

# FOCUS ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

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## Utilizing Paraprofessionals and Volunteers in Special Education

*Jeptha V. Greer*

Paraprofessionals and volunteers have become a viable, integral part of the special education instructional team. Assimilating these support people into school systems has relieved the classroom teacher from certain tasks but also has increased the teacher's responsibility in planning, coordination, and supervision. The most significant improvement has been the ability to better personalize and individualize programs for handicapped children and youth.

Salaried paraprofessionals began to appear in significant numbers in 1965 as a result of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Somewhat later, state and federal legislation mandated that public schools assume responsibility for greater numbers of handicapped children, as well as those having more complex problems. Although the purpose appeared to be related to economies, the most logical and prudent reason for increased use of paraprofessionals was to free the professional from time-consuming but essential details (Smith, Peck, & Weber, 1972). The trend also provided a means to involve the local community — particularly, mothers of school-age children — in educating students.

This year six million unpaid volunteers will be working in the schools (Boyer, 1978). Eight thousand school districts are estimated to be involved — representing over one billion dollars of service. This “epidemic of good will” will be felt greatly in the area of special education.

Paraprofessionals and volunteers have generated a service and an attitude that cannot be dictated or legislated. These positions have provided the training ground for many who ultimately have become teachers, administrators, and other professional support personnel.

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The major difference between paraprofessionals and volunteers is that the former receive a salary and the latter do not. This sometimes means that paraprofessionals have greater responsibilities, must have a specified level of training and/or experience, and are governed by more stringent regulations; but the role of volunteers is equally valued and essential. One consideration that applies in common to both paraprofessionals and volunteers is the need for a study by the local school system, at the outset, to determine the need and the availability of human and material resources. The means for obtaining these data can be through surveys, questionnaires, public information outlets, and public hearings.

## ORGANIZATION

### For Paraprofessionals

School systems should develop board policies regarding paraprofessionals, to include statements on qualifications and duties, selection, evaluation, suspension, tenure, transfer, resignation, reemployment, retirement, emergency and legal leaves, illness, maternity leaves and absences, religious leaves and absences, leaves and absences to attend professional organization meetings, and so forth. Each policy statement should be accompanied by administrative procedures, developed in detail for each. These procedures should contain the rationale

for the policy, the authority which prescribes or directs the policy (i.e., State or Federal law), and a step-by-step plan for executing the policy.

The major consideration is that the overall organization must reflect the paraprofessional as an integral member of the instructional team. Although the child is the focal point, the paraprofessional has a major role and is directly responsible to the teacher for supervision and specific assignments.

### For Volunteers

In some school districts the volunteer program has been organized by the system; in others by citizen groups; sometimes it has been a combination. Because of the many complex logistical facets of the program, it should operate under the board of education with one person designated as having primary responsibility for coordination. This person might assign several volunteers for various specific responsibilities.

Board policies and procedures should govern the selection and function of volunteers in the schools and centers; this is important in giving the service proper status within the school system. The policies and procedures should be broad and not so complex that they discourage participation.

## FINANCE

### For Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals should be compensated on a master salary schedule based on job description, qualifications,

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and experience. The schedule should reflect an initial salary placement and advancement steps to the maximum progression step. After reaching the ceiling of the salary schedule, longevity supplements should be provided, to recognize additional years of service. Such a procedure points out that the vocation of paraprofessional may well be a career position. An example of classification and salary ranges within a master salary schedule is shown in Figure 1.

Position Title	Step and Salary Minimum	Step and Salary Maximum
Teacher Aide	(18) \$6,500	(27) \$ 8,500
Teacher Assistant	(24) \$7,800	(33) \$10,200

#### SAMPLE MASTER SALARY SCHEDULE

Step	Annual Salary
(1)	\$4,000
-----	
(18)	\$6,500
(19)	
(20)	
(21)	
(22)	
(23)	
(24)	\$7,800
(25)	
(26)	
(27)	\$8,500
(28)	
(29)	
(30)	
(31)	
(32)	
(33)	\$10,000
-----	
(65)	\$25,000

Each step reflects an equal percentage of increase.

**Figure 1**

**Classification and Salary Range  
for Paraprofessionals**

An equitable salary schedule should be accompanied by other benefits comparable to those of the professional. These might consist of social security, retirement benefits, a basic insurance plan, including both health and life insurance, and other programs.

An additional consideration that seems to have appeal is the opportunity to choose an eight-, six-, or four-hour work day. This latitude allows persons with other responsibilities to also have a career. The plan has been especially attractive to mothers of pre-school or school-age children who want to spend as much time as possible with them.

Any budgetary consideration must be preceded by very specific planning. Necessary ingredients of such a plan include stated purpose, definitive, measurable goals and objectives, alternatives, resources needed in terms of cost (personnel, equipment, supplies, materials, purchased services, travel, etc.), and evaluation procedures.

#### For Volunteers

Unfortunately, little other than subjective data is available with regard to cost effectiveness in utilizing volunteers. Therefore, funding has been negligible, impotent, and of short duration. Nevertheless, volunteers unquestionably have relieved teachers from noninstructional activities and have provided a viable service to children. The logical conclusion, then, is to plan and develop a quality program with minimal funding and, through measurable evaluative techniques, show the effectiveness of the program, subsequently developing a budget based on this information. The most crucial need is for someone to coordinate the program from a system-wide standpoint. Although this might be an extra-duty activity initially, it should have a high priority when funding becomes available.

#### PERSONNEL CLASSIFICATIONS

##### For Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals often are classified according to two or more categories. For the purpose of this article, two levels — teacher assistant and teacher aide — will be considered.

The teacher assistant is responsible for direct support to the teacher and assumes any portion of the professional's responsibilities so designated under the teacher's supervision. Teacher assistants have limited decision-making authority regulated by their relationships with the teaching professionals and local school system policies.

The teacher aide, on the other hand, takes no independent action and has no decision-making authority. This person performs routine tasks assigned by teachers or other specified personnel.

An example job description for each of these classifications is shown on page 5.

Some specific activities that have been found suitable for teacher assistants are listed below. Many of these also reflect teacher aide responsibilities, but teacher aides generally are responsible for lesser instructional activities and more personal care activities, such as toileting and feeding needs of severely handicapped children.

1. Reinforcing positive behavior.
2. Assisting in large-group instruction.
3. Tutoring individual and small groups of children.
4. Correcting home and seat work activities.
5. Checking standardized and informal tests.
6. Observing and recording behavior.
7. Collecting materials and preparing displays, teaching centers, and similar instructional activities.
8. Assisting children with make-up work as a result of absence from school or class.
9. Assisting students with oral and written communication.
10. Participating in reading and story telling activities.
11. Assisting with hands-on activities.
12. Assisting with fine and gross motor activities, physical development, and lifetime physical and recreational activities.
13. Providing a model with whom the children can identify.
14. Recording written materials for children who have visual or other learning disabilities.
15. Assisting children with extended day activities.
16. Helping children solve personal conflicts with other children.
17. Assisting on instructional field trip activities.
18. Assisting children with self-care activities.
19. Assisting with feeding and toileting activities.
20. Working with audio-visual equipment.
21. Assisting the teacher with noninstructional tasks.
22. Assisting in classroom organization and management.

#### **For Volunteers**

The volunteer has become an integral part of the school family as administrators have attempted to cope with

greater costs of education, the need to assist teachers with the increasingly complex tasks of instruction, and increased interest on the part of the community to become involved. The combined use of paraprofessionals and volunteers has worked hand in glove to improve services for exceptional children.

An example job description of the position of volunteer is given on page 6.

The National School Volunteers Program (Carter & Dapper, 1974) has published four objectives that summarize the duties of volunteers as:

1. Relieving the professional staff of nonteaching duties.
2. Providing needed services to individual children to supplement the work of the classroom teacher.
3. Enriching the experiences of children beyond that normally available in school.
4. Building better understanding of school problems among citizens and stimulating widespread citizen support for public education.

## **RECRUITMENT**

### **For Paraprofessionals**

Recruiting paraprofessionals requires careful planning and execution. Size and location of the school system, along with other factors unique to each situation, provide various incentives for recruitment purposes. For example, recruiting for a school located in a ghetto could strive to locate paraprofessionals who live in that ghetto area, to help bridge the gap between school and community (Shank & McElroy, 1970). Substitute teachers are another valuable source of paraprofessional recruitment.

To be effective, recruitment efforts must be broad, utilizing all facets of public information, as well as word of mouth. Most school systems have a method of recruitment for both professional and auxiliary personnel. Recruitment of paraprofessionals should fit into the total recruitment efforts utilized by the school system; this is usually coordinated through a department of personnel and often through a paid coordinator of paraprofessional services.

### **For Volunteers**

Recruitment for volunteers is quite a different matter. Volunteers must be convinced that their talents are needed and that they will be used effectively. Volunteers

### Example Job Description Teacher Assistant

#### Position Title

Teacher Assistant, Special Education

#### Nature of Position

The special education teacher assistant functions under the direct supervision of the teacher, therapist, or other professional staff member. He/she assists by instructing pupils — individually or in small groups — who are referred to him/her for supplementary special instruction. A general knowledge of developmental and remedial instruction and classroom control and management skills is essential.

#### Qualifications

##### Education:

Completion of one year of post-high-school training from an accredited institution or the completion of an approved paraprofessional training program.

NOTE: Completion of one year of college (45 quarter or 30 semester hours) is often an acceptable alternative.

##### Certification:

Valid State license.

NOTE: If the State does not have a licensing commission, a local certification procedure should be established.

##### Experience:

No previous teaching experience is required, but experience in working with children in an instructional or day care setting is desirable.

#### Duties and Responsibilities

Works with children individually or in small groups under supervision of the teacher; assists in planning for the instructional and training needs of pupils; maintains records necessary to provide evaluation of pupil behavior and performance; assists with utilization of instructional supplies and materials; assists with classroom management; participates in pre- and post-service staff development; maintains an up-to-date license; and performs other specific and general duties assigned by the teacher, therapist, or other professional staff member.

### Example Job Description Teacher Aide

#### Position Title

Teacher Aide, Special Education

#### Nature of Position

The special education teacher aide functions under direct supervision of the teacher, therapist, or other professional staff member. The aide takes no independent action with regard to instruction of pupils. He/she has no decision-making authority but performs routine tasks assigned.

*Continued*

**Qualifications**

## Education:

Completion of nine grades of school or earned ninth grade equivalent.

## Certification:

Valid State license.

NOTE: If the State does not have a licensing commission, a local certification procedure should be established.

## Experience:

Fifty (50) clock hours of pre-service training prior to, during, or within the first 10 months of employment.

**Duties and Responsibilities**

Performs routine tasks assigned by the teacher, therapist, or other professional staff member.

### Example Job Description Volunteer

**Position Title**

Volunteer, Special Education

**Nature of Position**

The special education volunteer functions under direct supervision of the teacher, therapist, or other professional staff member. He/she may work with the paraprofessional in individual or group activities. The volunteer should be warm, able to follow instructions, and have the ability to relate to the children. He/she must be dependable. He/she will allow the teacher to spend additional time on professional duties by offering direct support to the exceptional child.

**Qualifications**

## Education:

Five hours of pre-service orientation; 20 hours of instruction specific to the task; and on-the-job training under the classroom teacher, volunteer coordinator, or designated administrator. Instruction specific to the task might include subject area orientation, training in the use of instructional supplies and equipment, human relations, and child growth and development.

## Certification:

Local system volunteer certificate.

NOTE: This certificate should be awarded after staff development requirements have been completed. The certificate should be of quality printing and presented to the volunteer with due ceremony and recognition.

## Experience:

No previous teaching or paraprofessional experience is required, but experience as a parent, grandparent, or an older sibling would be desirable. Work with scouting, camping, church, or synagogue youth activities should be advantageous. The key is love and feeling for children who are handicapped.

**Duties and Responsibilities**

Works with children individually or in small groups or in conjunction with a paraprofessional, under supervision of a teacher. Specific duties might include checking children's work, assisting on field trips, acting as a "buddy" for a pupil, reinforcing positive behavior, assisting in preparing classroom materials, and using any special talents, such as musical, artistic, etc.

also must be accepted as a part of the total team working in behalf of the handicapped child. Everyone should be looked upon as a potential volunteer, without bias. Because recruitment of volunteers is so important, various resources will be considered independently. Major resources include parents, students, senior citizens, the school community, private organizations, and the business community.

In the past, the province of the school generally was considered as not to be invaded by parents, as was the province of the home off limits to teachers (Smith & Gallup, 1977). In special education, the door was opened enough to encourage parents to volunteer, but not in a position in proximity to their own child. Fortunately, times have changed and, today, parents often are the best source of volunteer recruitment. Involving parents in a more direct way has aided mutual understanding and support. Often, they are effective in their child's own classroom; other times, this is not desirable for either parent or child.

One of the most exciting dimensions of a volunteer program is the use of cross-age student volunteers. This is not a new idea; it has been utilized within the family unit and one-room schoolhouses of the past (Lippit, 1975). Student volunteers afford a large labor force and can be a vital catalyst in future acceptance of the handicapped into the main flow of society.

A cross-age student volunteer program is based on the premise that helping is a two-way street. Although, generally speaking, the older help the younger, peer

tutoring and other forms of peer volunteer work can be most effective. Peer assistance has been especially effective when handicapped persons are assisted by someone near their own age. The major advantage of cross-age volunteer work is that everyone benefits.

The key to a vigorous student volunteer program is the selection and training components. Recruitment is essential and must be well organized and executed. Within my experience, a slide-tape presentation was planned, written, and produced by students in the DeKalb County, Georgia, school system. Simple, short, and localized to the individualized school, it proved to be very effective. The theme of the presentation, "Reach Out," was based on a popular song by the same name. The first 50 or so slides represented a potpourri of scenes depicting the many activities of a busy teenager. The tape featured two outstanding students — a boy and a girl. Examples of situations depicted in the first 50 slides are: general dialogue between individual students and groups of students, academic classroom activities and extracurricular functions, athletic events and social events, student organizations, student-teacher-administrator relationships, activities featuring scenes from the local community and home, hobbies and church or temple activities, community service projects, special talents such as playing the guitar or tearing down an automobile engine, and wholesome boy-girl relationships. The next 30 slides portrayed a specific message — GET INVOLVED! This DeKalb County presentation is outlined below.

Theme: Reach Out

Music: Soft, rock background (slides 1-50)  
The song "Reach out to others" (slides 51-89)  
Appropriate mood music (slides 90-100)

<u>Slide Number</u>	<u>Slide Description</u>	<u>Dialogue</u>
51-60	Ten separate scenes of the two main characters based around dialogue. Scenes feature close-up of key boy and girl student. Subsequent scenes feature one-to-one dialogue depicting concern and compassion.	Days have never been so busy or moments so precious as they are now. It seems you haven't a minute to spare and yet that's exactly what we are asking you to do — to spare a minute and give us a little of your time. We'll invest it in human relationships that will pay dividends you never dreamed of. Don't be surprised if this investment changes your life forever.
61	Student with young child on a one-to-one basis.	Here's the deal . . . Be willing to reach out and form a person-to-person relationship...
62	Student with older pupil on a one-to-one basis.	with another student who has a great need for a friend.

*Continued*

<u>Slide Number</u>	<u>Slide Description</u>	<u>Dialogue</u>
63	Student in discussion with another student in a crowded hallway.	This student could be one who is behind in math or reading . . .
64	Student tutoring another in a media center setting.	He could be one who needs help in the library . . .
65	Student welcoming another in front of the school building.	or a new student in your school . . .
66	Student in a one-to-one dialogue with another pupil.	or maybe just a kid who needs a friend.
67	Student assisting another pupil using a braille book or in mobility training.	On the other hand, he could be blind . . .
68	Student assisting another pupil in total communication or a tutorial situation.	he could be deaf . . .
69	Student working with a small group of pupils in a learning center.	or he could have special learning disabilities.
70	Student in dialogue with a pupil of a similar age.	He could be your age . . .
71	Student in dialogue with pupil obviously younger.	or he could be younger.
72	Student in an activity with own race.	He could be your color . . .
73	Student in an activity with a pupil of another race.	or he could be another.
74	Student in an activity with someone of the same sex.	He could be your sex . . .
75	Student in an activity with someone of opposite sex.	or he could be of the other sex.
76	Student in a psychomotor type activity with a pupil who is handicapped.	He will be half of a rewarding relationship.
77	Student laughing or otherwise reacting to the pupil being assisted.	You will be the other half.
78	Close-up shot of student.	We hope you're interested.
79	Close-up of hands . . . holding hands or shaking hands.	If you join us, we promise you dividends that are paid daily in a variety of ways . . . a million dollar smile,
80	Close-up shot of student.	a handful of love,
81	Close-up of an expressive reaction of a pupil who is handicapped.	an ego trip like you've never taken before,
82	Student in dialogue with a pupil close to his/her own age.	a gold-plated friendship,
83	Same as slide 82 but much closer angle.	and a certain feeling that money can't buy.
84	Cartoon sketch of volunteer coordination or name of coordination organizations; e.g., service club, honor society, etc., and telephone number contact.	All you have to do to take advantage of our fabulous offer is to call _____ and tell how you'd like to reach out. They will call you back immediately. That's not a promise — it's a guarantee.
85	Close-up of a clock or watch.	Remember, all we want is your time.
86	Student in meditation.	If you've been wasting it, or killing it, or biding it, or watching it fly, or spending it, STOP.
87	Traffic light on red, or stop sign.	Leave it to us.
88	Large group of students — males and females, multi-ethnic, all sizes.	

<u>Slide Number</u>	<u>Slide Description</u>	<u>Dialogue</u>
89	Student tutoring a pupil with a clock in the background.	We can accomplish miracles with borrowed time.
90-100	Eleven separate close-up scenes of happy facial expressions of various children who are handicapped.	No dialogue . . . appropriate mood music.

It has been reported that, for the most part, students prefer to teach children younger than themselves and to be taught by older students, prefer same-sex situations to opposite-sex situations; and that the volunteer student does not like to be a part of the evaluation of the pupil being assisted (Guralnick, 1978). Although I cannot offer evidence to support or refute this statement, peer interaction unquestionably is a powerful educational tool. A student volunteer program can be beneficial to all concerned, and the availability of human resources is virtually untapped.

Another exciting source of volunteers is in the ranks of the "Gray Panthers," comprised of senior citizens. Although the DeKalb County school system has found grandparents to be a primary source of volunteers among senior citizens, organized civic, church, and business groups often seek opportunities to help place older people in volunteer situations. Senior citizens' homes many times provide a reach-out component for those interested in working with children and youth.

Other sources of volunteers include the school community (in addition to parents directly involved with the school); religious and civic organizations; and the business community. Military organizations sometimes provide an excellent reach-out component, as do sorority/fraternity groups.

## APPLICATION

The next important step, which flows directly from recruitment, is the application procedure; it serves to provide the criteria from which the applicant will be employed, as well as a record of personal information. Applications, for both paraprofessionals and volunteers, should be accompanied by a formal interview. The difference is that the paraprofessional is interviewed and placed through the formal personnel procedure, whereas the volunteer normally is interviewed and placed through a central volunteer coordinator or at the local school or special center.

### For Paraprofessionals

The application form should vary little from that of the professional employee of the school system. General information such as name, social security number, present and permanent address, and telephone number are standard. The date available for employment also is important, as are educational and professional training, employment record, military service, and reason for desiring employment. Additional information including illness or injury during previous employment, previous placement on probation or suspension in violation of Federal, State, county, or municipal law, and similar considerations are applicable to individual situations. The length of time an applicant anticipates working is important in planning. Also, references should be listed, and a formal procedure followed for thoroughly checking them. The applicant should be interviewed by a professional personnel counselor but placed by instructional staff members. Placement should be based primarily on the competencies and desires of the applicant and the need of the local school or special center.

The application procedure absolutely must not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, religion, or national origin. Equally important, "no qualified handicapped person shall, on the basis of handicap, be subjected to discrimination in employment. . . ."

### For Volunteers

Traditionally, a formal application procedure for volunteers has not been considered necessary, but I suggest that one be developed, to better meet the needs of both the school and the volunteer. Information collected could include education, experience, interests, and other pertinent data. Most of the information described in the paraprofessional application might be considered for the volunteer. A personal interview is essential, and references are desirable.

For purposes of affirmative action efforts, information with regard to race, national origin, and religion often is requested on application forms. Questions regarding

handicaps are being asked for similar reasons. This information is not used to discriminate, and that point should be noted to applicants.

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT

### For Paraprofessionals

Little has been done systematically in the area of staff development for special education paraprofessionals

(Gartner, Riessman, & Jackson, 1977). This is unfortunate in that pre-service, in-service, and post-service education efforts are essential to an effective paraprofessional program.

Following is a suggested agenda in the area of pre-service education for paraprofessionals. From such an agenda, specifics can be developed locally. This agenda also can serve as a basis for in-service and post-service education. The outline is broad and should be considered only as a general guideline.

## PRE-SERVICE EDUCATION AGENDA

(5-day Workshop)

Theme: Paraprofessional Pre-service Workshop  
Participants: Paraprofessionals

### First day

- Objectives:
1. Overview — Special Education
  2. Defining the role of the paraprofessional
- 8:30 - 9:30      Opening session — Orientation to workshop
- 9:30 - 11:00    Discussion work groups  
Paraprofessionals, by assigned area of exceptionality, meet with appropriate coordinator. Task is to gain specific knowledge regarding area of exceptionality to which the paraprofessional has been assigned.
- 11:00 - 11:45   Summary session  
Each group presents any common concerns that might affect the entire group.
- 1:00 - 4:00      Role of the paraprofessional  
Paraprofessionals participate in small group discussion regarding *duties and responsibilities*.
- 4:00 - 4:45      Summary session  
Coordinators present common concerns brought up in the previous session.

### Second Day

- Objectives:
1. Defining the role of the paraprofessional (continued)
  2. Introducing the paraprofessional's responsibilities
- 8:30 - 10:00    Role of the paraprofessional (continued)  
Small group discussion regarding policies and procedures; job ethics; do's and don'ts; the instructional team; relationship with students, parents, teachers, and administrators.
- 10:00 - 12:00   Introduction to classroom responsibilities  
Small group discussion regarding behavioral areas; academic areas; child growth and development; lesson planning; classroom management.
- 1:00 - 4:00      Visitation to assigned schools or special centers  
Individuals visit the sites where they are to be assigned, for a general orientation and visits with personnel.

*Continued*

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### Third Day

Objectives:	1. Information session
	2. Assigning buddies
8:30 - 12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General session</li> <li>Personnel matters: licensing</li> <li style="padding-left: 2em;">benefits</li> <li style="padding-left: 2em;">school calendar</li> <li>Payroll</li> <li>Administrative considerations</li> <li>School-community relations</li> <li>In-house communications</li> </ul>
1:00 - 3:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assigning buddies</li> <li>Each paraprofessional is assigned an experienced paraprofessional buddy for a do's and don'ts session.</li> </ul>
3:00 - 4:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summary session</li> <li>Paraprofessionals share concerns of interest to the entire group.</li> </ul>

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### Fourth Day

Objectives:	1. Discussing inter-agency cooperation
	2. Identifying community resources
8:30 - 9:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General session</li> <li>Inter-agency cooperation</li> </ul>
9:30 - 12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carousel (round-robin) sessions</li> <li>Small group sessions conducted by representatives of various community allied agencies; e.g., human resources, natural resources, family and children's services, vocational rehabilitation, etc. Paraprofessionals rotate in small groups until all agencies have been covered.</li> </ul>
1:00 - 4:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visitation to selected community allied agencies</li> </ul>

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### Fifth Day

Objectives:	1. Discussing school system support services
	2. Introducing simulation activities
	3. Reporting to assigned classroom stations
8:30 - 9:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General session</li> <li>Overview of support services available to children in special education; e.g., physical, occupational, art, music, and speech therapies, psychological services, social work services, etc.</li> </ul>
9:30 - 12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simulation activities</li> <li>Simulations of typical classroom situations that the paraprofessionals might encounter.</li> </ul>
1:00 - 4:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reporting to assigned school or center</li> </ul>

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The above outlined staff development program is by no means all-inclusive. Its purpose is to stimulate thought and offer ideas, especially for pre-service programs. In-service education programs likewise should be planned meticulously with similar topics of interest and concern; supervised on-the-job training should be an important part of the in-service phase. Post-service education is more mechanical and should insure organized closing

of the school year and preparation for opening of the next.

An in-service record should be maintained by the paraprofessional to verify completion of a prescribed program of staff development. The following example is a document utilized by the DeKalb County, Georgia, school system.

IN-SERVICE RECORD FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Area \_\_\_\_\_

A. Returning Paraprofessionals

In-service Record (50 hours every 3 years)

Teacher's Certificate: Type \_\_\_\_\_

Certification # \_\_\_\_\_ Valid Date \_\_\_\_\_

Paraprofessional License # \_\_\_\_\_ Valid Date \_\_\_\_\_

Section A

	<u>Date</u>	<u>Hours</u>	<u>Verified</u>
Countywide In-service	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Local In-service	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____

A record of in-service must be submitted at the end of each school year.

B. Paraprofessionals New to DeKalb County

- I. Paraprofessionals holding a valid Teacher's Certificate and/or Paraprofessional License. List Certificate/License data under Section A (above).

In-service Record (50 hours every 3 years).

Complete Section A the same as a returning paraprofessional.

- II. Paraprofessionals with 90 quarter hours or more of college credit. This waives pre-service requirement. Official transcripts must be on file.

In-service Record (50 hours every 3 years to renew license).

Complete Section A the same as a returning paraprofessional by February 1.

- III. Paraprofessionals having completed the approved Technical School program. This waives pre-service requirement. Transcripts must be on file.

In-service Record (50 hours every 3 years to renew license).

Complete Section A the same as a returning paraprofessional by February 1.

- IV. Paraprofessionals with less than 90 quarter hours of college credit.

In-service Record (50 hours by February 1 to obtain license; 50 hours every three years to renew license).

Complete the following in-service record:

In-service Record

	<u>Date(s)</u>	<u>Hours</u>	<u>Verified</u>
Pre-service	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Practicum	_____	_____	_____
Systemwide In-service	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Local In-service	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____

### For Volunteers

Staff development efforts on behalf of volunteers should be thoroughly thought out, prepared, and presented. Probably the best initial approach is to assure prospective volunteers that they have or can develop the ability to communicate with children and youth who are handicapped. This seems to be considerably easier for student volunteers, probably because they tend to have fewer inhibitions and hangups regarding the handicapped.

Capitalizing on particular vocations and interests of adult volunteers helps them feel more secure and at ease. In-service education often is on a one-to-one basis because the duties vary so widely. For example, a senior citizen may come in and simply rock a severely handicapped pre-schooler or merely act as a grandfather or grandmother figure — necessary and valuable services. Another volunteer might conduct art lessons or tutor a child in an academic area.

A student might act as a buddy to a child or as an interpreter in the area of total communication for the hearing impaired, for example. Student volunteers need staff development training, and it can be handled on a more formal, organized basis than that of experienced adults. The training can be presented through school service organizations, honor societies, or special interest groups. In some cases, it has been offered through formal course work; this can be in conjunction with elective courses in career education or the humanities. Or it can be a non-credit course. One of the most successful means used by this writer has been the Saturday workshop, often in conjunction with a weekend field trip to a camp for the handicapped, a special school, a hospital, or other such specialized facility. Local fast-food establishments have been cooperative and enthusiastic in supporting such efforts. The objective is to allow the students to be with the handicapped initially in a neutral setting, after which subsequent training efforts become more meaningful and interesting.

A report which was the result of field studies (Education for All Handicapped Children: Conflict and Challenge, 1977), found that no single factor is more important to successful implementation of PL 94-142 than appropriate staff development efforts for all personnel having key roles in the education of handicapped children and youth.

### COORDINATION

Administration and supervision of the paraprofessional and volunteer program cannot be left to chance.

The program must be structured as thoroughly as is the training for professional personnel.

Administration handled at a central office level is desirable, to prevent duplication of efforts or offering unnecessary services. Successful coordination relies upon maximum communication. Most often this is accomplished through handbooks, newsletters, personal messages, recognition procedures, and, best of all, personal contact. Another major factor is the wise assignment of paraprofessionals and volunteers. The teacher with whom the paraprofessional or volunteer will be placed should share in the placement decision. A compatible team is essential. Therefore, placement should be based not only upon need and convenience, but upon the paraprofessional's or volunteer's becoming a part of a total instructional team.

### EVALUATION AND FOLLOWUP

#### For Paraprofessionals

Evaluation of a paraprofessional should be twofold: 1) evaluation conducted by the appropriate administrator-teacher team members, and 2) a self-evaluation by the paraprofessional. The criteria should be based on the goals and objectives of the paraprofessional program. Evaluation should be an ongoing process, not left to a midyear or end-of-year assessment. Sometimes instructional support personnel such as consultants or coordinators might be called in to assist with the evaluation process. A written evaluation, accompanied by verbal interpretation, is the most successful format. This allows the process to become instructional and facilitates communication.

A written evaluation should be based upon a measurement system that reflects at least "satisfactory" and "needs improvement" components. Each item evaluated should be accompanied by a brief written comment. Factors could include attendance, punctuality, personal appearance, initiative, dependability, reaction to criticism, ability to work with supervising teacher, therapist, or other professional, cooperation, technical skills, poise, stability, and attitude. Space should be available for additional general comments. The evaluation form should provide for signatures of both evaluator and paraprofessional. The paraprofessional also should have the opportunity to offer his or her written reaction along with the signature. The paraprofessional should be provided a copy of the written evaluation.

Self-evaluation is an equally effective evaluative process. An instrument covering personality and philosophy, classroom procedures, and attitudes should be developed to assist paraprofessionals in looking at their own performance and competencies. The instrument should be nonthreatening, but objective enough to reveal individual strengths and weaknesses.

### For Volunteers

Rather than considering evaluation of individual volunteers, program evaluation and followup should be pursued. The primary objective of such evaluation is to see if program goals are being met. Ideally, evaluators of the program should be the school systemwide special education administration, director or principal of the local school or special center, volunteer coordinator, teacher, therapist or other classroom professional, the students, and the volunteer. Although this is not practical, certain evaluative factors such as volunteer utilization, pupil-volunteer ratio, pupil improvement, and staff development activities should be evaluated.

The whole idea behind an evaluation and followup program is to improve the existing program and to create any changes that might enhance the program.

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## CLASSROOM FORUM

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**The volunteers in our school system have participated in several workshops covering the various categories of special education students we serve through both resource and self-contained programs. Although these workshops were generally beneficial to our overall program, several of the volunteers are now very label conscious. How can we tactfully encourage them to look beyond categorical labels when working with the youngsters?**

The pros and cons of using specific labels for exceptional children has been debated heatedly for the past several decades. On the positive side, the main emphasis has been on obtaining financial aid for specific categories of handicapped individuals. Legislators have been more prone to allocate funds when they have been told the money will go for the blind, or deaf, or other incapacitating condition. Until recently, these same categories also were used to segregate children in public school programs and to determine the major disability area in which the special education teacher might wish to pursue for degree work at the university.

Consequently, funds and programs were developed for children whose characteristics fell within the guidelines determined by these labels. As these programs developed and teaching techniques became more sophisticated, it was discovered that certain children did not meet all the characteristics stipulated by the guidelines. Research contradicted the belief that all exceptional children could function better in categorical settings rather than in regular classrooms. Self-contained classrooms did not always meet the social needs of the mildly handicapped children, for example. And a controversy arose which resulted in implementation of resource rooms in most school systems. Mildly handicapped youngsters were placed in regular classrooms for most of the school day, with the resource rooms serving as supplemental tutorial services.

Categorical labels are still used to describe children whose physical or mental abilities deviate from the norm,

even when they are mainstreamed through use of resource rooms and other special services. Most of these labels are negative-sounding descriptions of the handicapping condition, which overlook the fact of a living, breathing, feeling child behind each label. This truth — that regardless of the label, the child is still a child — has become secondary in the minds of many adults. Few exceptional children are described in positive terms that deemphasize the label used for categorizing the handicapping condition, despite the push to do so on a national basis.

Where does this leave the child who has been so labeled? It usually guarantees a categorical label throughout the academic life. Children who have been told they are retarded may feel they cannot and should not be expected to achieve success in the academic areas, and may use this as an excuse for not even attempting specific assignments that require knowledge of skills they think they may not have. The self-fulfilling prophecy syndrome becomes evident here — that is, if children believe they cannot achieve, they will not achieve; as they view themselves, so will they be. If Sandy has been told that she is a behavior problem, she will do her best to live up to that expectation, either consciously or subconsciously. In effect, the labelee becomes what the labeler dictates through use of categorical descriptions which all but mandate specific behavioral expectations.

A case in point is a child who was labeled as having a learning disability while residing within the same school district for the first four years of school. He was in a resource room program for two hours every day for three years, although his achievement level was never below grade placement and he never had repeated a grade. At the age of eleven, the family moved to another state, where placement in the resource room was determined by an achievement level two years below grade placement. Prior to his move, his original school system removed all records in his folder indicating any type of special placement or resource room activities. He entered fifth grade in the new state of residence without any label; as a result, he has been doing quite well in the regular classroom for two years.

One might go so far as to say that this child was miraculously “cured” merely by moving to another state. Or, perhaps he “outgrew” his disability. But the bare facts are that the label did not follow him, and neither did the characteristics of that label.

### *One further comment . . .*

A label should tell you something about whatever is being labeled. If it is a can of vegetables, the label should give the primary ingredients. Categorical labels in special education, however, tell very little about the child as an individual, although they might indicate general areas of deficiency within a group of similarly labeled children.

Other labels might tell you basically the same thing without being so disability oriented, however. Why not use, for example, “well done”, “medium”, and “rare” as the three major categories for exceptional learners? These three categories then could be subdivided into five behavioral characteristics that special education students seem to exhibit. The first of these might be the FLK (Funny Looking Kid). This category would take into consideration all *physical* characteristics that would be considered “abnormal” or “unusual.” Next would be the FAK (Funny Acting Kid). This group would include all children with unusual *behaviors* of any kind, and the behaviors would not have to be so specific as to require separate labels. The WATER youngster Wanders Around The Entire Room. Any child who doesn’t remain in his or her seat at all times would be eligible for placement within this group. BAD kids Bother And Destroy. Is any further explanation needed? Finally, GOOD kids Give Outstanding Output On Demand. Again, little explanation is needed — the youngsters perform beautifully at all times and are a joy to teach.

In all seriousness, are these satirical labels any worse than those currently used to describe exceptional children? Besides, it may be easier to identify a WATER kid than an LD in most instances because the label specifically describes outward, obvious behavior. But, just like our current labels, these five labels give no indication as to the true severity, learning ability, or differences within any one category. To do this, the labels must be removed altogether, and children must be viewed for what they are: individuals.

*The labels proposed here originally appeared in Special Education and the Classroom Teacher, by Beverly L. Dexter (Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas, 1977).*