Supporting Paraprofessionals
Growing Our Own

Paraeducator-to-Teacher: Toward Better Practice in Teacher Certification Programs

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Why paraeducators?

**Teacher shortage** – Paraeducator population can help fill the need for qualified teachers locally

**Prior experience** - Paras are already acculturated to the school environment, plus they tend to represent a more diverse demographic (Genzuk, 1998)
Why study paraeducators?

1. **Broaden the national research** on recruiting and retaining paraeducators as university students and, ultimately, as certified teachers (Platt & Likins, 2005).

2. **Inform the planning process** for future paraeducator-to-teacher certification programs (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996) served by USU.
The rise of paraeducators in public schools

- 1950s: Baby boomers increase student population; paras hired as clerical aides
- 1965+: Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) creates Title I, Head Start, & Title VII (American Indian education) — paras hired as instructional aides
- ESEA Bilingual & Migrant Education funding — districts hire paras proportional to # of bilingual students
- 1975: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) — more paras hired & trained for working with special needs children
Paraeducator-to-Teacher History

• 1953: Ford Foundation funds recruitment & training program for auxiliary personnel (middle class, college-educated women)

• 1967: Education Professional Development Act provides seed funds:
  - Teacher Corps — community service for college grads during Vietnam War era
  - Career Opportunities Program (TOPS) — minority recruitment & college education for teacher certification
Paraeducator-to-Teacher History

- 1989: Teaching Opportunities for Paraprofessionals (TOP) established in CT—model of para-to-teacher program shifts from federal (like COP) to state programs

- 1995: First national symposium for “Paraeducator Pathways into Teaching” (see clearinghouse at http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/Clearinghouse.html)

- Example of paraeducator resources in Utah, including state standards: http://www.utahparas.org
Para-to-Teacher Program Goals

- Maintain the integrity of USU’s teacher education programs
- Tap the diverse and often extensive experience of paraeducators in local schools (Platt & Likins, 2005)
- Accommodate the workloads of paraeducators when considering course loads, times, availability, and practicums (Platt & Likins, 2005)
Para-to-Teacher Program

Program choices for students:

- ELED
- Spec Education/ELED dual major
- Secondary Education
Program development hurdles

- Community Alignments:
  - Support from community stakeholders
  - Partnerships with local school districts
    - Administrative support
    - Guarantee of same-level job if hiatus is needed for student teaching
Program development hurdles

• Department & University Alignments:
  • Advising--high needs!
  • Writing Exam and Math placement
  • Partnering with other departments
  • Delivery F2F, broadcast, & online: program alignment for RCDE students
Same program; different needs

Non-para students primarily need acculturation experiences in schools

Paraeducators need professional release time to get broader & richer perspectives
- To prepare and plan with a mentor teacher
- To gain experience teaching in guided situations
Methodology:
Mixed-method research.

Surveys (Likert scale) : quantitative data
Comprehensive Interviews : qualitative data
Methodology: Mixed-method research

**Quantitative** data gathered from first of two surveys, with 63% response rate (25/40) from three cohorts:

- Pre-program survey
- Post-program survey
Methodology:
Mixed-method research

Qualitative data gathered from interviews with participants at end of first year (first cohort)

- Open-ended questions
- Drawn from survey items
- Lived experience of paras prior to, during, and after program
## Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Cohort 1* 4/7</th>
<th>Cohort 2 12/22</th>
<th>Cohort 3 9/15</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Paras</td>
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</table>

* Students in Cohort 1- Uintah Basin only
Paraeducator participants: 11

- Years as Paraeducator: Average 7 years, range 5 to 10 years
- Work loads: Part-time to Full-time
- Roles: Reading Tutors, Special Education Aides, plus one each: Librarian, Secretary, Bus Driver
**Descriptive Statistics**

*Non-para* student participants: 14

- **Roles:** Food Services, Secretaries, Homemakers, other

- **Work loads outside the home:** none more than part-time
Expectancy-Value Theory:

Value and expectancy multiply rather than add (Shah & Higgins, 1997)

- **Expectancy**
  The extent to which the learner expects success in the learning

- **Value**
  The value of the learning to the learner

= **Motivation**
Expectancy x Value Data Distribution

Histogram

Mean = 20.22
Std. Dev. = 2.525
N = 25

Frequency

Motivation

12.50 15.00 17.50 20.00 22.50 25.00
Paraeducator participants: 11 (44%)
• Mean Motivation Ratings (Expectancy x Value): 20.87

Non-para student participants: 14 (66%)
• Mean Motivation Ratings (Expectancy x Value): 19.71
Expectancy x Value = Motivation

- No statistical significance between traditional students and paraeducators

**BUT**

- Trending towards the hypothesis:
  Paraeducator motivation will be higher than that of traditional students in teacher education programs.
Patterns in the item analysis and in the one-way ANOVA showed that:

Cohorts with higher percentages of paraeducators report higher mean expectancies than traditional students, e.g.,

- Future administrative evaluations
- Future teacher effectiveness
- Ability to arrange their schedules for academic success
Themes in qualitative data

- Academic
- Administrative
- Personal
- Financial
Cohort 1 Interview Data: Academic support

**Academic support is essential**

- **Advisors were key to paraeducator satisfaction in program (loss of momentum after advisors leave)**

- **Advice:** “Make sure all applicants have prerequisites completed BEFORE the program starts because it’s so much easier to just focus on program requirements and not try to do overloads.”

- **Advice:** You have to be proactive: “Help was there if I needed it.”
Administrative support is essential (Professional mentors: principals, assistant superintendents, and experienced classroom teachers)

• “The support systems at USU and at work [schools] accelerated my progress but didn’t open a new opportunity."

• Advice: “Paras would be better able to go through the program if their principals understood the certification process at USU.”
Cohort 1 Interview Data: Personal support

Personal support of family & friends is essential

- “Make sure you have stable support systems before you enter this program!”
- “Family & friends have to be behind you, otherwise the time commitment of going to school and being a paraeducator won’t work.”
- “Your kids have to have an understanding that mom can’t cook dinner every night or attend every game.”
Cohort 1 Interview Data:
Financial support

Financial assistance is essential (local scholarships & grants, plus student loans)

• None of the participants could have attended school in Logan

• No paras could have completed the teaching degree as rapidly without the coordination of the paraeducator program.

• “The support systems at USU and at work [schools] accelerated my progress but didn’t open a new opportunity.”
Cohort 1 Interview Data: Program cohorts

- “You can’t pick your cohort, but having a cohort that gets along makes so much difference. The drama is exacerbated because the same people are in every class.”

- Cohorts should participate in team-building skills

- **Advice:** “Students need to get involved in threaded discussions online in order to interact with their cohort members. In addition, the cohort should meet together a few times per semester.”
"Being a para helps you feel more knowledgeable and comfortable working at a school. In our cohort I noticed that the ‘traditional’ students had more apprehension and idealism than the paras in the program…”

“Paras have a better sense of what students can do or should do.”
Internet References

- Paraeducator Pathways into Teaching” clearinghouse
  http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/Clearinghouse.html

- State of Utah paraeducator information site:
  http://www.utahparas.org

- USU School of Teacher Education & Leadership
  http://www.teal.usu.edu

- La: ura.foley@usu.edu

- vini.exton@usu.edu
References


References

