A 6-Pack by Any Other Name

The Special Education teachers in Carbon County felt as though many of their more capable students with learning disabilities and behavior disorders were falling through the cracks in their regular education program. Frustrated special education teachers had a hard time helping them over academic hurdles in their history or science classes. The resource teacher didn’t always know what was being presented in science or history class or what needed to be accomplished or how to accomplish it. Special Education teachers were able to help the students within the confines of the resource room, but the skills seemed to be lost when they ventured out into the “real world.”

So the servicing pattern of the “6-pack” program was formulated. Oh, by the way “6-pack” means 6 students at a time with an aide. Six students in each grade and each are identified according to the LD or BD guidelines. As much as possible, they are scheduled in the same classes and move as a group. An aide tracks these students and then meets with them as a group one hour a day.

The aide attends classes with her group. Ideally, the aide becomes a classroom aide, giving some help to everyone in the class along with the teacher. This way the 6-pack students are not singled out in their regular class. Another benefit is that the aide hears the same instruction, the assignments given, and knows what the homework is and when the tests will be, so that she is not always trying to second guess the teacher. Then when these 6-pack students and aide meet for one period each day, she can reinforce what went on in the classroom. (This is done under the direction of the Resource teacher).

It’s not just a study hour. Skills are taught and reinforced, such as organization and study skills, which these students don’t always have. In our particular program at Helper Jr. High, each student is given a planner, (first as a gift, then at a cost of $2). To earn a grade in 6-pack, the student is required to come to 6-pack prepared with planner completed, class materials and homework assignments that need to be worked on, a parent signature in the planner from the previous night and then use the 6-pack hour wisely.

Utah State University’s Videodisk Paraeducator Curriculum Project

Recognizing the pressing need for a standardized, competency-based training program for paraeducators in special education, the Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services is funding a four-year project in the Department of Special Education at the Utah State University to develop a videodisk-assisted paraeducator training program. The goal of the Paraeducator Curriculum Project is to provide paraeducators with the skills they need to be more effective members of the child study team.

To reach this goal, the project team conducted a survey of national experts, special education teachers, and paraeducators in order to identify specific paraeducator competencies. Based on the survey results (discussed in an article in this edition), the team identified topics comprising 5 units, with 6 lessons in each unit, on 2 videodisks. The first disc will include units 1-3: Students with Disabilities in Regular and Special Education, Legal and Ethical Issues, and Interpersonal Skills. The second disc will contain units 4 and 5: Strengthening Behavior, and Strengthening Skills with Effective Instruction. The curriculum units are currently being developed and evaluated in selected Utah school districts. The cycle of revision, field-testing, and formative evaluation will continue until the program is ready for final review and testing on a national scale.

A videodisk-assisted format was chosen as the training medium for several reasons. A level 1 videodisk is easy to use in both group and individualized training. Because the material can be accessed quickly, there is little down-time within the training session. Using comprehensive print material in conjunction with the videodisk provides flexibility. The objective is to provide a comprehensive training package which can be used as a stand-alone program to orient beginning paraeducators; to expand the skills of experienced paraeducators; or to serve as a foundation for LEAs or SEAs desiring to tailor training sessions to meet local or state criteria for career advancement or certification requirements.

Initial Field-Test Results

During September, October, and November, 1992, pilot and field tests were conducted in Logan, Cache, and Jordan School Districts. The Logan and Cache Districts piloted tested Unit 4: Strengthening Behavior, while Jordan District piloted and field-tested Unit 5: Strengthening Skills with Effective Instruction.

Eleven Chapter I paraeducators from the Logan and Cache School Districts participated in the Unit 4 pilot test. Two Chapter I paraeducator supervisors (Janet

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Lignugaris/Kraft and Becky Wadsworth) conducted training for their paraeducators in behavior management techniques and intervention strategies. During the training, the paraeducators used curriculum materials to specify and define behaviors, collect baseline data, and develop behavioral interventions to increase appropriate behavior. The paraeducators were observed in their classrooms by the facilitators and given feedback on their performance. Based on the evaluations of the training and materials, the paraeducators indicated the unit materials increased their awareness of pupil behavior, demonstrated ways to increase appropriate behavior, and provided a foundation for future training.

In the Jordan School District, 34 paraeducators took part in the pilot testing of Unit 5: Strengthening Skills with Effective Instruction. Two Jordan School District members, (Cynthia Burchett and Gordon Babb) were the facilitators for this unit. Based on the evaluation results of the pilot test, revisions were made to the trainee’s workbook and the facilitator’s manual. In addition, visual materials were developed to help supplement the video material.

After the pilot test, 12 Jordan special education paraeducators took part in the Unit 5 field test. As part of the field test, the paraeducators provided detailed information about their daily activities, previous training, and their perceptions of what they needed to more effectively carry out their roles. These paraeducators participated in 2-hour training sessions, which covered all of the material in Unit 5. The facilitators conducted field-based observations to provide the paraeducators feedback on their demonstrations of the skills acquired through the training.

The feedback from the paraeducators and the facilitators indicated that the training material increased their awareness of students’ instructional needs, provided a conceptual framework for understanding instructional strategies, and gave them new information and techniques to use in the classroom. In addition, many of the participants felt the workbook accompanying the training package was an excellent resource for future reference.

Conclusion:
The role and responsibilities of paraeducators have advanced to the stage where they are direct service providers for many pupils with special needs. Working under the supervision of special education teachers, and in conjunction with service outlined in individual educational programs, paraeducators have become invaluable resources in the classroom. As fiscal constraints and special needs populations grow, educational agencies will turn to paraeducators to meet the increasing demands.

In order to ensure a quality education for children with special needs, paraeducators must have the skills to provide quality services. In addition, in order to retain trained, experienced paraeducators, districts and states must provide opportunities for career advancement and job security. Training programs should be developed which meet the needs of paraeducators in providing services and assist districts and states in aligning training with career advancement. The Paraeducator Curriculum Project addresses these issues through a competency-based package that targets identified skills in a user-friendly format, with supervised field-based experiences.

“Share Your Experience”

We are developing a video-assisted training curriculum for paraprofessional educators working in public school classrooms. We are interested in stories from students who have disabilities. One of the units in this curriculum will address personal communication between the teacher and the paraprofessional educator. We would like to invite you to share your experiences and those related to us by others. The stories from teachers and paraprofessionals that we will collect will be used to illustrate the importance of effective communication in classrooms when teachers and paraprofessionals work together in classrooms.

To make it fun, we will pay $25.00 for any example used in the final curriculum. The criteria for judging will include the relevance of the anecdote, the clarity and impact with which the story makes its point, and the breadth of its applicability to paraprofessional educators in public schools.

Thanks in advance for your help.

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“Results of paraeducator general course”

At times, paraeducators are inclined to assume that job descriptions are too vague to be defined. Teachers perform paraeducator-like functions in the classroom, and paraeducators sometimes do clerical work. It is essential that paraeducators have a clearly defined role in the classroom. A general course that addresses these issues is a necessity. A paraeducator curriculum will provide a comprehensive, competency-based training program for paraeducators. (Gassman, 1997).