up the idea of cutbacks and coinage in the school board in general. One participant spoke about the idea that the school board is reducing the budget for aides. One paraprofessional explained in more detail that there used to be one child to one aide working full time and they were able to leave the classroom and not have anyone else waiting on her. However, now she is unable to do that because according to her, there are now more children with special needs.

One participant added a slightly different view of the cutbacks where she expressed that principals seem to be more concerned with the money and less concerned with the children's needs. One participant also explained that the board specialists are good but that they do not come often enough and that the promise the board makes to the parents is not actualized.

Finally, another main weakness in the school system was considered to be the training. There seems to be a consensus that there is training given. There appears to be mandatory workshops of the aides' choice that they must attend, as well as perhaps some days where professionals go to work to attend workshops such as pedagogical days. Though, there were participants who explained that there were professional days that could have been utilized for more training, and professional development, but were not. Another concern with the training was that it was repetitive, and only scratched the surface, it never went deeper. Participants expressed that it seemed to be always guided more for new paraprofessionals rather than the ones who have been doing it for years. However, one participant shared that sometimes these workshops could still be useful even though she has been employed for a very long time. She claimed that asking a lot of questions could get you answers that would be more useful than to sit around and simply listen to the repetitive seminar.

Another aspect of the training mentioned was quite interesting. Apparently the school board offers paraprofessionals 900\$ for training outside of the school board. One participant

shared two stories where the board did not follow through with this promise. One of her stories was that the paraprofessional did not ask permission before taking the course, and the other story was that the paraprofessional did ask permission. However, both resulted in no money being allotted to either paraprofessional. Conversely, another participant shared that she was awarded the money for professional development outside the school board. Perhaps the issue here is that the school board is lacking consistency, or perhaps there is more to the stories as to why the board did not pay for two out of the three specific situations told during the interviews.

Strengths. Unfortunately, the weakness and issues at the school board level seemed to overpower the participants' thoughts of any real strengths in the school board. It could be that some of the strengths were actually hidden within the weaknesses. The fact that the school board has inclusion at all, or even a specialist who comes to the school even once a year, could be a strength of the board compared to other school boards. Although, one participant did express one strength when she stated: "...well our school board is pretty good with inclusion so I would say like that's a strength..." (para 3), which was the main reason the researcher chose this specific school board for the research.

Support and relationships. Most participants did express that they felt supported in their current roles at their respective schools. Only one participant explained that this past particular year she did not feel so supported due to the previously mentioned cutbacks, and lack of a full time resource teacher. One participant stated, "Oh teacher, coworkers, principal, vice-principal, they all help us out..." (para 1). However, all participants did express different things that they felt they needed to be fully supported. Some answers spoke about the need for, "Good resource team and also a good teacher who's willing to work with you instead of just letting you do your own thing kinda thing..."(para 3). Others spoke about the idea of having teachers on

board with the idea of inclusion. “I think...workshops and training, and, well workshops specifically, for teachers, because not all the teachers are on board...” (para 4). One participant specifically expressed that in order for her to feel supported in her role teachers and paras have to be on the same page and work towards the same goals. Another participant expressed that what she specifically needed to be supported in her role, was dependent on the needs of the child or children she was working with. However, she did mention that feedback from teachers would be useful.

Relationship between paraprofessionals and teachers. This relationship was seen as an important one by all participants, and one that needed to be positive in order for anything to function properly. Participants spoke about different types of relationships they shared with their teachers in the past. One participant explained that she has always had good relationships with the teachers because she respects that it is the teacher’s classroom and she is simply there to help. One participant did explain that even though it is not easy to get along with everybody all the time, and that there are teachers who have negative attitudes towards aides, she still believed that she had good relationships with the teachers and needed it to be that way. She also shared that she is there to support the teachers as well.

There was a participant who shared that she normally has positive relationships with teachers she works with because she just so happened to be friends with them prior to working in their classroom. However, she did express that she has had negative experiences in the past that she attributed to the fact that the teachers were not on board with inclusion and she ended up having to “literally ... try and sell the whole inclusion program to them...” (para 5). It was made clear that it was not the teachers’ decision as to who is in their classroom, however, if they are

not on board with inclusion it makes it that much harder. This particular participant expressed a weakness in the relationship with teachers comes from the teachers not being pro inclusion:

I guess it's it's not mandatory for every student and every administrator to be you know pro inclusion and pro integration, but it should certainly be a pre-requisite if you are going to be employed by a school board that actually encourages it to maybe...a little bit be pro it...you know...but...ya that would definitely be another weakness too (para 5).

There was a consensus from all participants that the relationship between the teachers and the paraprofessionals will affect the students both positively and negatively depending on the type of relationship they had. There was an example of a negative impact when a participant shared the following: "... I mean just the little girl that I was with the door would be slammed in our face she would be like wow qu'est-ce que c'est ça?! (laughs), you know and I can't really say much to her..." (para 5). Another participant spoke about becoming a team with the teacher, and how the children are aware of the relationship between the paraprofessional and the teachers. One aide elaborated on both the positive and the negative effects by providing an example. She claimed that the way the teacher treats the paraprofessional will demonstrate to the children the way to treat the paraprofessional. She explained: "...the student may show a lack of respect for the aide if the teacher is showing lack of respect as well. but again, if the relationship is positive then that's a good thing for the student..." (para 2). When it was all said and done, the main consensus was that there is a ripple effect and that teachers and paraprofessionals need to be cautious of their interactions and relations because children will pick up on anything and everything.

Participants were also asked what they would want teachers to know if they had the chance to tell them. Interestingly, all participant shared different responses. Being that this study

focused mostly on the thoughts and voices of paraprofessionals on their job, it is important to express all of their thoughts on this subject as it could potentially inform teachers of how paraprofessionals feel. One participant explained that at this point in her life, she felt there was nothing the teachers needed to know about paraprofessionals. Another participant shared that she wanted teachers to know that aides do have real skills and understanding of the students, and even if their approach is different, the goal is still the same. A third participant shared that all teachers should be an aide for the day. She continued to express that teachers should understand that paraprofessionals are willing to work with them. She also expressed the notion that teachers should at least listen, if not try some of the ideas that paraprofessionals bring back from their workshops. A fourth participant shared that she wanted teachers to know how to use the aides properly and work with the paraprofessionals.

While the fifth response was for teachers, especially new teachers to understand that paraprofessionals know what they are doing, and teachers need to trust them, the sixth participant expressed that teachers should know that aides are there to work with them as well. Nevertheless, she added the aspect of respecting each other and not disagreeing in front of the children.

Relationship between paraprofessionals and parents. There seemed to be consensus that there was not much of a relationship between paraprofessionals and parents for numerous reasons. One reason was the boundaries that one aide spoke about. She spoke about the idea that if you let parents in too close they will start to try to build a friendship and perhaps that would be crossing the line for some paraprofessionals. Other participants spoke about their only communication with parents which resulted from a communication book. This book is where the aides share the daily experiences of the students to both inform the parents, and open the line of communication for the parents and the students to have their own conversation at home.

Other participants shared they did not have any relationship or communication with the parents. They were also not invited to meetings with the parents concerning the students they work with. Some participants viewed this fact as simply that there were too many aides who worked with one student, and it would be overwhelming for the parents if they were all present. While one participant shared that she did not believe that teachers did not think about whether what the aide says is valuable or not but it is rather just not thinking about it at all. Another participant shared an interesting idea about meetings with the parents. She explained that perhaps paraprofessionals do not need to be at the meetings with the parents. However, there should be another meeting where the paraprofessionals are informed about the child. It would seem that this is something that would help the paraprofessionals in their daily activities and still not make the parents feel overwhelmed.

One participant shared an interesting perspective when she mentioned that perhaps having a relationship with parents would suggest to the parents that the paraprofessionals work for them and not for the school, when in reality it is the opposite. While another participant seemed frustrated when expressing that she does not get invited to meetings with the parents:

... and we often don't get um, invited to parent teacher interviews which is shocking, because hello, were, we're the ones, we're the front line people who are working with them. so, it, ya, so it's kind of, ya that's a big disappointment because we have, you know I would have a lot to say (para 4).

Relationship between the paraprofessional and the students. The relationship between the paraprofessional and the child, or children they work with, seems to be an important one that should be built on trust and respect:

...cuz if you don't have that trust you're gonna lose them. They come to you and th- they trust you and that's where it begins so uh you have to be very careful, follow-through all the time, be uh, you know build a- a relationship based on respect and uh you'll- it's amazing what happens (para 1).

When participants spoke about their relationships with students, they expressed thoughts such as

“...[its] unlike anything else like you you really really get to know them very well and you, it’s the same way from them to us, like they get to know us very well...” (para 5) and “I mean that’s just me I wanna take them all like three or four of them home you know forever so hahaha. That’s me I get very attached so uh, it’s ok I don’t have a problem with that” (para 3) .

What paraprofessionals wish they knew before starting their job, and level of satisfaction in their current role. Participants were asked what they wish they would have known before accepting employment. One participant expressed that there was nothing she wished she knew while others had some responses. However, no participant claimed that any of these responses would necessarily deter them from the position. One participant shared that she wished she knew how “heartbreaking it could be some days... their life stories just so painful and you can’t- you can’t fix it you can’t- you can’t change it...” (para 2). Another participant wished she knew about the timeline of being informed on whether or not she was employed every year. Other concerns were the idea of the administration and legality aspect of the role:

... it takes a lot to teach a child who doesn’t want to learn...who doesn’t want to necessarily be there...who wants to do their own thing. so ...you know...you know what’s right but if your superiors ...you know say...tell you that you can’t work on that then its

...your hands are tied... (para 6).

and

it would just be more like the silly union legality stuff...like to get a job first of all is so bizarre and to also to keep it and then the hours and just like I would say like just the silly administration legality stuff of it before I was given the permanent job, I kind of would like to have known all that just it's just stupid. (laughs) (para 5).

Satisfaction. Not all participants were satisfied in their role at the time of the interviews. Some participants claimed they were satisfied but that they were "...under-utilized..." (para 1) and there lacked "...consistency in what exactly and how [they] are used..." (para 2). One participant expressed that their level of satisfaction was dependent on the teacher they were working with: "just more cooperation not- it depends on which teacher, sometimes I'm 100 percent satisfied like I've been 100 but..." (para 3). Another participant was "...quite satisfied" (para 5) with her role as well.

Alternatively, one participant expressed:

I mean I love what I do, I love the, the kids that I work with, um, it's very rewarding on that level, um, however, there are lots of holes that need to be plugged. (laughs) so there, so in terms of satisfaction I mean, the kids is what, the kids are why I do it ah but there's a lot of things that leave you wanting (para 4).

One participant did not elaborate on this topic, however, she did express that her level of satisfaction changes from year to year.

Discussion

The general purpose of this study was to explore the profession of paraprofessionals in elementary schools through the perspectives of all the players involved while relying heavily on

the perspectives of the paraprofessionals themselves. These perspectives were obtained through semi-structured in depth interviews with the integration aides, parents, students, educators, special education educator and a vice principal all from the same school board. Overall, there were diverse perspectives shared on many different aspects of the role of the paraprofessional.

Inclusion

Similarly, to studies such as Hunt et al. (2004), the participants discussed inclusion as lacking a singular specific definition. However, that particular study explains that there are “some common features of inclusive programs” (p. 123). The first feature that was reported in the literature describes inclusion as one where there were students with disabilities in a general education classroom. The current study is consistent with this view as many participants voiced this issue. The second perspective was that support through a team was provided for the children with special needs and once again, the participants in this study also pointed out the importance of teamwork. Finally, their third perspective of the importance of periodic evaluations of the children was not discussed by participants in this study. Inclusion was also defined in the current study as something that is dependent on many other factors such as a child’s level of functioning, and the participants each described their own personal version of inclusion.

Interestingly, there were also barriers to inclusion mentioned in the current study, similarly to Glazzard (2011)’s study. Although no participant in the current study mentioned the idea of barriers, it was evident when interviewing most participants (specifically the administrator, behavioral technician and some paraprofessional participants) that they did not possess a positive attitude at the moment about inclusion. The participants reported many issues with difficulties with inclusion including a lack of resources, lack of paraprofessionals, better placement for some children, teacher beliefs and willingness to work with students with special

needs. In fact, there was a lot of reference in the current study of inclusion as an idea rather than a functional concept or process. Previous literature seemed to find similar barriers of inclusion such as the lack of resources and teacher attitudes (Glazzard, 2011). Interestingly, Patterson (2006)'s study explained that more paraprofessionals were being hired because the policy of inclusion and integration was growing. However, the participants of this study expressed that the number of children with special needs seem to have increased despite the fact that fewer paraprofessionals are being hired, and school budgets are being cut. It is unfortunate that this seems to be one of the areas that has been affected by budget restraints.

Parent Perspectives

Similar to research by Werts, Harris, Tillery and Roark (2004), this study found that the parent participants for the most part spoke highly about the paraprofessionals that work with their children and believe that they are an integral part of their children's education. However, as reported in previous research, there were participants who were unaware of what goes on during the day between their child and the paraprofessional (Werts, Harris, Tillery & Roark, 2004). The current study had a split response on this topic where interviews with parent participants yielded responses of knowing what goes on during the day between their child and the paraprofessional, and being unaware. The current study's data indicated that parents were aware of the lack of paraprofessionals and were insistent that more paraprofessionals, more time for each child and more education for the paraprofessionals were needed.

Moreover, the Werts, Harris, Tillery and Roark (2004) study indicated that parents wanted more communication with the paraprofessionals, however, the participants in the current study appeared to be content with the amount of communication between them and the paraprofessionals. The two parent participants of the current study described the parents-

paraprofessional relationship as a “minimal relationship”. Similarly to Chopra and French (2004) the parents in the current study did not seem to know much about the paraprofessionals and their daily interactions with their child. The parents relied on the teachers or the behavioral technician as opposed to the individual integration aides for information regarding their child’s education and being. These were limited views of two sets of parents that felt they did not have much information about paraprofessionals

Student Perspectives

Previous research described that children with disabilities expressed that a paraprofessional’s job was to provide academic assistance, perform administrative work, provide social and classroom assistance (Tews and Lupart, 2008). In the current study, children without special needs also expressed these perspectives. The children with disabilities in this study expressed having a good relationship with their paraprofessional. Children with disabilities claimed that there are moments in time when they became angry with the paraprofessionals because they felt as though they were not understood.

Similarly to Tews and Lupart (2008)’s study, the current study found that all children expressed that children who work with an integration aide spend more of their time outside of the classroom than inside the classroom. The children did not express an opinion about this, rather they simply stated what they believed to be a fact of their educational life.

It was important to include both children with and without disabilities in the current study because there seems to be a lack of research collected from children in general. There were definitely some challenges in interviewing the children, especially the two children with special needs. For example, one of the children could not remember much about being with a paraprofessional during the interview. Future research should perhaps include a more in depth

study based solely on children participants' perspectives. Obtaining the children's perspectives is not an easy task for many factors. One factor is that the parents are very protective of their children and are not easily willing to grant permission or access to their children. Another reason being that children with special needs are not always verbal or comprehend easily making it harder to obtain their perspectives.

General Educator Perspective

According to Giangreco (2003) general educators apparently felt relief when they obtained a paraprofessional in their classroom and that they believed the paraprofessionals would be the ones "taking care" of the children with special needs. However, in the current study, this did not seem to be the case. The educator participants in the present study seemed to indicate that they were the planners and the main individuals responsible for all the children in their classroom and the paraprofessionals would simply follow their lead. While they did admit that paraprofessionals sometimes taught new information, however it was the educators that chose the activities and content of the lessons. As in Giangreco (2003)'s study, one of the educators did explain that she plans her day around when and which paraprofessional was going to be in her class. The more she knew about the ability of the paraprofessional as well as the time slots of when they were coming, she would plan the topics or assignments that she knew would be harder for the children with special needs, as well as all the other children. In her class, she used the paraprofessional almost as if the paraprofessional was simply another educator in the classroom; for example, she would help the students or take them out of the classroom for extra help. This could potentially cause more work to for the educator to coordinate everything or some educators felt that it provided relief as it is another adult that would help with the work load.

On a similar note, Sosinsky and Gilliam (2011)'s study expressed that educators felt they lacked time to plan with the paraprofessionals and that paraprofessionals were not particularly responsible for the educating aspect of the children but rather for general responsibilities, cleaning and supervising the children. The current study was slightly less convincing on this specific topic, as it was not quite clear on exactly what the educators had the paraprofessionals do when it came to the education of the children. Both educators expressed that they were the planners of the curriculum but they were not sure if they were primarily teaching the curriculum to children with disabilities or if they left that feature to the paraprofessionals when they worked with students outside the classroom.

Special Ed Technician/Behavioral Technician Perspective

Although similar, the role of this behavior technician differs from a special education educator in previous research. Past research seems to imply that there is a larger role for special educators than this particular behavior technician possessed. For example, Chopra and French (2004)'s study indicated that it was the special education technician's role to analyze, interpret, provide potential solutions and diagnose the students. The behavioral tech in this study indicated that her role was to be a support system for teachers and integration aides (which could mean an ear to listen or help during a crisis), as well as run groups during the day such as social skill and emotion-regulation groups.

Previous literature claimed that paraprofessionals spend more time with the children and therefore should have a relationship with the parents as far as relaying daily information. The literature does draw a line as to the relationship between parents and paraprofessionals (Chopra and French, 2004). The literature also indicated that the special education teacher did not believe that paraprofessionals should spend too much time with one student at the risk of becoming too

close with parents and consequently overstep their boundaries (Chopra and French, 2004). Similarly, previous research indicated that special education teachers tend to be preoccupied filling out paper work and performing other duties that they lack the time to view paraprofessionals with the students and therefore could not produce many conclusions (Giangreco, 2013) and (Giangreco and Broer, 2005)

The current study also found that the behavioral technician viewed the relationship between a paraprofessional and a parent dependent on the main educator. The main educator of the classroom was expected to be the one to invite paraprofessionals to the meetings. The behavioral technician expressed that she believed a relationship between the paraprofessionals and the parents of the children they are working with was a rare occurrence.

Administrator's Perspective

Previous studies did not use any administrator participants. However, some previous literature did mention ideas surrounding administrations role with paraprofessionals to some degree. For example, Glazzard (2011) spoke about the idea of team work with all those involved in order for paraprofessionals to function properly. Similarly, the vice principal in the current study mentioned the idea of team work and collaboration. Both Glazzard (2011) and the vice principal in the current study shared the idea that lack of team work in the process (which includes the administrators and paraprofessionals) would be seen as a barrier to the process of inclusion. They also both agreed on the idea of a positive attitude between the administration and the paraprofessionals for inclusion to work and for paraprofessionals to function at their highest potential.

The current study's vice principal basically suggested that inclusion as it is utilized currently is not beneficial or even functional. Her main issue with inclusion was the same as all

the other participants. There are simply not enough paraprofessionals employed and other resources, such as funding, are lacking as well. She viewed paraprofessionals as those who were there to assist the teachers with their planning and implement the curriculum to benefit the students in an inclusive setting. The vice principal seemed to agree with the other participants in the current study that the wages and hours for paraprofessionals were low as well as paraprofessionals are lacking training in the system and incentives for those with higher education to apply for the job. As articulated in the findings, the vice principal seemed to be explaining similar concepts and facts about the role as the other sets of participants. Future research should explore the perspective of the administrators on paraprofessional if for nothing else but to add more depth to the conversation.

Paraprofessionals' Perspectives

Previous literature also found that paraprofessionals communicated with the parents frequently and in some cases more than the general educator of the classroom (Chopra et al. 2004). Whereas in the current study, the paraprofessionals reported that they barely have any communication with the parents.

Patterson (2006)'s study indicated that the majority of its participants communicated that they were responsible for at least some part of actually teaching the children. Similarly, in the current study, the majority of paraprofessionals explained that they were also responsible for implementing instructions planned by them. Patterson (2006)'s study explained as well that paraprofessionals felt they needed more training and many were not satisfied with their role in the schools at the time of the study. In the current study, paraprofessional participants did mention that the training was lacking in different ways, whether it be the type or just nonexistent.

When it came to satisfaction in their job, Patterson (2006)'s study expressed that there was dissatisfaction because no one, including paraprofessionals, really knew what their job entailed. The current study did find that some paraprofessionals were dissatisfied with the job however it was more detailed. For example, paraprofessionals expressed that their level of satisfaction was dependent on the general educator they were with, which varied from year to year. One participant simply explained that there was a lot lacking in the job such as the lack of resources and it leaves you wanting more.

Most of the previous research (such as Hunt et al. (2004), Giangreco and Broer (2005), Werts, Harris, Tillery and Roark (2004) and Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli and MacFarland (1997)) took place in the United States of America, whereas the current study took place in Quebec Canada where the educational programs differ in organization. Consistent with previous research, the current study, found that there were various aspects lacking such as training and understanding and implementing of the role of the paraprofessional in general. These issues need to be adjusted and the role needs to be clearer in order for proper implementation of the role of the paraprofessional to meet the needs of children with special needs

Limitations and Future Directions

There are a few limitations to the current study. One limitation was the number of participants and the views were expressed in one school board and it may not be transferable to other contexts across the school board. The study did possess many different types of participants to gain a holistic picture with all the players' perspectives. However, the limited views of these participants were not nearly clear enough to draw lasting reliable conclusions. Future research should explore a more in depth study across contexts using multiple methods that include observations and interviews.

Another limitation was the fact that even though there were only a few schools involved in the current study, only one had more than one participant. Future research should recruit a more diverse sample and more than one participant from each of the schools in the school board.

A third limitation was the gender of the participants. All the participants were female except one of the parents. Although it would be challenging finding male participants, especially male paraprofessionals, it would be interesting for future research to examine the male perspective as well.

Implications for Practice

This phenomenological study on perceptions on paraprofessionals may have implications for practice. Overall, the findings suggest that there needs to be some sort of re-examination of the role of the paraprofessional and there needs to be an understanding of the role of paraprofessionals. There needs to be an emphasis on the education and training of the paraprofessionals on a more continuous basis and the need to be involved in discussions about inclusion and integration which are consistent with the philosophies and values of their school board system.

Validity and Reliability

Researcher bias. One struggle in the current study was that of researcher bias as the principle researcher of the study was employed as a paraprofessional. From one interview to the next, this issue became less of a reality as the researcher worked hard to let go of previous assumptions and thoughts about paraprofessionals and simply listen to what the participants were saying. During the process of analyzing the data, the researcher and research assistant had meetings to discuss the data which allowed for greater reliability in the analysis. When it came time to write up the results and analysis, the researcher made sure to have her supervisor read it

through, especially to make sure that the results and analysis were not favoring one side or the other but rather simply stating and analyzing the data.

Conclusion

As this current study attempted to fill in a gap in the literature on the paraprofessional role in this particular school board, it provides a description of some of the perspectives of school staff about the paraprofessional role. In addition, it discussed this issue with parents, children and paraprofessionals themselves. Despite the limitations, it is consistent with previous research with respect to the lack of clarity of the role of paraprofessionals and the need for consistency across settings.

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Appendix A: Paraprofessionals

INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY CONSENT FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS

Study Title: Perceptions on Paraprofessionals

Researcher: Stacey Waks

Researcher's Contact Information: s_waks@hotmail.com

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Harriet Petrakos

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:

hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is focus on the perspectives of paraprofessionals in educational settings and how they perceive that their services can be effectively utilized in order to best meet the needs of special needs children in elementary school. The study will examine the perspectives of paraprofessionals and of the different stakeholders (i.e., child, parents, teaching staff) supporting and educating children with special needs in elementary schools.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview and will be audio recorded.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 1 hour of your time for an interview.

As a research participant, your responsibilities would be: to be as honest as possible in answering questions, however you are allowed to not answer any question you feel makes you uncomfortable.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include: Feelings of anger or feeling uncomfortable when discussing negative aspect of the profession. You may feel the risk of disclosing information out of fear or to avoid getting into trouble with their superiors.

You might or might not personally benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits include: reflecting on the role of the paraprofessional and to suggest information based on your experiences to promote improvement for the benefit of all those involved. You may benefit from this research by listening to different perspectives and some ideas may be applied to to improve the position of paraprofessionals. You may be able to benefit by feeling that your voice was heard.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: your perspectives of your profession, the positive and negative views.

By participating, you agree to let the researchers have access to information about your profession. This information will be obtained from an interview.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research, and except as described in this form. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be confidential. That means that it will not be possible to make a link between you and the information you provide.

We will protect the information by being kept in a password-protected computer and a notebook that only the researcher, research assistant and the supervisor of the researcher will have access to.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study or after the study has been published.

In certain situations, we might be legally required to disclose the information that you provide. This includes situations where there is a possibility that the research might reveal a situation such as abuse of the child participants, or if the researcher uncovers any information that presents a threat or serious harm. If this kind of situation arises, we will disclose the information as required by law, despite what is written in this form.

E. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before June 30th, 2016 and the information you have given will be destroyed upon request. You can contact the researcher by phone or email.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

F. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described (including having the conversations audio recorded).

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Paraprofessional's information letter
Perceptions on paraprofessionals

To whom it may concern,

I am a graduate student, **under the supervision of Dr. Hariclia Petrakos**, in the Department of Education at Concordia University. I am interested in understanding the perception of all the stakeholders (parents, children, special education educators, mainstream educators, administration and paraprofessionals (aides)) have on paraprofessionals (aides) in a mainstream classroom. This project will focus on paraprofessionals and their perceptions of their job along with perceptions of others involved in order to figure out the best way to utilize paraprofessional support for students with special needs (including learning disabilities, physical disabilities, social and behavioral disabilities and high functioning children with autism). If you are a paraprofessional who works with children in classroom and would like to have your voice heard, we would love to hear from you.

Upon receiving your consent to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will be audio recorded. In total, participating in this study will take approximately 1 hour of your time for an interview. By participating in this study you will remain anonymous and will be referred to as a participant number. Your name is not required as the information gathered will be confidential, meaning it will not be possible to link you to the information you provide.

A benefit, which may be reasonably expected is the chance to reflect on the role of the paraprofessional and to suggest information based on your experiences to promote improvement for the benefit of all those involved. This is a chance to have your voice heard.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me, Stacey waks at 514-475-2953 or **Dr. Hariclia Petrakos at 514-848-2424 ext. 2013.**

Sincerely,

Stacey waks
Project researcher

Hariclia (Harriet) Petrakos, Ph.D.
Faculty Supervisor

Interview Questions

Inclusion

- What is your understanding of inclusion? (adapted from Glazzard, 2011)
- What is your definition of a paraprofessional (otherwise known as integration aide).

Roles and Responsibilities

- What are your roles and responsibilities? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997, Patterson, 2006)
- What percentage of time do you spend engaging in each of the following categories: clerical support, supervision of students, personal care, behaviour support, implementing instructions planned by paraprofessionals, engaging in self-directed activities and others? (Giangreco & Broer, 2005)
- What does a typical day look like for you?
- How satisfied are you in your role? (adapted from Giangreco & Broer, 2005)
- What would make your experience more useful in a positive way? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997).

Skills and Characteristics

- Describe what you believe to be the skills and personal characteristics required for your job? (Patterson, 2006)

Challenges

- Describe your challenges. (Patterson, 2006)
- What happens when you have difficulty with a student? (Patterson, 2006)

Support and Supervision

- What assistance do you need to be supported in your current role? (Patterson, 2006)
- How are support service decisions made by the team? (Giangreco et al., 1997)

Proximity

- What percentage of time do you spend in close proximity to assigned student (3ft) ? (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Tell me more about that, can you give me an example?

Relationship with teacher

- Finish the sentence... the interaction between teacher in the classroom and you is....? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997)
- Does the relationship between paraprofessionals and teachers affect the child? How?
- To what extent do you take on teaching the students versus the main educator? Is there a balance?
- What do you want teachers to know about paraprofessionals? (Patterson, 2006)

General questions

- What are some advantages versus disadvantages of paraprofessionals? (Giangreco et al., 2005)
- What do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses in the school system, (ex: hiring, training, working)? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997)
- What can be done or put in place for potential improvement? Giangreco et al., 1997)
- What do you wish you knew before starting your job? (Patterson, 2006)

- How can paraprofessionals be effectively deployed to support the inclusion of pupils? (Glazzard, 2006)
- What else do you believe is important for me to know? (Patterson, 2006)
- Are there realistic expectations?

Relationship with parents

- Describe your interaction with parents. (adapted from Patterson, 2006)

Training

- How much training to do you have? (Patterson, 2006)
- Were you trained or did you receive more training after initial employment? (Patterson, 2006)
- Are you provided with continuous training opportunities? (Patterson, 2006)

Mandate of a Paraprofessional

INTEGRATION AIDE

The principal and customary work of an Integration Aide consists of supporting the integration in the regular classroom of identified students with special needs. She/he facilitates the progress and global development of the preschool, elementary and secondary students with special needs, as well as ensuring their well-being and safety. She/he works in close collaboration with the Teacher(s) responsible for the students with special needs in creating an environment conducive to learning and encourages the independence of students with special needs. She/he interacts naturally with all students of the regular class as necessary to promote the independence for students with special needs.

To facilitate the learning of students with special needs:

- She/he applies the strategies determined by the Teacher(s) in collaboration with the Resource Team and/or Special Education Technician.
- She/he ensures the safety of students with special needs in accordance with the rules of conduct, safety measures and recommendations from the Teacher(s) in collaboration with the Resource Team and/or Special Education Technician.
- She/he advises the Teacher(s) when the behaviour of the student with special needs becomes a concern.
- She/he encourages interaction with peers.
- She/he responds to challenging behaviours from students with special needs according to the strategies determined by the Teacher(s) in collaboration with the Resource Team and/or Special Education Technician in conformity with the Individual Educational Plan when applicable.
- If needed, she/he greets students with special needs upon arrival and accompanies them until departure.
- If needed, she/he accompanies the students with special needs or assists their movements during the day and supervises them notably during recess, meal periods and transition times as part of their assigned workload and schedule.
- She/he may assist students with special needs with dressing and undressing.
- She/he assists students with special needs to prepare and eat their snacks and/or lunches ensuring that the rules of hygiene and well-being are respected. If needed, she/he assists with feeding and toileting.

- In order to contribute her/his observations and suggestions regarding the students with special needs with whom she/he is working, she/he can be asked to participate in meetings to develop the Individual Educational Plan as part of their assigned workload and schedule.
- She/he attends, on request, meetings with parents, as part of the assigned workload and schedule.
- She/he may carry out tasks such as organizing required materials, and assisting with the organization and carrying out of activities under the direction of the Teacher(s) in collaboration with the Resource Team and/or Special Education Technician.
- She/he may prepare daily or weekly records and maintain portfolios or work for the students with special needs under the Teacher's direction. She/he may record observations on the progress or behaviour of students with special needs.
- She/he supports the integration of students within special needs. Notably:
 - she/he helps them with daily work;
 - she/he encourages them to participate and provides them with cues;
 - she/he repeats instructions and assists them in the carrying out of tasks and activities;
 - she/he helps them practice their skills;
 - she/he monitors them in learning centers within the classroom setting;
 - she/he monitors their behaviour;
 - she/he applies consequences or rewards according to class rules or an intervention plan established by the Teacher(s) in collaboration with the Resource Team and/or Special Education Technician;
 - she/he helps them with daily class routines;
 - she/he helps them interact appropriately with others;
 - she/he monitors the interaction of other students when required to the benefit of the student with special needs.

The description of the Resource Team can be found in the Special Education Policy.

Appendix B: Educators

INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

COSENT FOR EDUCATORS

Study Title: Perceptions on paraprofessionals**Researcher: Stacey Waks****Researcher's Contact Information: s_waks@hotmail.com****Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Harriet Petrakos****Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:****hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca**

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is focus on the perspectives of paraprofessionals in educational settings and how they perceive that their services can be effectively utilized in order to best meet the needs of special needs children in elementary school. The study will examine the perspectives of paraprofessionals and of the different stakeholders (i.e., child, parents, teaching staff) supporting and educating children with special needs in elementary schools.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will be audio recorded.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 30 minutes of your time for the interview.

As a research participant, your responsibilities would be: to be as honest as possible in answering questions, however you are allowed to not answer any question you feel makes you uncomfortable.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include: Feeling uncomfortable when discussing negative aspect of the profession. You may feel the risk of disclosing information out of fear or to avoid getting into trouble with their superiors.

You might or might not personally benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits include: reflecting on the role of the paraprofessional and to suggest information based on your experiences to promote improvement for the benefit of all those involved. You may benefit from this research by listening to different perspectives and some ideas may be applied to improve the position of paraprofessionals. You may be able to benefit by feeling that your voice was heard.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: your perspectives of paraprofessionals, the positive and negative views.

By participating, you agree to let the researchers have access to information about your profession. This information will be obtained from an interview.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research, and except as described in this form. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be confidential. That means that it will not be possible to make a link between you and the information you provide.

We will protect the information by being kept in a password-protected computer and a notebook that only the researcher, research assistant and the supervisor of the researcher will have access to.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

In certain situations, we might be legally required to disclose the information that you provide. This includes situations where there is a possibility that the research might reveal a situation

such as abuse of the child participants, or if the researcher uncovers any information that presents a threat or serious harm. If this kind of situation arises, we will disclose the information as required by law, despite what is written in this form.

E. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before June 30th, 2016 and the information you have given will be destroyed upon request. You can contact the researcher by phone or email.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

F. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described (including having the conversations audio recorded).

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page I. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Educators information letter

Perceptions on paraprofessionals

To whom it may concern,

I am a graduate student, **under the supervision of Dr. Hariclia Petrakos**, in the Department of Education at Concordia University. I am interested in understanding the perception of all the stakeholders (parents, children, special education educators, mainstream educators, administration and paraprofessionals (aides)) have on paraprofessionals (aides) in a mainstream classroom. This project will focus on paraprofessionals and their perceptions of their job along with perceptions of others involved in order to figure out the best way to utilize paraprofessional support for students with special needs (including learning disabilities, physical disabilities, social and behavioral disabilities and high functioning children with autism). If there are paraprofessionals in your classroom or in your school, we look forward to hearing from you.

Upon receiving your consent to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will be audio recorded. In total, participating in this study will take approximately 30 minutes of your time for the interview. By participating in this study you will remain anonymous and will be referred to as a participant number. Your name is not required as the information gathered will be confidential, meaning it will not be possible to link you to the information you provide.

A benefit, which may be reasonably expected is the chance to reflect on the role of the paraprofessional and to suggest information based on your experiences to promote improvement for the benefit of all those involved.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me, Stacey waks at 514-475-2953 or **Dr. Hariclia Petrakos at 514-848-2424 ext. 2013.**

Sincerely,

Stacey waks
Project researcher

Hariclia (Harriet) Petrakos, Ph.D.
Faculty Supervisor

Questions for Educators

Interview

General

- What is your definition of a paraprofessional (otherwise known as integration aide).
- what is your job title?
- How many years of experience do you have?

Inclusion

- What is your understanding of inclusion? (adapted from Glazzard, 2011)
- What is your definition of a paraprofessional (otherwise known as integration aide).

Roles and Responsibilities

- What are your roles and responsibilities when it comes to students with disabilities and what are the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessionals? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997, Patterson, 2006)
- What does a typical day look like for you?

Skills and Characteristics

- Describe what you believe to be the skills and personal characteristics required for a paraprofessional's job? (Patterson, 2006)

Challenges

- Describe your challenges in regards to paraprofessionals. (adapted from Patterson, 2006)
- What happens when you have difficulty with a student? (Patterson, 2006)

Support and Supervision

- What assistance do you need to be supported when dealing with children with special needs and paraprofessionals? (Patterson, 2006)
- How are support service decisions made by the team? (Giangreco et al., 1997)

Proximity

- What percentage of time should a paraprofessional spend in close proximity to an assigned student (3ft) ? (adapted from Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Tell me more about that, can you give me an example?

Relationship with paraprofessional

- Finish the sentence... the interaction between you and the paraprofessional in the classroom is....? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997)
- Does the relationship between paraprofessionals and teachers affect the child? How?
- To what extent do you believe paraprofessionals take on the educating of children with special needs? Is there a balance?
- What do you want to know more about paraprofessionals? (adapted from Patterson, 2006)

General questions

- What are some advantages versus disadvantages of paraprofessionals? (Giangreco et al., 2005)
- What do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses in the school system, (ex: hiring, training, working)? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997)

- What can be done or put in place for potential improvement? (Giangreco et al., 1997)
- What do you wish you knew about children with special needs before starting your job? (Patterson, 2006)
- How can paraprofessionals be effectively deployed to support the inclusion of pupils? (Glazzard, 2006)
- What else do you believe is important for me to know? (Patterson, 2006)
- Are there realistic expectations?

Relationship with parents

- Describe your interaction with parents. (adapted from Patterson, 2006)

Training

- How much training do you have in regards to students with special needs and working with paraprofessionals? (Patterson, 2006)
- Were you trained or did you receive more training after initial employment? (Patterson, 2006)
- Are you provided with continuous training opportunities? (Patterson, 2006)

Appendix C: Students

INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

CONSENT FOR CHILD 12 AND OVER

Study Title: Perceptions on paraprofessionals (aides)**Researcher: Stacey Waks****Researcher's Contact Information: s_waks@hotmail.com****Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Harriet Petrakos****Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:****hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca**

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to learn about how aides feel about working in the classroom. The researcher is also interesting in finding out how students, parents and teachers feel about the work that aides do in schools.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to answer questions for 10 minutes. You will have a choice to answer only the questions that you want. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. The questions will all be about the aide in your classroom. The interview will be audio recorded (taped).

In total, participating in this study will take about 10 minutes of your time.

By answering these questions, you are asked to be as honest as possible, and you are allowed to not answer any question you feel makes you uncomfortable.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. You may feel uncomfortable answering certain questions, however, you are allowed to end the interview or not answer any question you don't want to answer.

You might or might not learn something about yourself during this discussion: you might think about the role of the aides and your ideas might help us understand how to improve things for aides and other children in schools.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: your thoughts about aides, both the positive and negative thoughts that you have.

By agreeing to participate, you agree to let the researchers listen to the information you share about your experiences with aides. This information will come from the discussion we will have.

We will not allow anyone else to see the information, except people involved in the research.. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be confidential. That means that it will not be possible for anyone to know that you shared this information. No one will know that you said anything.

We will protect the information by being kept in a password-protected computer and a notebook that only the researcher, research assistant and the supervisor of the researcher will have access to.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible for anyone to know that you were in this research in the published results.

We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

In certain situations, we might be required by the law to tell someone if we think you are not safe in any way. If this happens, we will tell what you told us to make sure you get some help.

E. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you

must tell the researcher before June 30th, 2016 and the information you have given will be erased when you ask us to stop. You can contact me by phone or email.

Nothing bad will happen to you if you do not participate or if you stop in the middle or ask us not to use your information.

F. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described (including being audio recorded, taped).

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page I. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

VERBAL ASSENT SCRIPT CHILD

Kindergarten children

Hello,

My name is Stacey and I am doing a project on aides (aide's name) in your classroom. I would like to speak to you about them, like what they do in the classroom and what you think about them. I am not allowed to tell anyone, even your parents, teachers or anyone else what you say. Whatever you tell me is a secret. You also don't have to answer any question you do not want to answer and you are allowed to stop talking to me whenever you want. I would also like to use this microphone (**my audio recording device) for us while we chat. Would this be something you would like to do with me?

Children in grades 1-3.

My name is Stacey and I am doing a project on aides (aide's name) in your classroom and would like to have a chat with you about the aides (aide's name) in your classroom. I am not allowed to tell anyone, even your parents, teachers or anyone else what you say. Whatever you tell me is a secret, no one will know you told me anything. You also don't have to answer any question you do not want to answer and you are allowed to quit or stop talking to me whenever you want. I would also like to audio record our conversation. Would this be something you would like to do with me?

Questions for students

Interview questions for students with disabilities

- How old are you?
- Who helps you at school?
 - Does (name of aide) help you?
- Do you like the help?
- What do you like about (name of aide) and what don't you like?
- What does the (name of aide) do in your classroom? What are some of his/her duties?
- How close are you to (name of aide) throughout the day? Does he/she stand right next to you all the time?
- How much would you say you are out of the class or spend time in the classroom with just (name of aide)?
- What do you think should change? Any thoughts on how they should change?

Interview questions for students without disabilities

- How old are you?
- Why do you think (name of aide) is working in your class?
- What does the (name of aide) do in your class?
- Does blank's (name of aide) make it easier or harder to play with him or her? Explain
- How much time do you think (name of aide) spends out of the class with blank or in the class alone with blank?
- Is (name of aide) always standing right next to the same person all the time?

Appendix D: Parents

INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

CONSENT FOR PARENTS

Study Title: Perceptions on paraprofessionals**Researcher: Stacey Waks****Researcher's Contact Information: s_waks@hotmail.com****Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Harriet Petrakos****Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:****hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca**

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is focus on the perspectives of paraprofessionals in educational settings and how they perceive that their services can be effectively utilized in order to best meet the needs of special needs children in elementary school. The study will examine the perspectives of paraprofessionals and of the different stakeholders (i.e., child, parents, teaching staff) supporting and educating children with special needs in elementary schools.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will be audio recorded.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 30 minutes of your time for an interview.

As a research participant, your responsibilities would be: to be as honest as possible in answering questions, however you are allowed to not answer any question you feel makes you uncomfortable.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include: Bringing up uncomfortable feelings if you feel your child is not receiving the full potential of paraprofessionals that you feel they deserve.

You might or might not personally benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits include: reflecting on the role of the paraprofessional and to suggest information based on your experiences to promote improvement for the benefit of all those involved.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: your perspectives of paraprofessionals, the positive and negative views.

By participating, you agree to let the researchers have access to information about the paraprofessional in your child's class. This information will be obtained from an interview.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research, and except as described in this form. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be confidential. That means that it will not be possible to make a link between you and the information you provide.

We will protect the information by being kept in a password-protected computer and a notebook that only the researcher, research assistant and the supervisor of the researcher will have access to.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

In certain situations, we might be legally required to disclose the information that you provide. This includes situations where there is a possibility that the research might reveal a situation such as abuse of the child participants, or if the researcher uncovers any information that

presents a threat or serious harm. If this kind of situation arises, we will disclose the information as required by law, despite what is written in this form.

E. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before June 30th, 2016 and the information you have given will be destroyed upon request. You can contact me by phone or email.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

F. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described, including being audio recorded during the interview.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page I. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

CONSENT FOR PARENTS FOR CHILD

Study Title: Perceptions on paraprofessionals

Researcher: Stacey Waks

Researcher's Contact Information: s_waks@hotmail.com

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Harriet Petrakos

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:

hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca

Your child is being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want your child to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is focus on the perspectives of paraprofessionals in educational settings and how they perceive that their services can be effectively utilized in order to best meet the needs of special needs children in elementary school. The study will examine the perspectives of paraprofessionals and of the different stakeholders (i.e., child, parents, teaching staff) supporting and educating children with special needs in elementary schools.

B. PROCEDURES

If your child participates, your child will be asked to participate in a shorten interview of approximately 10 minutes. Your child will be asked questions and will only be required to answer the ones they choose to answer. They are not required to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable. The questions will revolve around the paraprofessional (aide) in their classroom and prior to beginning the interview your child will also be asked for their verbal consent to participate. The interview will be audio recorded.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 10 minutes of your child's time.

As a research participant, your child's responsibilities would be: to be as honest as possible in answering questions, however they are allowed to not answer any question they feel makes them uncomfortable.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

Your child might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include: the child may feel uncomfortable answering certain questions, however, the child has the power to end the interview or not answer a specific question.

Your child might or might not personally benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits include: allowing your child to reflect on his or her own experience in the classroom with an aide.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: your child's perspectives of paraprofessionals, the positive and negative views.

By allowing your child to participate, you agree to let the researchers have access to information about your child's experiences with an aide. This information will be obtained from the interview.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research, and except as described in this form. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be confidential. That means that it will not be possible to make a link between your child and the information he or she provides.

We will protect the information by being kept in a password-protected computer and a notebook that only the researcher, research assistant and the supervisor of the researcher will have access to.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify your child in the published results.

We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

In certain situations, we might be legally required to disclose the information that your child provides. This includes situations where there is a possibility that the research might reveal a situation such as abuse of the child participants, or if the researcher uncovers any information that presents a threat or serious harm. If this kind of situation arises, we will disclose the information as required by law, despite what is written in this form.

E. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

Your child does not have to participate in this research. It is purely your as well as your child's decision as they will be asked for his or her consent before beginning the interview. If your child does participate, he or she can stop at any time. You or your child can also ask that the information he or she provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your child's information, you must tell the researcher before June 30th, 2016 and the information you have given will be destroyed upon request. You can contact me by phone or email.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your child's information.

F. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered.

I agree to give permission for my child to participate in this research under the conditions described in this form (including my child being audio recorded).

(please check one of the following):

Yes No Child's name: _____

My child has special needs (including learning disabilities) : Yes No

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page I. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Parent information letter

Perceptions on paraprofessionals

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

I am a graduate student, **under the supervision of Dr. Hariclia Petrakos**, in the Department of Education at Concordia University. I am interested in understanding the perception of all the stakeholders (parents, children, special education educators, mainstream educators, administration and paraprofessionals (aides)) have on paraprofessionals (aides) in a mainstream classroom. This project will focus on paraprofessionals and their perceptions of their job along with perceptions of others involved in order to figure out the best way to utilize paraprofessional support for students with special needs (including learning disabilities, physical disabilities, social and behavioral disabilities and high functioning children with autism). If your child is presently using the paraprofessional support, we would like to hear from both you or your child. If your child is not using the support presently but does have an aide present in his/her class, we would like to hear from your child.

Upon receiving your consent to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will be audio recorded. Upon your consent further down the form, you will also be asked to allow your child to potentially participate in a shorten interview of approximately 10 minutes. Your child will be asked questions and will only be required to answer the ones they choose to answer. They are not required to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable. The questions will revolve around the paraprofessional (aide) in their classroom and prior to beginning the interview your child will also be asked for their verbal consent to participate. By participating in this study you will remain anonymous and will be referred to as a participant number. Your name is not required as the information gathered will be confidential, meaning it will not be possible to link you to the information you provide.

A benefit, which may be reasonably expected is the chance to reflect on the role of the paraprofessional and to suggest information based on your experiences to promote improvement for the benefit of all those involved. A benefit for your child is to be able to reflect on his or her own experience in the classroom with an aide and feel important and part of the process by having their voice heard.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me, Stacey waks at 514-475-2953 or **Dr. Hariclia Petrakos at 514-848-2424 ext. 2013.**

Sincerely,
Stacey waks Project researcher
Hariclia (Harriet) Petrakos, Ph.D. Faculty Supervisor

Questions for parents

Interview

Inclusion

- What is your understanding of inclusion? (adapted from Glazzard, 2011)
- What is your definition of a paraprofessional (otherwise known as integration aide).

Roles and Responsibilities

- What are the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessionals on a daily basis? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997, Patterson, 2006)

Skills and Characteristics

- Describe what you believe to be the skills and personal characteristics required for a paraprofessional's job? (Patterson, 2006)

Challenges

- Describe your challenges in regards to paraprofessionals. (adapted from Patterson, 2006)

Support and Supervision

- What assistance do you need to be in place for your child with special needs? (adapted from Patterson, 2006)
- How are support service decisions made by the team? Are you included in the decision making processes? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997)

Proximity

- What percentage of time should a paraprofessional spend in close proximity to an assigned student (3ft) ? (adapted from Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Tell me more about that, can you give me an example?

Relationship with paraprofessional

- Finish the sentence... the interaction between you and your child's paraprofessional is? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997)
- Tell me about your relationship with paraprofessionals? Do you speak to them often?
- How do you know whatever you know about your child's paraprofessional...is it by what your child tells you, what others tell you...direct contact?
- Does the relationship between paraprofessionals and teachers affect the child? How?
- To what extent do you believe paraprofessionals take on the educating of children with special needs? Is there a balance?
- What do you want to know more about paraprofessionals? (adapted from Patterson, 2006)

General questions

- What are some advantages versus disadvantages of paraprofessionals? (Giangreco et al., 2005)
- What do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses in the school system, (ex: hiring, training, working)? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997)
- What can be done or put in place for potential improvement? Giangreco et al., 1997)

- How can paraprofessionals be effectively deployed to support the inclusion of pupils? (Glazzard, 2006)
- What else do you believe is important for me to know? (Patterson, 2006)
- Are there realistic expectations?

Relationship with parents

- Describe your interaction with the paraprofessional of your child. (adapted from Patterson, 2006)

Training

- How much training do you believe paraprofessionals and teachers should have in regards to students with special needs? (adapted from Patterson, 2006)
- Should they be receiving more training after initial employment? (adapted from Patterson, 2006)
- Should they be provided with continuous training opportunities? (adapted from Patterson, 2006)

Appendix E: Special Needs Teachers

INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

COSENT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATORS

Study Title: Perceptions on paraprofessionals**Researcher: Stacey Waks****Researcher's Contact Information: s_waks@hotmail.com****Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Harriet Petrakos****Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:****hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca**

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

B. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is focus on the perspectives of paraprofessionals in educational settings and how they perceive that their services can be effectively utilized in order to best meet the needs of special needs children in elementary school. The study will examine the perspectives of paraprofessionals and of the different stakeholders (i.e., child, parents, teaching staff) supporting and educating children with special needs in elementary schools.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will be audio recorded.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 30 minutes of your time for the interview.

As a research participant, your responsibilities would be: to be as honest as possible in answering questions, however you are allowed to not answer any question you feel makes you uncomfortable.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include: Feeling uncomfortable when discussing negative aspect of the profession. You may feel the risk of disclosing information because they are afraid or they do not want to get into trouble with their superiors.

You might or might not personally benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits include: reflecting on the role of the paraprofessional and to suggest information based on your experiences to promote improvement for the benefit of all those involved. You may benefit from this research by listening to different perspectives and some ideas may be applied to improve the position of paraprofessionals. They may be able to benefit by feeling that their voices were heard.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: your perspectives of paraprofessionals, the positive and negative views.

By participating, you agree to let the researchers have access to information about your profession. This information will be obtained from an interview.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research, and except as described in this form. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be confidential. That means that it will not be possible to make a link between you and the information you provide.

We will protect the information by being kept in a password-protected computer and a notebook that only the researcher, research assistant and the supervisor of the researcher will have access to.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

In certain situations, we might be legally required to disclose the information that you provide. This includes situations where there is a possibility that the research might reveal a situation such as abuse of the child participants, or if the researcher uncovers any information that presents a threat or serious harm. If this kind of situation arises, we will disclose the information as required by law, despite what is written in this form.

E. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before June 30th, 2016 and the information you have given will be destroyed upon request. You can contact the researcher by phone or email.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

F. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described (including having the conversations audio recorded).

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Special Educators information letter

Perceptions on paraprofessionals

To whom it may concern,

I am a graduate student, **under the supervision of Dr. Hariclia Petrakos**, in the Department of Education at Concordia University. I am interested in understanding the perception of all the stakeholders (parents, children, special education educators, mainstream educators, administration and paraprofessionals (aides)) have on paraprofessionals (aides) in a mainstream classroom. This project will focus on paraprofessionals and their perceptions of their job along with perceptions of others involved in order to figure out the best way to utilize paraprofessional support for students with special needs (including learning disabilities, physical disabilities, social and behavioral disabilities and high functioning children with autism). If there are paraprofessionals in your classroom or in your school, we look forward to hearing from you.

Upon receiving your consent to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will be audio recorded. In total, participating in this study will take approximately 30 minutes of your time for the interview. By participating in this study you will remain anonymous and will be referred to as a participant number. Your name is not required as the information gathered will be confidential, meaning it will not be possible to link you to the information you provide.

A benefit, which may be reasonably expected is the chance to reflect on the role of the paraprofessional and to suggest information based on your experiences to promote improvement for the benefit of all those involved.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me, Stacey waks at 514-475-2953 or **Dr. Hariclia Petrakos at 514-848-2424 ext. 2013.**

Sincerely,

Stacey waks
Project researcher

Hariclia (Harriet) Petrakos, Ph.D.
Faculty Supervisor

Questions for special needs teachers

Interview

General Questions

- what is your job title?
- How many years of experience do you have?
- What is your definition of a paraprofessional (otherwise known as integration aide)

Inclusion

- What is your understanding of inclusion? (adapted from Glazzard, 2011)

Roles and Responsibilities

- What are your roles and responsibilities when it comes to students with disabilities and what are the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessionals? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997, Patterson, 2006)
- What does a typical day look like for you?

Skills and Characteristics

- Describe what you believe to be the skills and personal characteristics required for for a paraprofessional's job? (Patterson, 2006)

Challenges

- Describe your challenges in regards to paraprofessionals. (adapted from Patterson, 2006)
- What happens when you have difficulty with a student? (Patterson, 2006)

Support and Supervision

- What assistance do you need to be supported when dealing with children with special needs and paraprofessionals? (Patterson, 2006)
- How are support service decisions made by the team? (Giangreco et al., 1997)

Proximity

- What percentage of time should a paraprofessional spend in close proximity to an assigned student (3ft) ? (adapted from Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Tell me more about that, can you give me an example?

Relationship with paraprofessional

- Finish the sentence... the interaction between you and the paraprofessionals are? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997)
- Does the relationship between paraprofessionals and teachers affect the child? How?
- To what extent do you believe paraprofessionals take on the educating of children with special needs? Is there a balance?
- What do you want to know more about paraprofessionals? (adapted from Patterson, 2006)

General questions

- What are some advantages versus disadvantages of paraprofessionals? (Giangreco et al., 2005)
- What do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses in the school system, (ex: hiring, training, working)? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997)
- What can be done or put in place for potential improvement? Giangreco et al., 1997)

- What do you wish you knew about children with special needs before starting your job? (Patterson, 2006)
- How can paraprofessionals be effectively deployed to support the inclusion of pupils? (Glazzard, 2006)
- What else do you believe is important for me to know? (Patterson, 2006)
- Are there realistic expectations?

Relationship with parents

- Describe your interaction with parents. (adapted from Patterson, 2006)

Training

- How much training to do you have in regards to students with special needs and working with paraprofessionals? (Patterson, 2006)
- Were you trained or did you receive more training after initial employment? (Patterson, 2006)
- Are you provided with continuous training opportunities? (Patterson, 2006)

Appendix F: Administrators

INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

COSENT FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Study Title: Perceptions on paraprofessionals

Researcher: Stacey Waks

Researcher's Contact Information: s_waks@hotmail.com

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Harriet Petrakos

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:

hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

C. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is focus on the perspectives of paraprofessionals in educational settings and how they perceive that their services can be effectively utilized in order to best meet the needs of special needs children in elementary school. The study will examine the perspectives of paraprofessionals and of the different stakeholders (i.e., child, parents, teaching staff) supporting and educating children with special needs in elementary schools.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will be audio recorded.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 30 minutes of your time for the interview.

As a research participant, your responsibilities would be: to be as honest as possible in answering questions, however you are allowed to not answer any question you feel makes you uncomfortable.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include: Feeling uncomfortable when discussing negative aspect of the profession. You may feel the risk of disclosing information because they are afraid or they do not want to get into trouble with their superiors.

You might or might not personally benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits include: reflecting on the role of the paraprofessional and to suggest information based on your experiences to promote improvement for the benefit of all those involved. You may benefit from this research by listening to different perspectives and some ideas may be applied to improve the position of paraprofessionals. They may be able to benefit by feeling that their voices were heard.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: your perspectives of paraprofessionals, the positive and negative views.

By participating, you agree to let the researchers have access to information about your profession. This information will be obtained from an interview.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research, and except as described in this form. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be confidential. That means that it will not be possible to make a link between you and the information you provide.

We will protect the information by being kept in a password-protected computer and a notebook that only the researcher, research assistant and the supervisor of the researcher will have access to.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

In certain situations, we might be legally required to disclose the information that you provide. This includes situations where there is a possibility that the research might reveal a situation such as abuse of the child participants, or if the researcher uncovers any information that presents a threat or serious harm. If this kind of situation arises, we will disclose the information as required by law, despite what is written in this form.

E. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before June 30th, 2016 and the information you have given will be destroyed upon request. You can contact the researcher by phone or email.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

F. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described (including having the conversations audio recorded).

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Administrators information letter

Perceptions on paraprofessionals

To whom it may concern,

I am a graduate student, **under the supervision of Dr. Hariclia Petrakos**, in the Department of Education at Concordia University. I am interested in understanding the perception of all the stakeholders (parents, children, special education educators, mainstream educators, administration and paraprofessionals (aides)) have on paraprofessionals (aides) in a mainstream classroom. This project will focus on paraprofessionals and their perceptions of their job along with perceptions of others involved in order to figure out the best way to utilize paraprofessional support for students with special needs (including learning disabilities, physical disabilities, social and behavioral disabilities and high functioning children with autism.). If there are paraprofessionals in your school, we look forward to hearing from you.

Upon receiving your consent to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will be audio recorded. In total, participating in this study will take approximately 30 minutes of your time for the interview. By participating in this study you will remain anonymous and will be referred to as a participant number. Your name is not required as the information gathered will be confidential, meaning it will not be possible to link you to the information you provide.

A benefit, which may be reasonably expected is the chance to reflect on the role of the paraprofessional and to suggest information based on your experiences to promote improvement for the benefit of all those involved. By participating there is a potential benefit that you can improve your school and improve your school's process of dealing with children with special needs.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me, Stacey waks at 514-475-2953 or **Dr. Hariclia Petrakos at 514-848-2424 ext. 2013.**

Sincerely,

Stacey waks
Project researcher

Hariclia (Harriet) Petrakos, Ph.D.
Faculty Supervisor

Questions for administrators

General questions

- What is your definition of a paraprofessional (otherwise known as integration aide).
- what is your job title?
- How many years of experience do you have?

Interview

Inclusion

- What is your understanding of inclusion? (adapted from Glazzard, 2011)

Roles and Responsibilities

- What are your roles and responsibilities when it comes to students with disabilities and what are the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessionals? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997, Patterson, 2006)
- What does a typical day look like for you?

Skills and Characteristics

- Describe what you believe to be the skills and personal characteristics required for a paraprofessional's job? (Patterson, 2006)

Challenges

- Describe your challenges in regards to paraprofessionals. (adapted from Patterson, 2006)
- What happens when you have difficulty with a student? (Patterson, 2006)

Support and Supervision

- What assistance do you need to be supported when dealing with children with special needs and paraprofessionals? (Patterson, 2006)
- How are support service decisions made by the team? (Giangreco et al., 1997)

Proximity

- What percentage of time should a paraprofessional spend in close proximity to an assigned student (3ft) ? (adapted from Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Tell me more about that, can you give me an example?

Relationship with paraprofessional

- Finish the sentence... the interaction between you and the paraprofessionals are? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997)
- Does the relationship between paraprofessionals and teachers affect the child? How?
- To what extent do you believe paraprofessionals take on the educating of children with special needs? Is there a balance?
- What do you want to know more about paraprofessionals? (adapted from Patterson, 2006)

General Questions

- What are some advantages versus disadvantages of paraprofessionals? (Giangreco et al., 2005)
- What do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses in the school system, (ex: hiring, training, working)? (adapted from Giangreco et al., 1997)
- What can be done or put in place for potential improvement? Giangreco et al., 1997)

- What do you wish you knew about children with special needs before starting your job? (Patterson, 2006)
- How can paraprofessionals be effectively deployed to support the inclusion of pupils? (Glazzard, 2006)
- What else do you believe is important for me to know? (Patterson, 2006)
- Are there realistic expectations?

Relationship with parents

- Describe your interaction with parents. (adapted from Patterson, 2006)

Training

- How much training to do you have in regards to students with special needs and working with paraprofessionals? (Patterson, 2006)
- Were you trained or did you receive more training after initial employment? (Patterson, 2006)
- Are you provided with continuous training opportunities? (Patterson, 2006)

Appendix G: Resources Available

Lester B. Pearson School Board
1925 Brookdale Ave. Dorval,
Quebec Canada
H9P 2Y7
Phone number: 514.422.3000

Counseling West Island
3400 Rue du Marché,
Dollard-des-Ormeaux, QC
H9B 2Y1
Phone number: 514-683-3446

West Island Therapy Center
School Support
14770 Boul de Pierrefonds,
Montréal, QC
H9H 4Y6
Phone number: 514-696-0948
Email: info@westislandtherapycentre.com

CLSC de Pierrefonds
13800, boulevard Gouin Ouest
Pierrefonds, Québec
H8Z 3H6
Phone number: 514 626-2572