"I do as much as any teacher"-

Role Conflict Among Paraeducators in Private Special Education Schools

by

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Abstract

It is estimated that there are 1 million paraeducators working directly with children in public and private schools in the U.S. Other titles for paraeducators include teacher aide, teaching assistant, paraprofessional, 1:1, aide, and educational assistant. Responsibilities include instructional support, personal hygiene, motor development, self-help skill development, behavior management, and clerical support. Despite this group's critical presence within schools, little research has been conducted to determine the extent that paraeducators experience job satisfaction, role conflict and role ambiguity. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding about role conflict from 419 paraeducators working in 12 private special education schools in New York State. Data was collected using Rizzo, House and Lirtzman's Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale, demographic questions, and an open-ended, narrative item. Multiple regression analysis determined if role ambiguity and/or demographics of age, gender, education, relevant experience, length of time in the position, plans to become a teacher, and status as a certified teacher or teaching assistant were statistically significant predictors of role conflict. Findings include five statistically significant predictor variables: role ambiguity, gender, age range of 50 years and older, experience of 5-9 years working with children who have disabilities, and seniority in one's current position. Qualitative data from 100 of the respondents yielded strong negative sentiment toward remuneration, coupled with strong expressions of commitment, concern, and deep affection for the students. The study concludes with recommendations to decrease role conflict and role ambiguity among paraeducators in private special education schools.

Keywords: paraeducator, role ambiguity, role conflict, job satisfaction

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY AND CONCERNS OF PARAEDUCATORS

A billboard along a New York highway advertising a particular health insurance plan proclaims, "The best employee benefit is a happy employee." The message is that the employee who is content enjoys the benefits of whatever comes with that feeling and the employer who has a happy employee reaps the workplace benefits derived from the worker's positive feelings. This appears to be a classic win/win equation. With the premise being that satisfied workers are ones that employers aim to nurture and retain, specific facets of the workplace environment have been studied to determine their relative weights in the composition of job satisfaction, as well as global, overall job satisfaction among workers. Influential facets of work include wages, benefits, working conditions, leadership styles, promotion opportunities, social aspects, supervision, training, and the work itself. Two additional constructs that have been shown to influence job satisfaction among various job categories are role conflict and role ambiguity.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread interest in assessing and taking action to address levels of job satisfaction among workers in various sectors and levels of the workforce, there is a group of personnel within schools of which very little is known about their satisfaction on the job. Within the composition of a school's workforce, key groups that are commonly thought of are teachers, related services professionals, including occupational, physical, and speech therapists, social workers, and psychologists, nurses, administrators, secretaries, and custodians. There is another group within a faculty that, although not typically thought of when enumerating faculty composition, plays a prominent role in education, particularly in special education. That group is comprised of paraeducators, who often have the titles of teaching assistants and teacher aides. It

is estimated that there are 1 million paraeducators working with children in public and private schools (Guay, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). Despite this group's critical presence within the operation of schools, little research has been conducted to determine the extent that this group experiences job satisfaction, role conflict and role ambiguity. Associated questions of interest are whether role ambiguity is a predictor of paraeducator role conflict and if demographic factors influence role conflict.

The context of this study can be viewed as the identification of a gap in research and a concomitant interest in understanding a construct among a critical segment of the school workforce. The topic of research was chosen to provide quantitative and qualitative information about role conflict experienced by paraeducators and whether that construct can be predicted by selected independent variables. From a theoretical context, the information gained can be added to extant literature regarding paraeducators' roles and responsibilities, as well as to the body of knowledge regarding role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction among various job categories. From a methodological context, the study will present data gathered from a considerable number of paraeducators, rather than from the administrators or teachers who work with paraeducators. From a practice context, schools and those leading them can benefit from the data and recommendations offered in this study to guide them in addressing role conflict and role ambiguity among their paraeducator faculty members.

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is to gain understanding about role conflict among paraeducators, specifically those working in private special education schools, and the impact role ambiguity and certain demographic factors have on predicting paraeducator role conflict.

From the results of the study, school leaders can address role conflict within their schools and adjust policies and procedures to reduce this construct among their paraeducators.

Chapter I presents working definitions of key constructs and variables, the scope of the study, benefits, contributions, and an orientation to the history, identity, and concerns of paraeducators, and the plan of this dissertation.

Working Definitions for This Study

The following definitions are offered for the major constructs and variables within this study:

Paraeducator Definition

Rossetti and Goessling (2010) described paraeducators as school support staff who work under the direct supervision of certified teachers by assisting students with instruction, personal care, and social/emotional/behavioral skill development, as well as by collecting data and collaborating with other members of the multidisciplinary team.

Role Conflict Definition

House and Rizzo (1972) defined role conflict operationally in terms of compatibility-incompatibility between: (a) a worker's standards or values and expectations on the job; (b) the time and resources available or capabilities of the worker to do the job; (c) the worker's abilities to manage several roles within the job; and (d) various organizational inputs from policies, rules, or cues from related persons.

Role Ambiguity Definition

Role ambiguity was explained by Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) as deficient or uncertain information about which behaviors, actions, and reactions are acceptable in a given organizational position. Kahn et al. described three specific forms of role ambiguity: (a)

ambiguity or uncertainly regarding what is required, (b) ambiguity regarding how responsibilities are to be met or how to fulfill one's responsibilities, and (c) ambiguity regarding which messages or cues to respond to or whose expectations must be met.

Job Satisfaction Definition

Job satisfaction can be described as the general feeling that a worker has about a job and the happiness one experiences on the job. Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction in terms of the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job. Job satisfaction has also been defined as one's reaction to the job experience (Berry, 1997). Vroom (1982) considered job satisfaction in terms of the difference between the rewards a person believes should be received and the rewards the person actually receives. If a worker receives less than is perceived fair, the worker considers that an injustice has been done and job dissatisfaction results. If the worker perceives that more is received than is considered appropriate, guilt and dissatisfaction occur. Vroom attributed motivation and job satisfaction to the balance between expectations and rewards (Waskiewicz, 1999). In simple terms, job satisfaction is the happiness one experiences on the job.

Scope of This Study

My interest in this research topic emanates from almost four decades of experience I have had as an administrator within three major non-profit organizations serving persons with moderate to severe disabilities and my close association with paraeducators working for those organizations. For the past 31 years, I have been a senior-level manager in a large multi-service organization serving children and adults with disabilities. Having been in the roles of clinical director, assistant executive director, and for the past 17 years, school principal, I had the opportunity to recruit, train, and work with hundreds of paraeducators. Presently, my faculty

consists of 220 persons, including assistant principals, clinical supervisors, special education teachers, clinicians, and 100 paraeducators.

Throughout the years, I have learned that the role of the paraeducator is of critical importance to the quality of the education and care given to the students. Yet, the role of paraeducator is challenging because of the changing environment in which paraeducators operate. And, because of the demands of working with the special needs population, the expectations placed on paraeducators can be overwhelming for those who may have only a high school education and no experience, which is the minimum requirement.

Paraeducators are expected to have skills in: (a) assisting students with achieving self-help milestones, (b) managing behavior, (c) supporting the teaching of academics, (d) using augmentative communication devices, and (e) helping children use mobility equipment, while consistently demonstrating these skills with patience and concern for the students. The ability to be flexible is also an attribute needed as a paraeducator may be asked to move from one class to another and work with a completely different multidisciplinary team to cover a paraeducator absence or staff vacancy. Paraeducators are often in positions where role conflict and role ambiguity are omnipresent.

To better understand the impact of role conflict and role ambiguity, this study examines role ambiguity and the demographic variables of gender, age, experience working with children who have disabilities, experience in current position, education, status as teaching assistant, status as teacher, and plans to become a teacher, and their impact on role conflict among paraeducators in private special education schools. This study offers an opportunity to achieve greater understanding by sampling 419 paraeducators who are presently working in 12 private

special education schools in New York State to gain their perceptions regarding these variables and to see how the variables studied affect their daily work.

Data were collected using Rizzo, House and Lirtzman's (1970) Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale, demographic questions, and an open-ended, narrative item. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine if role ambiguity and the variables studied were statistically significant predictors of role conflict. Based on the results, recommendations are offered in Chapter V to help practitioners minimize role conflict among paraeducators in private special education schools, as well as to give suggestions for future research that can be done in this area.

Benefits and Contributions of This Study

As the executive supervisor of this population, it was my hope to learn the impact that role conflict and role ambiguity have on the paraeducator. This study focused on this group of faculty members, that is, the paraeducators, for whom extant literature with this population is minimal. I explored the variables: (a) gender, (b) age, (c) status as teaching assistant, (d) status as teacher, (e) plans to become a teacher, (f) experience working with children who have disabilities, (g) experience in current position, and (h) education to determine whether they tended to predict role conflict among paraeducators in private special education schools. It is hoped that the relationships that I discovered through my data collection, as well as my analyses shared in Chapter IV, will shed some light on the thinking of this population of educators. It is also hoped that a major contribution of this research will be to provide practitioners with answers as to how they can have paraeducators be more effective in their positions and to offer suggestions as to how to improve job satisfaction by decreasing conflict caused by loosely defined roles and responsibilities.

Paraeducators in Our Schools

The next section provides an orientation to the history, identity, and concerns of paraeducators.

Paraeducator History

My examination of the history of paraeducators in special education begins with World War II and post World War II, a time when there were shortages of teachers (Morrissette, Morrissette, & Julien, 2002; Studebaker, 1944). The headline of a 1944 article written by U.S. Commissioner of Education Studebaker (1944), "Missing: 115,000 Teachers. With Thousands of Teachers at War, the Children Suffer," expressed the concern arising from thousands of teachers involved in war and the resultant 115,000 vacancies created. Studebaker wrote that while school administrators were proud to see 7,700 teachers join the armed forces, the wartime situation left teaching positions unfilled. To compound the problem, more than 50,000 teachers left their classrooms for better financial opportunities in business, government, and military industrial positions that had emerged because of the United States' involvement in World War II. This resulted in placing non-credentialed persons in 57,000 teaching positions. Studebaker cautioned that it would take years to hire qualified teachers and that children would feel the effects of this lack of trained teachers for a long period of time. To address the teacher shortage, persons who did not meet the requirements for teacher certification were granted war emergency certificates as teachers. Most of them did not have the educational background or the teaching experience to become teachers. Morrissette, Morrissette, and Julien (2002) defined the period of post World War II as a key period for recruitment of paraeducators. A reason cited for this was to enable the newly hired teachers to spend more time on instructional activities by hiring

paraeducators whose responsibilities included performing clerical and administrative assignments and assisting teachers by monitoring students in the school.

During the 1960s and 1970s, schools hired more paraeducators to assist with classroom instruction; as such, their direct involvement with students became more widespread (Morrissette et al., 2002; Parvey, 2007; Pickett & Gerlach, 2003). Powerful legislation necessitated assistance in classrooms of students with bilingual and special education needs (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Parvey, 2007). Specifically, the Bilingual Education Act in 1968, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and in 1975, the special education groundbreaking law, Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, later known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA and in 2004, amended and re-named the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, brought about increased hiring of paraeducators. Not only were children placed in learning environments that legally mandated additional support staff for the class, some students were afforded one-to-one assistants in special education classes, inclusion classes, and as *shadows* to accompany and assist them as they traveled to different classes throughout the day. Consequently, more paraeducators became members of the special education community.

Since that time, because of an increased number of children receiving special education services in public and private schools, the need for paraeducators to assist with the education of these children continues to rise.

Paraeducator Identity

Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) credited the term *paraeducator* to Anna Lou Pickett, who in 1977 was director of the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals. Similar in etiology

to paralegal and paramedic, it refers to someone who works alongside of and is supervised by a professional. Typically, a paraeducator works alongside and under the supervision of a teacher.

In addition to the most common titles of teaching assistant and teacher aide, paraeducators are also known by the titles of aide, paraprofessional, para, educational assistant, one-to-one, shadow, instructional assistant, and teacher assistant (Butt & Lowe, 2012; Harkness, 2002; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001; Pickett, 2008).

Despite the work done and impact made by over one million paraeducators (Guay, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor, 2012), information about this group is not generally known by persons who have not had direct contact with this segment of the workforce. Federal and state data indicate that for the 20 year period from 1992 to 2012, the number of paraeducators increased 131%. During the same period of time, the number of special education teachers declined (Data Accountability Center, 2010).

The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-2011 Edition (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012), classified this group as "teaching assistants" and included the following demographic data: 40% work part-time, most work a traditional 180-day school calendar, and minimum educational requirements vary from a high school diploma to some college training. Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) found that paraeducators also consisted of persons certified as teachers who, for various reasons, were unable or had yet to secure jobs as teachers, or were teachers who preferred part-time employment, and therefore, they accepted positions as paraeducators. Paraeducators also included persons certified as teachers in their home countries who were unable or have yet to secure teaching certification in the United States. Morgan and Ashbaker pointed out that at the time of their study, 90% of paraeducators in the U.S. were female and their work experience varied from new high school graduates with little or

no experience working with children, except possibly as babysitters, to having experience as parents, scout leaders, or teachers with several years of experience.

Paraeducators are employed by public schools and work within self-contained, inclusion, and general education classes. They are also employed by private special education schools and work within self-contained and inclusion classrooms.

As shown in Table 1.1, in New York, the State Education Department has divided the direct-care, paraeducator faculty population into two groups: (a) teaching assistants who have state certification and are allowed to provide instructional services to students under the general supervision of licensed or certified teachers; and (b) teacher aides who perform non-instructional duties, also under the supervision of the teacher. Initial certification as a Level I teaching assistant requires passing a state certification examination. Once certified, there is a tier system consisting of four levels and at each level, additional college credits are required. The State Education Department does not require any college credits to be employed as a teacher aide, although individual schools may have their own criteria.

Table 1.1

Comparison of Roles, Responsibilities, and Requirements for Teaching Assistants and Teacher Aides in New York State

	Teaching Assistant	Teacher Aide
Definitions	Provide instructional services under the supervision of a licensed or certified teacher	Provide non-instructional services
Certification	Certification required	Certification not required
Duties	Work with individual pupils or groups of pupils	Assist in oversight of language and/or computer laboratories
	Assist in instructional work	Assist in physical care tasks and health-related activities
	Provide teacher with information about pupils	Assist in set-up of laboratory equipment, conduct experiments
	Assist pupils in using instructional resources	Assist students with behavioral/management needs
	Assist in development of instructional materials	Assist in the technical preparation and production of media programs
	Assist in instructional programs in foreign languages, arts, crafts, music and similar subjects	Read to and play audio-visual materials
	Assist with specific health-related activities as appropriate	Manage records, materials and equipment
		Assist in proctoring, correcting test papers
		Supervise students

Note. Adapted from "Teaching Assistants and Teacher Aides Compared" by New York State Education Department. Retrieved from www.highered.nysed.gov

Paraeducator Concerns

Although there is a dearth of information specifically addressing paraeducator job satisfaction, role conflict, and role ambiguity, literature on paraeducator issues reveals key concerns regarding the areas of roles and responsibilities; training; supervision; recruitment; respect, appreciation and acknowledgement; and financial status.

Roles and responsibilities. Over the past 50 years, the roles and responsibilities of special education paraeducators have changed, evolved, and increased in breadth, as well as depth (Chung, 2006). Within public schools having self-contained classes and inclusion classes, and in special education schools, paraeducators assume high levels of responsibility for academic, self-help, personal care, and behavioral aspects of special education (Unok Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999). Minondo, Meyer, and Xin (2001) examined roles and responsibilities of paraeducators in inclusion programs and delineated five major role components: (a) instructional, (b) school support, (c) liaison, (d) personal support, and (e) one-to-one in-class support.

A major discussion point has been the merging and blurring of responsibilities and tasks between teacher and paraeducator. When observing a special education classroom, it can be difficult to determine whether a particular adult in the room is the teacher or paraeducator. Carroll (2001) described this situation as the teacher having major responsibility, but paraeducators spending increasing time providing instruction, teaching skills to the students, and taking data (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 1999; Guay, 2003; Parvey, 2007).

A situation of widespread concern in the literature, termed *paraeducator paradox*, was coined by Mueller (2002, p. 64). It signifies the current state within special education in which those students who present the greatest physical, behavioral, medical, and/or cognitive

challenges are served by a system that relies heavily on untrained or undertrained, undereducated, and non-credentialed paraeducator faculty members. As an example, self-contained classrooms for children with severe physical and/or cognitive disabilities may be staffed by one special education teacher and four paraeducators who have high school diplomas, receive one week or less of on-the-job training, and bring to the job limited, relevant experience (M. Tokar, personal communication, August 15, 2012). Whereas paraeducators free teachers from some non-instructional portions of their work, such as bringing students to nursing, assisting with self-help functions, taking data, and performing clerical functions, they also assume instructional duties for which they are not trained, educated, or certified to perform (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Guay, 2003). Studies have found that untrained paraeducators spend more direct time with students who have special needs than credentialed teachers (Butt & Kaye, 2012; Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Special education paraeducators work with students who have challenging behaviors or severe physical disabilities without formal education or training. Parvey (2007) found that teachers have very high expectations of their teaching assistants and assign them to the lowest performing students.

Paraeducators state that they handle responsibilities they perceive to be within the teacher's realm, e.g., managing aspects of achieving academic and behavioral success (Unok Marks et al., 1999). When asked why this role assumption evolved, three main reasons were given by paraeducators: (a) they feel they are employed to keep students from being a bother to the teacher, (b) it is clear to the teachers that paraeducators are available to immediately address students' needs, and (c) paraeducators feel they are viewed as the expert of the child and the hub of information (Unok Marks et al., 1999). The hub role extends beyond the classroom into the role of liaison between parents and the school (Lucero, 2010; Minondo, Meyer, & Xin, 2001;

Unok Marks et al., 1999). Mueller (2002) pointed out that the responsibilities of paraeducators have changed and they "aren't aides anymore, running the ditto machine and performing clerical tasks" (p. 64). They are responsible for student instruction; small group leadership; recognizing medical emergencies; and providing physical care, including the challenging task of feeding children with compromised chewing, swallowing, and breathing abilities. Research has shown that their work represents more instructional, diagnostic, and counseling responsibilities, which is a shifting away from primary teacher support and clerical work (Gerlach, 2003).

Guay (2003) wrote that the paraeducators she observed assisting students in art classes "played the role of teacher, nurse, friend, translator and disciplinarian as the situation required. They retaught, reminded, reiterated, and mentored" (p. 26). Guay further observed that paraeducators were integral and meaningful additions to art classes for students with disabilities. They instructed, managed behaviors, and controlled the environment. However, she noted from qualitative interviews with paraeducators that training outside of the classroom was minimal or did not exist. Gerber, Finn, Achilles, and Boyd-Zaharias (2001) explained that many paraeducator teacher aides are placed in situations where they are not prepared to perform tasks. Unok Marks, Schrader, and Levine (1999) wrote that some of the responsibilities described by paraeducators are acceptable if shared with teachers, however, not if assumed to be the sole responsibility of the paraeducator.

Training. Hiatt, Sampson, and Baird (1997) advised that ongoing training is important to the success of the paraeducator and offers opportunities for feedback, self-evaluation, discussion about strengths and weaknesses, and support, which can contribute to feelings of job satisfaction. However, despite the broad scope of responsibilities paraeducators are expected to manage, research cites the lack of sufficient workplace orientation, pre-job training, on-the-job

training, and professional development (Chung, 2006; Walker, 2009). Paraeducators complain that they are asked to perform tasks for which they lack training (Mueller, 2002). Training is often non-specific and not relevant to the work of the paraeducator (Pickett & Gerlach, 2003). Training is brief, delivered by another paraeducator, and is not content-focused (Lucero, 2010; Mueller, 2002; Nemerowicz, 2009; Unok Marks et al., 1999). Walters-Remaly (2003) reported that training needs to be individualized, based on the particular school district, school building, program, and student(s) to be served.

Gerber et al. (2001) explained that many paraeducators are placed in situations where they are not prepared to perform tasks. Patterson (2006), whose research utilized direct interviews with paraeducators, expressed concern over insufficient training given to paraeducators:

> All of the participants interviewed in this study indicated that the supported student spent more time with them than anyone else, including the classroom teacher. This presents some concern, given that students with disabilities require specialized care, yet paraprofessionals without training are largely responsible for their education and care. (p. 9)

Ranging from the absence of on-the-job-training to intensive, focused internships as part of state-required credentialing, training of paraeducators is inconsistent (Hiatt, Sampson, & Baird, 1997) and varies from state-to-state, within school districts, and within individual schools. Models of training vary, as do methods, content, and length of training. Content and approaches vary from didactic methods, including lectures and reading assignments, to experiential-based training. Halpern (1992) recommended that training include an emphasis on actual performance issues. Tan (1997) discussed the need for training that includes modeling by professionals and

experiential opportunities, in addition to didactic components. Butt and Lowe (2012) designed and assessed a training program by ascertaining from paraeducators and teachers the perceived training needs of paraeducators, developing, and then implementing five specific, targeted, skills-based training modules: (a) how learning occurs, (b) information about specific disorders in development, (c) behavior management, (d) literacy development, and (e) numeracy development.

Based on Butt and Lowe's (2012) finding that the paraeducators in their study specifically requested training on different types of disorders in development, I invited my school nurses to present at our school's Superintendent's Training Day in November 2013. This was the first time the Nursing Department had done a major presentation for the school. Each nurse selected relevant topics to present, including asthma, G-tube and G-J tube feedings, catheterization, and spina bifida. Feedback was sought after the faculty training event and the nurses' presentation was considered the most relevant and most effective one of the day. One paraeducator expressed his wishes that all of the other presentations would have been as interesting and relevant to the work the paraeducators do (J. Jean Charles, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Supervision. Paraeducators expressed dissatisfaction with the supervision they receive (Riggs, 2002; Young Tillery, Werts, & Harris, 2003). Hiatt et al. (1997) linked ongoing supervision with feelings of job satisfaction and reminded school leaders that it is the administrator's responsibility to ensure that time is allotted for planning, on-the-job training, conferring, and evaluation between the teacher and paraeducator. The problem inherent in this recommendation is that paraeducators' supervisors, the teachers, are not trained in matters of supervision (Butt & Lowe, 2012; Parvey, 2007; Pickett & Gerlach, 2003). In a classroom within

a private special education school, the classroom ratio might be 12:1:4 (12 students to one teacher and four paraeducators), and the teacher is expected to supervise the four paraeducators. In that same classroom environment, a student may have a one-to-one paraeducator and thus, the teacher would be supervising five paraeducators. A private special education school in this study that serves children with severe disabilities has a class of 13 students in which the teacher supervises four classroom paraeducators and two one-to-one paraeducators. This teacher, who has no formal experience or coursework in supervision, supervises six paraeducators. Vasa, Steckelberg, and Pickett (2003) chastised schools that employ paraeducators without providing appropriate supervision and referred to them as being unethical.

Section 1119 of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001) stipulates that paraeducators work "under the direct supervision of a teacher" and "in close and frequent proximity to the teacher," yet this is not what research has evidenced (Patterson, 2006). Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) explained that their book *Working with Paraeducators and Other Classroom Aides* was written to address a new role for which teachers are not prepared in their training to undertake, the role of supervisor of one or more paraeducators. They found that special education teachers who work with paraeducators on a regular basis have had little training in working with adults.

Special educators do not receive training on effective methods of supervising the paraeducators in their classes (Conti, 2004), despite the need for this. As one teacher described, "We had a one hour workshop on how to work with aides in our classroom" (personal communication, L. Charles, August 23, 2011).

Mueller (2002) reported that many paraeducators reported little contact of a supervisory nature with the teachers with whom they work and who are their immediate supervisors.

Observations are rare, as is feedback (Mueller, 2002). Self-contained classrooms are more likely to offer adequate supervision than general education classes or job situations in which the paraeducator travels with the student from classroom to classroom, such as a paraeducator who follows a high school special education student from class to class to assist the student throughout the day.

Teacher-as-supervisor is not a typical role for most teachers working in public or private schools. It is fair to say that young people enter college with aspirations to become teachers so they can work with children. Teachers enter the profession to work with children, not to supervise adults, and this supervisory responsibility typically is not met with open arms (Pickett & Gerlach, 2003). In special education classrooms, where a teacher is expected to supervise one or more paraeducators, supervisory skills are critical. This responsibility is added to the teacher's job, despite the teacher's lack of training, experience, and interest. Mavropoulos (2005) reported that teachers spent less time mentoring, training, and evaluating staff, and more time planning and delegating. Despite this major responsibility, supervisory skill development is not a component of education majors' undergraduate or graduate education. Conti (2004) recommended preparing special education teachers for the role of supervising paraeducators.

The depth of concern regarding the role of teacher as supervisor of paraeducators is clearly evident within my school. In 2003, I teamed with one of our teachers to develop a six-module training program based on Pickett and Gerlach's (2003) book *Supervising Paraeducators in Educational Settings: A Team Approach*. Each teacher was given a copy of the book. We enlisted the help of other administrators and teachers to present each chapter, followed by discussion about its applicability to our school and their role as teacher. Despite this training, the teachers continued to express frustration with not having adequate skills to supervise their

classroom staff, which can include as many as six paraeducators (S. Moradoff, personal communication, September 7, 2011). In 2005, we contracted with a local university to provide supervision training to our teaching faculty. Training teachers to supervise adults in their classrooms is ongoing and continues to be addressed through professional development (J. Jean Charles, personal communication, January 5, 2012).

French (2003) addressed lack of teacher-as-supervisor training with a quote from a teacher:

> "There really isn't any training out there. You know, when you go through teacher training…nobody even approaches the subject (of supervision), and then you're put in a situation and you tend to learn it by doing, and things, hopefully, get better after a year or so." (p. 7)

French responded to the teacher's statements by posing the following questions: "So, if teachers are expected to supervise and hold de facto supervisory responsibilities, what do they do? How do they manage without supervisory training?" (p. 7).

Teachers can be powerful influences in paraeducator job satisfaction by mastering their role as supervisor. Advocating for their staff, helping them negotiate the school's hierarchical system, addressing issues related to fairness, and assisting with logistical matters are examples of skills teachers can gain (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001). Role clarification, empowerment, and their potential impact on job satisfaction can occur by including paraeducators in developing ideas for activities and lessons; asking paraeducators to be in charge of learning centers; and seeking input on layout of classroom, bulletin board design, and other components of the classroom environment (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001). Teachers must be comfortable and skillful in their role as supervisor, yet the lack of supervisory training is evident.

Recruitment. Hilton and Gerlach (1997) reported that despite growing utilization of paraeducators in demanding roles, limited attention has been paid to their recruitment. While this might seem to be an issue for administrators, and not for paraeducators who are already employed, one's colleagues can have considerable influence on job satisfaction and role conflict.

Recruitment of paraeducators has included members from within the community being served by the school program, as well as through non-targeted recruitment. Calzada, Brotman, Wallace, and Rojas-Flores (2005) described the Parent Corps program in which members of the targeted neighborhood community are recruited, hired, and trained to work with classroom teachers. This program aims to prevent the development of behavior problems among preschoolers who are considered at risk. Their study concluded that select members of the community, who share culture, language, ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic understanding, are effective members of the team working with children with special needs.

A recent need across the U.S. is for bilingual paraeducators within the public school and private special education school sectors. Bilingual paraeducators are uniquely positioned to gain access and to understand issues faced by students and families from various cultures. This group of faculty members possesses language and cultural skills to provide the nexus between school and home (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Lucero, 2010). Lucero (2010) recommended that qualitative research be conducted to understand the contributions made by bilingual paraeducators. They offer cultural factors that can either be marginalized due to lack of education and credentials or treated as highly valued additions as a result of language, cultural, and life experience similar to the students they serve (Monzo & Rueda, 2003). While this marginalized state may be a factor working against job satisfaction, conversely, positive status within the culture of the school could facilitate job satisfaction because of the unique connection

bilingual paraeducators could have with bilingual students and families. Consistent with monolingual colleagues, bilingual paraeducators perform a myriad of instructional and non-instructional tasks. Bilingual proficiency brings with it the additional tasks of translating, counseling, testing, and family involvement (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006).

Ghere and York-Barr (2007), in studying turnover and retention of paraeducators in inclusion programs, presented strategies for maximizing the chances of hiring successful, invested paraeducators, and thus, reducing staff turnover. Specifically cited was Blalock's (1991) proposal of looking within the organization at volunteers and substitute or per diem staff as potential applicants. Carroll (2001) reminded the reader of the importance of the interview and the opportunities it presents to not only screen the applicant, but to increase the candidate's knowledge about the school program and the role of the paraeducator. This is critical since roles and responsibilities vary from school to school based on the children served and the specific job description. Ghere and York-Barr commented, "This way, decisions made by school personnel about whether to hire and a decision made by the applicant about whether to accept a position were better informed" (p. 26). They pointed out that each district in their study used different recruitment procedures resulting in recruitment time expenditures ranging from 1.5 to 13.5 hours.

Respect, appreciation, and acknowledgement. Respect, appreciation, and acknowledgement toward paraeducators are additional factors of concern presented in the literature. Giangreco, Edelman, and Broer (2001, p. 485) quoted the famous signature line of the late comedian Rodney Dangerfield, "I don't get no respect." The authors posed the question of whether today's paraeducators are the Rodney Dangerfields of education. Their research was based on comments made by paraeducators regarding their impressions of not being sufficiently

respected, appreciated, or acknowledged. Mueller (2002, p. 2) wrote that paraeducators felt that "They were the lowest on the totem pole. Paraeducators across the country report that they do not feel they are respected or valued for their contributions." Patterson (2006) reported similar findings such that 81% of the paraeducator subjects she studied expressed the need to be treated as equals and not be expected to do what the teachers would not do. In a survey of 1,867 paraeducators working in public schools across a Midwestern state, Fisher and Pleasants (2012) found that the greatest concern of respondents was lack of appreciation, with 40% rating it as a major concern. Pickett and Gerlach (2003) advised that respect towards every member of the treatment team is critical to the success of the team process, the foundation upon which student outcome is predicated. They cautioned the reader that for a classroom to be successful, the paraeducator and teacher must see themselves as a team whose components include trust, respect, and recognition of each member's contributions. Team rules or expectations are critical to the team process. These include respecting each member's roles and views, demonstrating listening skills, possessing a positive attitude, and being prepared (Pickett & Gerlach, 2003).

Giangreco, Edelman, and Broer (2003) conducted a study to ascertain which aspects of the job of a paraeducator were felt to be most in need of training and/or support. Based on responses from teams representing 46 schools in 13 states and 331 individual team members, including 125 paraeducators, 120 teachers, parents, clinicians, administrators, and others, the following were among priority areas needing to be addressed: (a) orientation/training; (b) mechanisms and time to work with teachers; (c) recruitment of substitute paraeducators; (d) compensation for education, experience, and skill; and (e) demonstrating that paraeducators are valued, appreciated and recognized. Despite the latter area's status as one of the most important issues, only eight of the 46 schools opted to take action to address that area of concern.

Research on acknowledging paraeducator efforts and success was conducted by French (2003). When writing about the importance of acknowledging and honoring paraeducators, French advised administrators to "Acknowledge and honor paraeducators whose performance excels. Paraeducators report that acknowledgement is meaningful in their willingness to stay in their positions despite wages that are lower than desired" (p. 12).

Financial status. It would be a major oversight to omit the issue of remuneration as a major concern among paraeducators and special education administrators. Pickett (1996) reported that a major cause of paraeducator attrition was low salaries. Frith and Mims (1985) cited poor salaries as a reason why paraeducators leave their jobs. This research, however, which was conducted with a limited numbers of respondents (n = 21), found that while salary was a major concern, it might not be the primary concern. They recommended that it would be wise for administrators to take a more comprehensive look at the role of paraeducators and see if working conditions and all of its components are the primary causes of losing staff.

Fisher and Pleasants (2012) included a quote from a paraeducator in their statewide study of roles, responsibilities and concerns of paraeducators:

> We have a problem with major turnover each year because the pay is so low- a grocery store checkout person is paid more! We work directly with the students, yet often the students we work with earn more money at their part-time jobs. (p. 292)

In their study, in which Giangreco et al. (2003) asked 46 school teams in 13 states to self-identify priority areas to improve paraeducator supports, the fifth greatest priority area was compensation for education, experience, and skills. Yet, of the 46 school teams, only two schools decided to take action on that issue.

While there is a dearth of research on the impact of pay on paraeducator job satisfaction, it is clearly evident when speaking with paraeducators that money weighs heavily on their minds. In the private special education school in which I am principal, the majority of the paraeducators work two jobs, and some even work three jobs. In New York State, where salaries for paraeducators are historically low and where tuition rates for private special education schools have been frozen for the past four years, schools have not been able to give raises or cost of living increases to faculty. In discussions with colleagues, it is clear that the low pay associated with the position of paraeducator has a serious impact on morale, retention, and the ability to hire qualified candidates for the position. Seeking candidates with bilingual ability to better meet the needs of children from bilingual families becomes even more challenging because of the low salaries that can be offered.

Plan of This Dissertation

Chapter I introduced the reader to paraeducators: their history, their identity, and their major areas of concern. This chapter also presented working definitions of key constructs, and the purpose, scope, benefits, and contributions of the study. Chapter II presents a review of the extant literature relevant to the research study. Chapter III introduces the research questions that have guided the study. Subjects and settings are described, as are data collection procedures, instrumentation, and research measures. The research design, including the theoretical model and data analysis procedures, follows. The concluding pages of Chapter III discusses protection of human subjects, ethical considerations, potential researcher bias, and limitations of available data. Chapter IV presents the findings and interpretations of the research. Responses to the research questions posed earlier in the study are found in that chapter. Chapter V closes the

study with conclusions, suggestions for future policy and research, recommendations for practice, and a view to the future.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

As presented in Chapter I, studies on paraeducator role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction were minimal. As a means of illustrating this void, I refer to two lists of references on the subject of paraeducators compiled by Giangreco (2012a and b). One list, *Selected Paraprofessional References* (2012b), included data-based and non data-based literature, excluding dissertations, for the period 1990-2011 and contained 318 titles. Although 10% (*n* = 33) of those titles included the word *role*, none contained the terms *role conflict* or *role ambiguity*. One had *role confusion* and one had *job satisfaction* in its title. The second list, *Paraeducator Support* (2012a), which contained 61 titles of dissertations related to paraeducators for the period 1993-2011, did not include any titles with the words *role conflict* or *role ambiguity*, although 23% (*n* =14) included the word *role* in its title. Two had *job satisfaction* in their titles. These 379 literature sources, although relevant to paraeducators and their various roles and responsibilities, only minimally reflected the constructs of role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction.

My review of the extant literature, specifically on issues related to paraeducator role conflict and role ambiguity, focused on four components: (a) role stress constructs (role conflict and role ambiguity); (b) job satisfaction; (c) the relationship between role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction; and (d) paraeducator role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction. To gain understanding in these areas, literature from organizational psychology, general education, special education, educational administration, and management science was reviewed.

Role Stress Constructs: Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity

Origin of Constructs

An early theorist, Seeman (1953) wrote about role conflict and ambivalence in school leadership, defining role conflict as "the exposure of the individual in a given position to incompatible behavioral expectations" (p. 373). Two groups of early researchers, Gross, Mason, and McEachern in 1958 and Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek and Rosenthal in 1964, were credited by Abramis (1994) as initiating the study of role demands and role stress. Kahn and Quinn (1970) considered role stress as any work-related incident or situation that produces adverse consequences for the worker.

In their seminal and often cited work (Cervoni, 2007; Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack; 2011; House & Rizzo, 1972; King & King, 1990; Wolverton, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 1999), Kahn et al. (1964) conceived of organizational role stress as emanating from two sources: role conflict and role ambiguity. Their theoretical model involved relationships between a focal person and role senders; events and behaviors influencing each role episode; and personality factors, organizational factors, and interpersonal relations. Focal persons are those in the center of the discussion about roles. Role senders are those persons who interact directly with the focal person. In a workplace, interactions may be planned or spontaneous and may exist top-down, bottom-up, and on equal levels within a hierarchy. Within schools, role senders may be faculty members, school board officials, parents, students, and others. Role senders have role expectations of the focal person and exert pressure to have those expectation met. Kahn et al. cautioned that role pressures may result in psychological conflict and that the "intensity or magnitude of a person's role conflict will depend on the absolute and relative strength of the forces; that is, if there are two opposing forces, the greater the strength of the weaker force, the greater the conflict" (p. 19).

Beehr, Walsh, and Taber (1976) described manifestations of role stress as feelings of dissatisfaction with work, dissatisfaction with life, depression, anxiety, fatigue, tension, and resultant coronary artery disease. A direct link has been found between workers who experience above average levels of role ambiguity and role conflict and resultant diminished decision-making ability, effectiveness, and organizational commitment, as well as job-related stress with physical manifestations (Brauer, 1980; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Wolverton et al., 1999). In 1970, Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970) first wrote about role conflict and role ambiguity and developed the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale, which is frequently used to measure role stress. Their article was based on the work of Kahn et al. (1964) and provided the springboard for interest and subsequent studies on role stress.

Role Conflict

Kahn et al. (1964) wrote that role conflict would occur when members of a role set, defined as members of an organization with whom a worker is mostly closely associated, held differing and conflicting role expectations of the focal person. Psychological conflict or stress occurs as a result of role forces arising from role pressures. The intensity of role conflict depends on the strength of the role forces (Kahn et al., 1964). Role conflict manifests when: (a) multiple role senders have conflicting or ambiguous expectations of the focal person; (b) when the focal person's standards or values are incompatible with role sender's message; (c) when organizational inputs from policies, rules, or cues conflict with each other or with focal person's standards or values; (d) when resources, time, or capabilities of focal person render the focal person unable to meet expectations; or (e) when conflict exists between the focal person's workplace and home (House and Rizzo, 1972; Kahn et al., 1964).

Role conflict occurs when there is incompatibility between demands or expectations placed on workers (Acker, 2003; Koustelios, Theodorakis, & Goulimaris, 2004). Situations cited by Acker (2003) included working within two or more groups that have different ways of accomplishing tasks or finding oneself facing unrealistic demands.

Three types of role conflict were delineated by Kahn et al. (1964): (a) intra-sender conflict which is when one person at work gives conflicting directions to the focal person, such as the situation of a supervisor giving a direction that is in conflict with a standard operating procedure; (b) inter-sender conflict which is when the focal person receives pressure from one role sender which opposes pressure from another role sender, such as the situation in which a middle manager is under pressure from the supervisor to provide closer staff supervision, but staff give the middle manager pressure to loosen the extent of supervision; and (c) inter-role conflict which is when conflicts exist within a worker's life, such as an organizational culture in which the worker is expected to work many hours beyond the workday, yet a spouse and children expect the worker to engage in family time. Kahn et al. determined that all types of role conflict resulted in psychological stress.

Role overload was another cause of role conflict presented by Kahn et al. (1964), in which persons in a worker's life have legitimate, mutually compatible expectations of the worker. However, it is impossible for the worker to meet all of them as requested.

Kahn et al. (1964) summarized role conflict as follows:

> Much of role conflict, as we have defined it, can be thought of as a kind of inadequate role sending; lack of agreement or coordination among role senders produces a pattern of sent expectations which contains logical incompatibilities or which takes inadequate account of the needs and abilities of the focal person. (p. 21)

Acker (2003) studied the relationship between role stress and burnout of mental health providers, including 190 participants with doctorate and master's degrees, 30 participants who had bachelor's degrees, and 11 participants who did not have college degrees. All worked in outpatient mental health settings in New York State. Acker (2003) found that correlations between role conflict, role ambiguity and dimensions of burnout were statistically significant among the mental health service providers, regardless of level of education. Burnout in that study was defined using Maslach's (1982) definition as a cluster of signs and symptoms, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and physical and emotional exhaustion. A demographic finding, which is of particular relevance to my study, was that workers with longer work experience had higher levels of role conflict. Acker (2003) also found that there was a strong correlation of role ambiguity and role conflict with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity refers to the extent to which there is sufficient information available to perform a task (Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970; Wolverton et al., 1999). Role ambiguity in the workplace results from being in a situation where uncertainty arises and consequently, a worker does not know how to perform a task (Acker, 2003). Abramis (1994) defined role ambiguity as "a perceived environmental demand, uncertainty or ambiguity about how to carry out the work role" (p. 1412). Causes of this include absence of job descriptions, unclear goals and expectations, and not having the information needed to perform the job (Acker, 2003). Baron (1986) described role ambiguity as worker uncertainty about job requirements and behavioral expectations. Wilson and Rosenfeld (1990) dissected role ambiguity into two parts- the means and the ends. When a worker is unsure of how to do tasks or achieve goals, that is the

means aspect of role ambiguity. When that worker is unsure of what is expected at the end of the process, the ends aspect of role ambiguity enters. In Abramis' meta-analysis of 88 studies on role ambiguity, job satisfaction, and job performance, role ambiguity was found to be significantly and negatively related to job satisfaction and job performance. However, the latter is a weak correlation. Abramis determined that these results are consistent with previous research and concluded that role ambiguity is generally associated with decreased job satisfaction.

Research on role ambiguity in schools has been conducted with principals, teachers, school counselors, and academic deans. Studies focused on paraeducator role ambiguity have been few. Butt and Lowe (2012) studied differing perceptions of the roles of paraeducators among teaching assistants and teachers in Australia. Teachers viewed the role of paraeducator as primarily working with the teachers to support teaching and learning. Paraeducators, however, considered their role to be working in the classroom to support the students. Paraeducators saw their focus as direct involvement with the students, whereas teachers saw the focus as supporting them. The authors recommended clearly defined job descriptions to clarify roles and minimize role ambiguity.

Job Satisfaction

If the average American is employed from the age of 22 until the age of 65, logging in 35 hours a week, the worker's lifetime working hours could total 80,000 hours or greater. With this extensive time commitment made to the workforce, whether at one job or many, the quest for job satisfaction pervades. Whether one is a worker or a boss, an unskilled laborer or a professional, or employed by the government, the non-profit sector, or private industry, the quest to find or maintain job satisfaction continues throughout the work cycle. Landy (1978) pointed out that

there is strong linkage between job satisfaction and physical and mental health, work characteristics including productivity, motivation, problems with lateness and absenteeism, and job-related accidents.

Interest in Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been defined by researchers, can be described by the individuals seeking it, or can be summed up as "I don't know how to describe it, but I'll know it when I feel it." There is no lack of academic interest in job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a major topic of research that has been viewed as an independent variable, dependent variable, moderator variable, and covariate (Landy, 1978; Wanous & Lawler, 1972). In 1976, Locke estimated that there were 3,350 articles or dissertations written about job satisfaction. Cranny, Smith, and Stone (1992) reported that in 1992, this number had increased to more than 5,000. Now, in 2013, Google Scholar lists 2.2 million references when one types in keywords *job satisfaction.*

Theoretical Approaches

Factors contributing to job satisfaction are many and include intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of work. Intrinsic factors include: (a) communication; (b) the work itself including variety of tasks, interest level, challenge, and productivity; (c) perceptions of equity; (d) consistency with one's values; (e) leadership approaches; (f) social relationships; and (g) social opportunities. Extrinsic factors include: (a) pay, (b) promotion, (c) benefits, (d) work conditions, (e) job safety, and (f) policies and procedures.

Job satisfaction origins. Origins of the consideration of job satisfaction among workers and theoretical approaches can be traced back to the work of Taylor (1914), Mayo (1933), and Maslow (1943). Locke (1976, p. 1298) wrote about Frederick Taylor, considered the father of scientific management, and his view of worker attitude. Taylor "implicitly assumed that a

worker who accepted the scientific management philosophy and who received the highest possible earnings with the least amount of fatigue would be satisfied and productive." During the period 1924-1933, Mayo conducted studies at Western Electric Company to ascertain the effects that working conditions had on worker productivity. These studies showed that changes in work conditions, while temporarily increasing productivity, were not the causes of the increase. Instead, it was the attention being given to the workers that led to the increased productivity. A conclusion drawn at that time was that workers worked for reasons in addition to and other than receiving their paychecks (Mayo, 1933). As determined in the study, the workers experienced job satisfaction beyond being paid (Locke, 1976).

Although Maslow did not specifically address job satisfaction, his Needs Hierarchy Theory (Maslow, 1943) has been applied to work incentive systems and is considered a theory of job satisfaction (Locke, 1976; Ololube, 2006; Saif, Nawaz, Jan, and Khan, 2012). Locke (1976) wrote, "The optimal job environment for a given employee would be the one which corresponded most closely to his position on the needs hierarchy" (p. 1308).

There are many theoretical models surrounding job satisfaction. They are generally categorized as representing one of two conceptual frameworks: process theory or content theory. Process theories are considered causal models of job satisfaction as they offer explanations of why and how variables such as individual needs, values, expectancies, and perceptions combine to elicit job satisfaction (Locke, 1976). Examples of process theories cited in research were Adams' Equity Theory (1963) and Vroom's (1982) and Lawler and Porter's (1967) Expectancy Theory of Motivation (Locke, 1976; Ololube, 2006; Saif et al., 2012). Locke (1976) described content theories as those which attempt to identify the specific needs or values most relevant to achieving job satisfaction. Workers achieve job satisfaction as those needs are met. Saif,

Nawaz, Jan and Khan (2012, p. 4) wrote that "Experts have been preparing multiple lists of biological, psychological, social and higher level needs of human beings. Almost all the researchers categorize the needs into primary, secondary, and high level employee requirements, which need to be fulfilled" if a worker is to feel motivated and satisfied. Examples of content theories cited in research were Maslow's Needs Hierarchy Theory (1943), Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Theory (1968), McGregor's Theory X and Y (1960) and Alderfer's (1969) ERG Theory (Locke, 1976; Ololube, 2006; Saif et al., 2012).

Job satisfaction and behaviors and attitudes. The correlation between job satisfaction and specific work-related behaviors and attitudes has also been studied. One such behavior is termed *extra-role behavior* and refers to socially responsible behaviors between co-workers. Examples include staying late to assist someone, helping a co-worker with a personal or professional problem, tolerating inconveniences without complaining, and in general, taking an active role in encouraging a positive organizational climate (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Witt & Wilson, 1991). Witt and Wilson (1991) found that workers who experience job satisfaction are more likely to engage in extra-role behaviors.

Moorman, Niehoff, and Organ (1993) studied the relative contributions of employees' perceptions of workplace justice toward predicting on-the-job citizenship behavior. Among their findings was that an employee's appraisal of whether or not the procedures in the organization were fair and were applied in a fair manner might be a basis for an employee's level of job satisfaction. Examples given of organizational citizenship behavior included workers showing conscientiousness toward their job, trying to prevent problems with other employees, and refraining from excessively complaining about work (Moorman, Niehoff, & Organ, 1993).

Job satisfaction and life satisfaction. Theoretical consideration has been given to the link between job satisfaction and life satisfaction. Cited in the literature has been the finding that satisfaction with job leads to satisfaction with life and satisfaction with life leads to satisfaction with job (Mount, Ilies, & Johnson, 2006). Other factors influencing job satisfaction include the extent of employee involvement in decision-making, sense of empowerment, and autonomy.

Job satisfaction and school climate and culture. Job satisfaction has been associated with school climate. Halpin and Croft (1963) presented an analogy to describe organizational climate: "Personality is to the individual what 'climate' is to the organization" (p. 1). Nwankwo (1979) described school climate as "the general 'we-feeling' group sub-culture or interactive life of the school" (p. 268). Taylor and Tashakkori (1995) conducted a study using a national database of 10,000 teachers to explore various school climate variables' ability to predict teachers' job satisfaction. Principal components analysis of data yielded the following five critical climate factors as being the most influential on job satisfaction: (a) principal leadership, (b) student discipline, (c) faculty collegiality, (d) lack of obstacles to teaching, and (e) faculty communication. Their study determined that teacher job satisfaction was most strongly correlated with the school climate dimension of lack of obstacles to teaching and next with strong principal leadership.

Xiaofu and Qiwen (2007) investigated the relationship between school climate in a Chinese secondary school and teacher job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was defined as the teachers' perception of their profession, their job, and their working conditions. This perception affected morale, quality of education, and engagement of students. Their findings showed significant positive correlations between perceptions of a positive school climate and teachers' satisfaction.

Gruenert (2008) wrote that if a happy teacher is considered a better teacher, and this positive attitude affects the quality of instruction, then it is up to school leaders to create working conditions that foster a happy school climate. He continued this theme by pointing out that too much effort is spent utilizing extrinsic awards. "Bringing doughnuts to the faculty lounge on Fridays may help a few teachers wake up quicker, but this act will not affect the morale of the building" (p. 57).

Griffith (1999) tested the hypothesis that employee perceptions of positive organizational climate are associated with higher levels of organizational performance and job satisfaction and lower levels of employee turnover. After mailing surveys to 8,535 school-based employees in 117 elementary schools in a large suburban school district, 3,291 surveys or 39% of the questionnaires were returned. Delineation of job titles was not stated, thus, paraeducator response is unknown. Given that elementary schools typically employ a few paraeducators in their inclusion classes, it is feasible that the paraeducator workgroup's response was represented to some degree in assessing organizational climate and job satisfaction. Results demonstrated that employee perceptions of positive organizational climate were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among those surveyed.

Compatibility with a school's culture, which includes the components of vision, values, rituals, ceremonies, history, stories, people, architecture, artifacts, and symbols (Peterson & Deal, 2002), also has been linked with job satisfaction. Jones, Ratcliff, Sheehan, and Hunt (2012) found that a school culture which fosters discussion, sharing insights, and collaboration among teacher and paraeducators not only facilitates strong, skillful classroom teams, it provides optimal learning for students. Gruenert (2008) suggested that when considering ideas to improve

the level of job satisfaction, a question to be explored is how the culture of the building is compatible with the needs of the faculty.

Melton-Shutt (2004) noted that the higher the score on the School Culture Triage Survey (Phillips & Wagner, 2003; Wagner, 2006), which is a 17-item, pencil-and-paper measure of culture behaviors (professional collaboration, affiliative and collegial relationships, and efficacy or self-determination), the higher the staff satisfaction levels and the higher the state assessment scores.

In examining job satisfaction within schools, Ouichi's Theory Z (1982) posited that the ultimate motivator and satisfier among school faculty is self-interest. To facilitate satisfaction on the job, the culture of a Theory Z school would include having staff members develop their own goals, which in turn, would help shape the goals of the organization.

Job satisfaction and teachers. It is unknown whether factors influential in teacher job satisfaction (and dissatisfaction) are the same as the same as those for paraeducator job satisfaction (and dissatisfaction). The New York State Education Department (NYSED, 2011) found that the turnover rate among teachers with less than five years of experience was 20% in 2007-2008, 21% in 2008-2009, and 22% in 2009-2010. Among all teachers in the state, the turnover rate was 13% from 2007-2009 and 14% in 2009-2010. The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Teacher, Parents and the Economy (Markow & Pieters, 2012) found that teacher job satisfaction dropped 15 points since 2009, to 44% who are very satisfied, which is the lowest level of job satisfaction in the past 20 years.

Ingersoll (2001) cited the primary reasons for the dissatisfaction of teachers leaving the profession as: poor salary (45%), lack of student motivation (38%), inadequate administrative support (30%), student discipline problems (30%), and inadequate preparation time (23%).

When examining teacher job satisfaction, the factors of career-orientation, recognition, and personal achievement, and not salary, advancement, and supervision, have been the most powerful determinants (Knoop, 1981). Most commonly found to be the key indicator of job satisfaction was the work done by teachers when working directly with children in the classroom.

Bishay (1996) sought to ascertain factors that satisfy teachers by examining how they felt throughout their days of teaching. Using the experience sampling method and beeping the teacher subjects throughout the day, emotions were captured and logged on a survey. Bishay compared this study to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow which deemed that individuals who are involved in their work and are at their peak functioning ability, achieve levels of satisfaction and joy which was termed *flow*. Bishay's findings showed the following factors correlated positively with job satisfaction among teachers: (a) higher levels of responsibility, such as administrative work or extra-role activities, including a club advising position, increased job satisfaction; (b) gender such that males felt higher levels of job satisfaction; (c) job satisfaction increased with age; and (d) satisfaction increased with years of service.

Job satisfaction and nurses' aides. While there is an absence of data on job satisfaction among paraeducators in special education settings, there are studies involving nurses' aides, a position that has similar characteristics to those of a paraeducator. Both involve close relationships with persons in need of assistance, both work alongside and under the supervision of professionals, and both require patience, caring, and concern, as well as knowledge of requisite skills. Castle, Degenholtz, and Rosen (2006) conducted a study to determine which facets of job satisfaction had the greatest impact on nurses' aides in two nursing homes in Pennsylvania. Their results were similar to those of Parsons, Simmons, Penn, and Furlough

(2003) and Will and Simmons (1999). Each study determined that the respondents found most satisfaction with the work itself and least satisfaction with pay. Nurses aides, like paraeducators, are underpaid relative to other areas of health care and education, respectively. Castle et al. (2006) found that nurses'aides experienced job satisfaction because of their close work with the residents and their relationships with coworkers. The authors offered the recommendation that management capitalize on this and promote these relationships by establishing permanent assignments with residents as a team and that social opportunities for staff and residents be encouraged. The authors acknowledged that this may be difficult given chronic understaffing in nursing homes and possible resistance from managers who may feel these activities are unproductive.

There is an important difference, however, between the jobs of nurses' aides and paraeducators. In addition to assisting with personal care needs, paraeducators are expected to assist with the instruction that students receive, whether individually or in small groups. In New York State, certified teaching assistants (unlike teacher aides) are allowed to temporarily stand in for a teacher in the teacher's absence. Thus, the expectation is that the teaching assistant has the ability to follow the teacher's lesson plans, which would include leading the class in differentiated instruction and implementing all lessons, while the teacher is not in the classroom. This level of responsibility, and the role conflict that might come with it, is not comparable to the role of a nurses' aide, who is not expected or allowed to assume the responsibilities of a nurse in the nurse's absence.

Relationship Between Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, and Job Satisfaction

There is a plethora of information found within the management science literature indicating that there is an inverse relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction, and role

ambiguity and job satisfaction (House & Rizzo, 1972: Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Kahn et al., 1964; Locke, 1976; Schuler, Aldag, & Brief, 1977). Abramis' (1994) meta-analysis concluded that a moderate and negative correlation exists between role ambiguity and job satisfaction. Koustelios and Kousteliou (1998) and Schuler, Aldag, and Brief (1977) determined that role ambiguity and role conflict were associated with low job satisfaction, high rates of absenteeism, and tension.

Based on the relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction, the construct of role conflict can be viewed as a surrogate for the construct of job satisfaction and as such, the former can be studied as a gauge of the latter.

The roles and responsibilities of paraeducators have been widely studied (Giangreco et al., 2001; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001; Parvey, 2007); however, this group has not been studied for measurable manifestations of role stress. There is a lack of information on role conflict among paraeducators, the relationships between role conflict and role ambiguity among this group, and role conflict and demographic characteristics of paraeducators. In an essay on the role of paraeducators on educational teams, Harkness (2002) wrote from firsthand experience as a paraeducator that describing the role is easy; successfully actualizing it in the classroom is difficult. Among the suggestions offered by Harness (2002) is for teachers to give clear directions that clarify the paraeducator's role, including stated, expected outcomes, explaining processes, and offering explanations about the relative importance of each.

Critical Studies in Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, and Job Satisfaction

Teachers and role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction. Although there is an absence of studies examining the relationship between role stress and paraeducators, studies involving other members of a school workforce have been conducted. The impact of role

ambiguity and role conflict among teachers has been studied with findings that indicated a decrease in job satisfaction associated with role ambiguity (Conley & Woolsey, 2000; Dinham & Scott, 2000; Koustelios & Kousteliou, 1998).

In their study of job satisfaction, role clarity, and role conflict among teachers in Greece, Koustelios and Kousteliou (1998) found a negative correlation between job satisfaction and the role constructs that were measured. They wrote, "Since both role conflict and role ambiguity have disastrous consequences for both organizational and individual performance, it is important, especially in a work setting like primary and secondary schools, that they are recognized and managed effectively" (p. 132). Koustelios, Theodorakis, and Goulimaris (2004) examined role ambiguity, role conflict and job satisfaction among physical education teachers in Greece. They found that both role constructs were statistically significant predictors of two aspects of job satisfaction: the job itself and supervision. Increased role ambiguity and role conflict were found to lower teacher satisfaction with the job itself and with supervision. Role ambiguity and role conflict were not found to be significant predictors of the other indicators of job satisfaction that they measured: (a) working conditions, (b) pay, (c) promotion, and (d) relationships with the organization as a whole. Koustelios et al. (2004) concluded that their results were consistent with results of research in non-teaching occupations.

Keingstein (2013) studied isolation among teachers and the impact it had on role ambiguity, role conflict and job satisfaction. She found that isolation increased loneliness, role conflict, and role ambiguity and decreased teacher job satisfaction. Special educators experienced the greatest levels of isolation, loneliness, and role conflict.

School administrators and role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction. In studying role conflict and job satisfaction among principals, Brauer (1980) found there was a

significant negative correlation between role ambiguity and job satisfaction. She also determined that there was a significant negative correlation between role conflict and job satisfaction among that group.

Also involving principals, Eckman (2004) found that job satisfaction and role conflict were inversely related. In relation to demographics, role conflict was higher among the younger principals. The longer the subjects had served in their positions, the lower was the extent of role conflict they experienced. Differences existed between male and female high school principals in their levels and causes of role conflict, with females experiencing greater role conflict in all aspects of their roles, except monetary concerns, in which males indicated significantly higher levels of role conflict.

School counselors and role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction. With high school counselors, role conflict and role ambiguity were also found to be negatively correlated, significant predictors of job satisfaction (Cervoni, 2007; Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011).

Academic deans and role stress. Among academic deans of universities, role conflict and role ambiguity were found to significantly affect a dean's level of job satisfaction (Wolverton et al., 1999).

Social workers and role conflict and job satisfaction. A study of Master's level social workers who practiced in acute care hospitals showed a negative correlation between role conflict and job satisfaction. However, these constructs were not found to present serious problems for the sample population (Rosenbaum, 1992).

Mental health workers, role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction. Although her study did not include paraeducators in special education settings, Acker (2003) included mental health workers with varying levels of education in her study of role conflict and role

ambiguity. Findings suggested that those workers with less education and less training could be more effective working with clients who have mental illness and "more equipped to deal with the stress and frustration associated with that kind of work" (p. 75). This finding may be applicable to paraeducators who work with children with the most severe physical, behavioral, and cognitive disabilities, such as those enrolled in private special education schools.

Paraeducator Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, and Job Satisfaction

Morgan and Ashbaker (2001, p. 19) offered the following guidance to teachers which could influence paraeducator job satisfaction: "As a teacher who works with a paraeducator, and particularly if you are her direct supervisor, you are in a position to be her advocate. In fact, you may be her only advocate." To establish a positive climate, Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) further advised that teachers become aware of how to speak to others, place value on the life experiences and cultural backgrounds staff bring to the classroom, and to not expect staff to perform tasks they have not been taught.

I can personally reflect on the job satisfaction that was expressed when accompanying three paraeducators from my faculty to the 2011 Council for Exceptional Children annual conference in National Harbor, Maryland. Satisfaction was evidenced by formal presentations they offered to make, and subsequently made, to colleagues, their requests to attend future conferences, implementation of what they learned from the conference in their classrooms, and interest expressed from their colleagues in attending future conferences. Since that time, paraeducators have been invited and encouraged to attend professional conferences along with teachers, clinicians, and school administrators. Each similar opportunity for paraeducators has been met with expressions of enthusiasm and appreciation for having benefitted from the learning experience.

Critical Studies in Paraeducator Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, and Job Satisfaction

Paraeducator job satisfaction and teachers' leadership behaviors. Prest (1993) sought to determine if there were specific leadership behaviors or demographic factors among teachers that could be linked to high or low job satisfaction among paraeducators. He found that teachers' behavior of tolerance for freedom and uncertainty, persuasive ability, demonstration of consideration, and concern had significant correlation with paraeducator job satisfaction.

Paraeducator job satisfaction and student success. Keane (2007) looked at the relationship between paraeducator job satisfaction and secondary school students' success. His results did not support a correlation between high paraeducator job satisfaction and student academic success. However, it did yield higher rates of student participation in co-curricular activities.

Job satisfaction differences between paraeducators in public schools and special education schools. Akerman (2008), using qualitative and quantitative measures, researched whether there was a difference in job satisfaction between paraeducators working in public special education schools and paraeducators employed in special education programs located in public, non-specialized education schools. The results did not indicate any statistically significant differences between the two groups.

Limitations of This Literature Review

Despite the prevalence of paraeducators in today's schools and their direct involvement with students, research in the areas of paraeducator role ambiguity, role conflict, and job satisfaction is minimal within the body of literature associated with these constructs. Research on teacher job satisfaction was found, however, studies on paraeducator job satisfaction were not. Although many articles presented information about the enhanced roles and growing

responsibilities of today's paraeducators, missing from the literature were studies examining role conflict and role ambiguity among this group.

Summary

Chapter II presented a review of literature in the areas of role stress, job satisfaction, the relationship between role stress and job satisfaction, and the relationship between paraeducators and role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction. The inverse relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction is critical to my study since role conflict among paraeducators is being considered a surrogate for paraeducator job satisfaction.

The Methods chapter, which follows, presents the study's research design, variables, research questions, and methodology.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction: Research Design

This chapter begins with a description of the research design, variables, and research questions that have guided the study. Following those topics is the Methodology section to provide information about the study participants, the setting, data collection procedures, validity, reliability, and the methods used for data analysis, including coding of qualitative data. Chapter III concludes with a discussion of protection of human subjects, bias and ethical considerations, and limitations to available data.

Theoretical Framework and Research Approach

This study examines the relationships between the dependent variable role conflict and the independent variables role ambiguity, gender, age, status as teaching assistant, status as teacher, plans to become a teacher, experience working with children who have disabilities, experience in current position, and education, as determined by the participants' survey data.

Theoretical Model

Within the theoretical model (see Figure 3.1), the dependent variable is role conflict. The independent variables are: role ambiguity, gender, age, status as teaching assistant, status as teacher, plans to become a teacher, experience working with children who have disabilities, experience in present position, and education. The theoretical model posits that relationships among variables can be measured and specifically, each independent variable can be measured to determine its relative influence on role conflict and its ability to predict role conflict while the effects of the other variables are held constant.

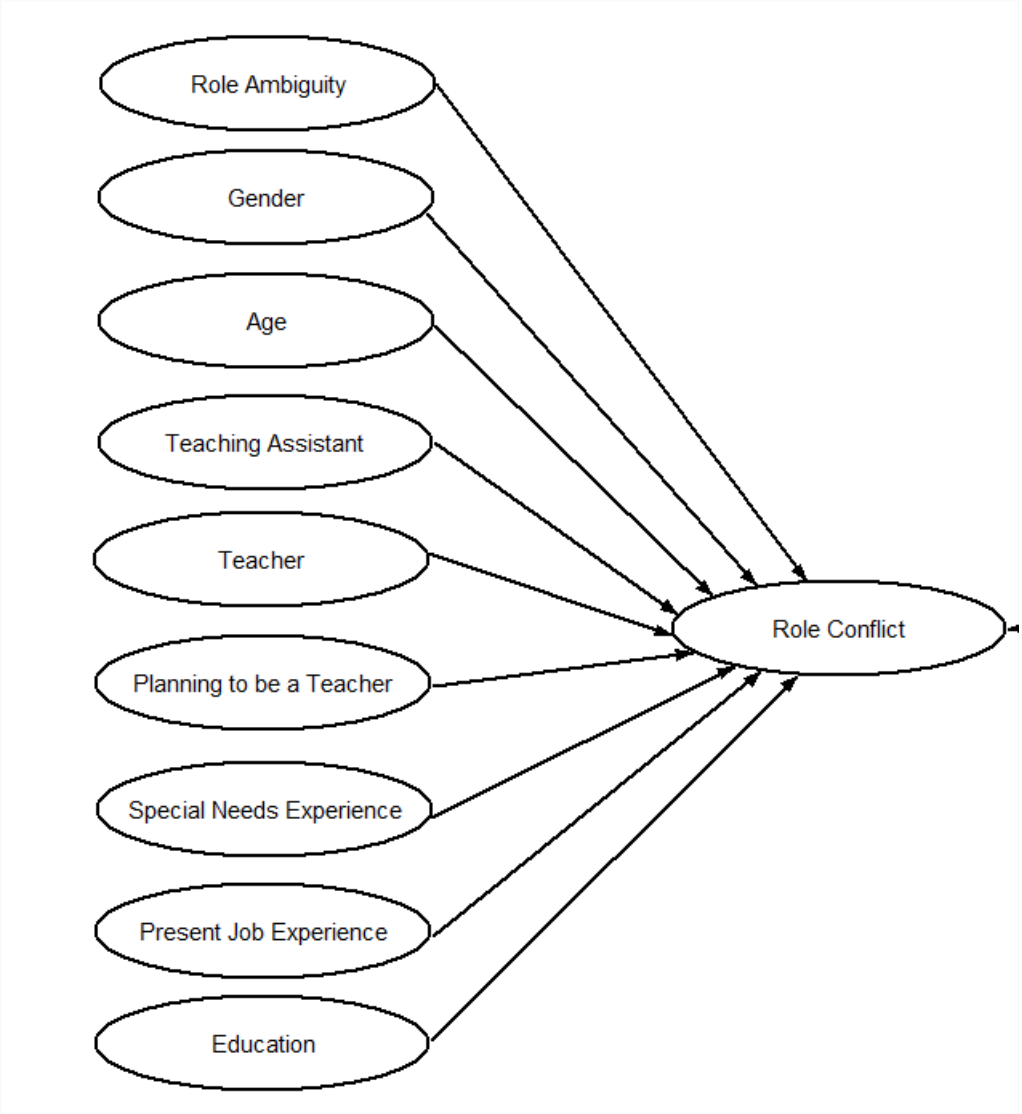

Figure 3.1. Theoretical model showing the dependent variable role conflict and the independent variables: role ambiguity, gender, age, status as teaching assistant, status as teacher, plans to become a teacher, experience working with children who have disabilities, experience in present position, and education.

Research Design

This research study examines role conflict among paraeducators working in private special education schools. The influence role ambiguity and demographic factors have on role

conflict among this group was measured. Methods have been used in this study to gain understanding about these constructs and their relationship within a select group of paraeducators working within private special education schools. The approach taken in this investigation was dissemination of a survey instrument to 419 paraeducators in 12 private special education schools.

Variables

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study is role conflict. Role conflict was measured using the Role Conflict scale, which is a subscale of the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale designed and published by Rizzo et al. (1970).

Independent Variables

The independent variables in this study are role ambiguity and demographic data provided by the respondents.

Role ambiguity. Role ambiguity was analyzed in this study for its impact on predicting role conflict. Role ambiguity was measured by the Role Ambiguity scale (Rizzo et al., 1970), also a subscale of the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale (Rizzo et al., 1970).

Demographic information. Respondents were asked to complete eight questions related to (a) gender, (b) age, (c) education, (d) experience working with children who have disabilities, (e) experience in current position, (f) plans to become a teacher, (g) status as certified teaching assistant, and (h) status as certified teacher. Demographic data were analyzed for each of the variables' relationship to and impact on predicting role conflict. The variables are described as follows:

Gender. This binary variable was coded as male, where male = 1 and female = 2.

Age. Age was specified as a categorical variable to alleviate concern with disclosing an exact age and to maintain anonymity. Categories were: 18-25 years, 26-34 years, 35-39 years, 40-49 years, and 50 years and older.

Years of experience working with children who have disabilities. This item asked for the years of experience the respondent has working with children who have disabilities. Years of experience was specified as a categorical variable to alleviate concern about maintaining anonymity. Categories were 0-1 year, 2-4 years, 5-9 years, 10-15 years, and 16 years and greater.

Years of experience in current position. This item asked for the length of time the respondent has been in the current position. This was specified as a categorical variable to alleviate concern about maintaining anonymity. Categories were 0-1 year, 2-4 years, 5-9 years, 10-15 years, and 16 years and greater.

Education. Education was specified as a categorical variable to alleviate concern about maintaining anonymity. Categories were: high school, some college, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and other.

Plans to become a teacher. This item asked if a respondent planned to become a teacher at some point, if not already a teacher. This binary variable was specified as yes = 1 and no = 2.

Status as certified teaching assistant. This item asked if the respondent was a New York State certified teaching assistant. This binary variable was specified as yes = 1 and no = 2.

Status as certified teacher. This item asked if the respondent was a New York State certified teacher. This binary variable was specified as yes = 1 and no = 2.

Although data were provided by respondents regarding the last four demographic items: education, plans to become a teacher, status as a certified teaching assistant, and status as a

certified teacher, this information was not included in the results as it did not produce significant information in test regression models. The data will be included when presenting respondent demographics; however, they will not be discussed further as predictor variables.

Research Questions

The following research questions form the center of inquiry in the study:

- RQ1: In what ways do paraeducators experience role conflict within their positions?
- RQ2: In what ways and to what extent does role ambiguity contribute to role conflict for paraeducators in their positions?
- RQ3: To what extent does gender contribute to paraeducator role conflict?
- RQ4: To what extent does age contribute to paraeducator role conflict?
- RQ5. To what extent does experience with children who have disabilities contribute to paraeducator role conflict?
- RQ.6 To what extent does experience in current position contribute to paraeducator role conflict?

Methodology

Sample

The New York State Education Department has established and recognizes two paraeducator job classifications: certified teaching assistant and non-certified teacher aide (see Table 1.1). Participants in my study represent both job categories. From the survey, demographic data were ascertained to delineate each subject's status as a certified teacher working as a paraeducator (New York State certified teachers working as paraeducators are not required to obtain teaching assistant certification), a certified teaching assistant, or a teacher aide. Other demographic information about the subjects was gained from the survey, specifically

gender, age, education, relevant experience, experience in current position, and plans to become a teacher.

All permanent, non-per diem teaching assistants and teacher aides working in 12 private special education schools were invited to participate in this study. While they may have different titles, respondents are members of the faculty group that provides direct-care to the students.

Sample size. The total paraeducator population within those 12 schools consisted of 473 faculty members. From the potential population of 473 paraeducators, 419 (88.6%) attended the survey meetings at their schools and completed the survey. Fifty-four paraeducators (11.4%) did not attend the survey meeting for reasons which included absence from work that day, late bus duty responsibilities, and exercising their option to not attend the meeting. Responses to items on the qualitative and quantitative sections of the survey from the group of 419 paraeducators are presented in Chapter IV.

Demographic data. Data from participants gained from the demographic questions on the survey are summarized as follows:

Gender. Of the 413 participants who provided information on gender, 87.7% are female. This representation among paraeducators in the sample is consistent with data from the National Center for Education Information (Feistritzer, 2011), which indicated that within the public elementary school teacher population, 84% are female.

Age. As seen in Figure 3.2, data in the age range demographic are reasonably equally proportioned and balanced. More than half of all participants (52.1%) are 40 years of age or older. This is noteworthy given the physical demands of the paraeducator position within these schools, which include lifting children into wheelchairs and onto changing tables, pushing wheelchairs on uneven surfaces, and teaching adolescents to walk. Of the 411 participants who

provided information on age, the distribution was 20.4% in the age range of 18-25 years of age, 16.6% in the 26-34 years age range, 11.0% in the 35-39 years age range, 21.9% in the 40-49 years age range, and 30.2% in the 50 years and older age range.

My pilot study, which included paraeducators from programs not participating in the survey and administrative colleagues, indicated that respondents might be reluctant to indicate actual age and therefore, participants were asked to indicate a category of age, rather than actual age.

The histogram shown in Figure 3.2 presents the sample in terms of age operationalized by age range.

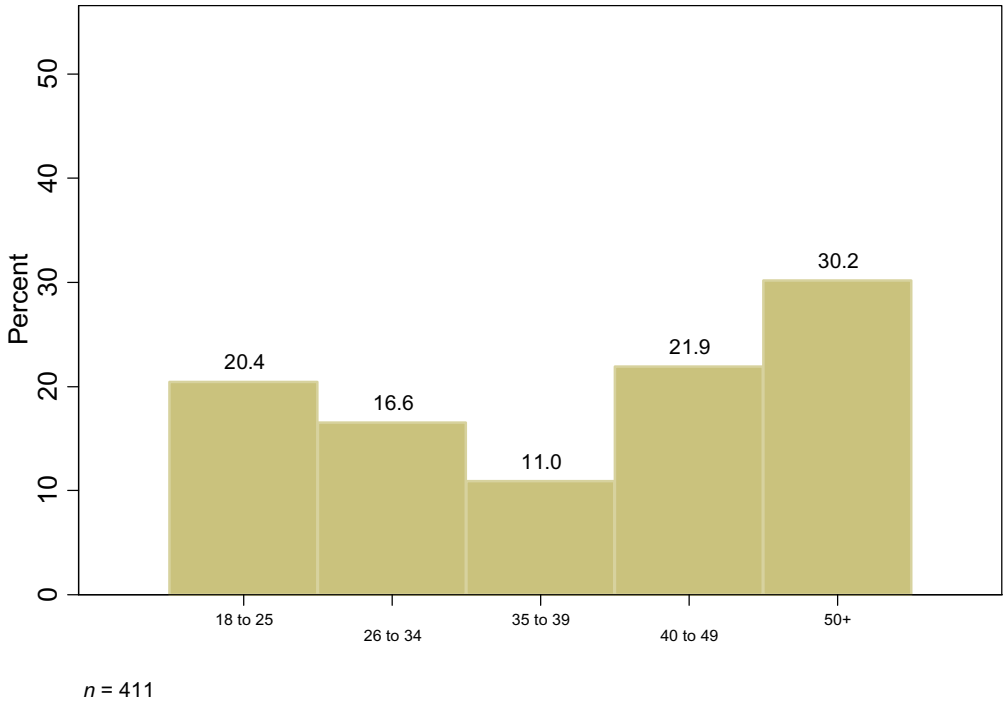

Figure 3.2. Histogram showing the study sample by age operationalized by age range.

Education. Of the 408 individuals who answered the item asking the highest level of education completed, 22.6% have completed high school, but have not taken college courses,

52.7% have taken some college-level courses, 18.6% have received bachelor's degrees, and 5.9% have received master's degrees. One individual indicated education less than high school and possible explanations include that the person was employed in that position before the school required a high school diploma and was allowed to remain in the position, that the respondent has a GED and did not know that the high school category applied, or for some other reason. Of note is that 77.2% of the respondents have had at least some college-level education. Twenty-four individuals indicated completion of a master's degree and that prompts the question of why someone with a graduate degree would have a position as a paraeducator. Some possible explanations are that: (a) the person is returning to the workforce after an absence and wants to "get his or her feet wet," (b) the person is unable to obtain employment commensurate with a graduate degree since unemployment at the time of the survey in New York State was 7.5% in June and July 2013 (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013), and (c) possibly the paraeducator is someone who enjoys working with children and wishes to be of service in a direct-care capacity to those with special needs.

The histogram shown in Figure 3.3 presents the sample in terms of education.

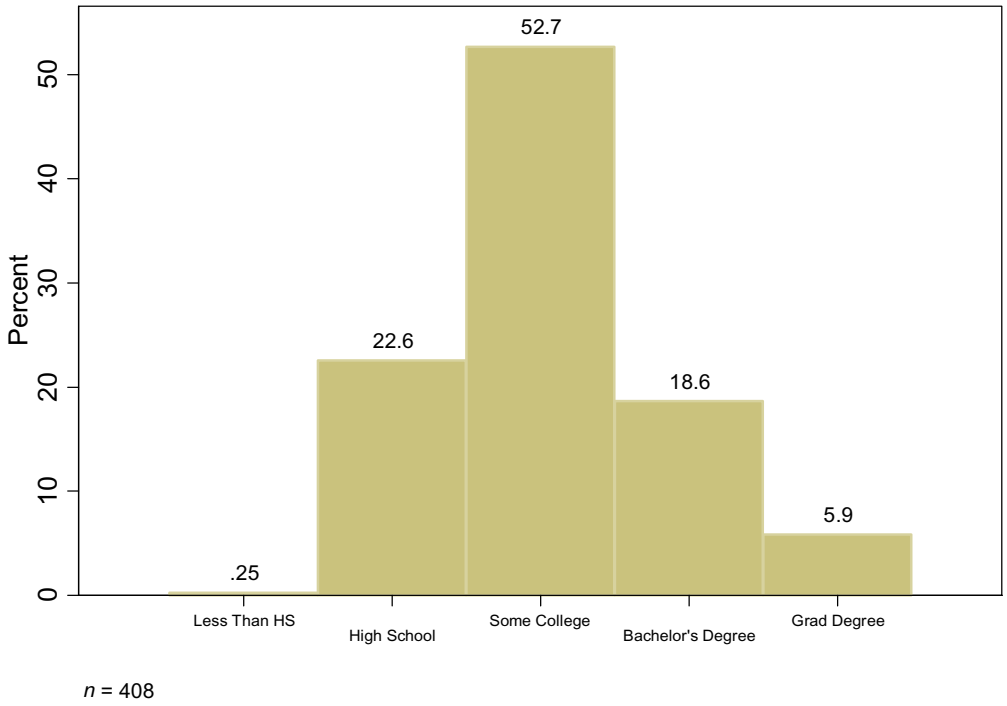

Figure 3.3. Histogram showing the study sample's highest level of education.

Overall, the male subjects reported that they have nearly the same level of education as their female co-workers. Of the 50 males who responded to the question about education and college experience, 76.0% have had at least some college experience. Of the females who responded to this question, 77.5% have at least some college experience. Gender did not tend to be a factor influencing paraeducators to obtain college experience.

Experience working with children who have disabilities. When asked about years of experience the participants have had working with children who have disabilities, 405 paraeducators responded. The sample reflects a balance in terms of years of experience working with children who have disabilities. Of that group: 15.3% have 1 year or less; 24.7% have 2-4 years; 27.7% have 5-9 years; 16.1% have 10-15 years; and 16.3% have 16 years of experience and greater. Of note is that 84.8% have had more than one year of experience, 60.1% have had

at least five years of experience, and almost one-third of the subjects (32.4%) have had at least 10 years of experience working with this population.

The histogram shown in Figure 3.4 presents the sample in terms of experience working with children who have disabilities.

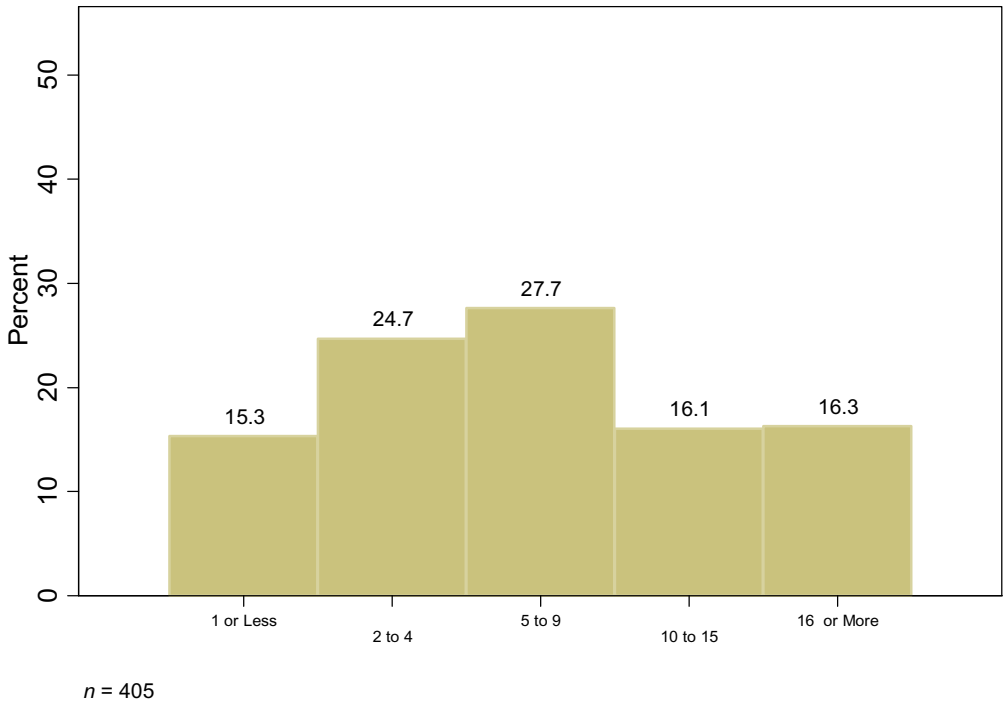

Figure 3.4. Histogram showing the study sample by experience working with children who have disabilities.

Experience in current position. Approximately one in five (21.5%) of the 401 respondents to this item have been in their current positions for one year or less and approximately one in four have been there more than 10 years. Fewer individuals responded to this item than any other item, except the question about plans to become a teacher. Perhaps anonymity played a part in this response because of concern that their identity could be known based on their years of working in their schools.

Of those who provided information on the years of experience they have had in their current position: 21.5% have 1 year or less, 24.9% have 2-4 years, 26.9% have 5-9 years, 12.5% have 10-15 years, and 14.2% have 16 years of experience or greater. Summarizing this data, we see that 78.5% have had more than one year of experience in their current position and 53.6% have at least five years of experience.

There is inconsistency between responses to the item about experience working with children who have disabilities and experience working in one's current position. Since all participants are employed as paraeducators, their experience working with children with disabilities should be equal to or greater than their experience in their current position. This is not the case in two of the five categories in which years in the current position are greater than years of experience working with children who have disabilities. Of those two categories, the difference in one category is 6.2% and the other is 0.2%. Possible explanations for this include missing data from 18 participants who did not complete the item asking about experience in the current position, errors in completing the item, and misinformation provided in the interest of maintaining anonymity.

The histogram shown in Figure 3.5 presents the sample in terms of experience working in their current position.

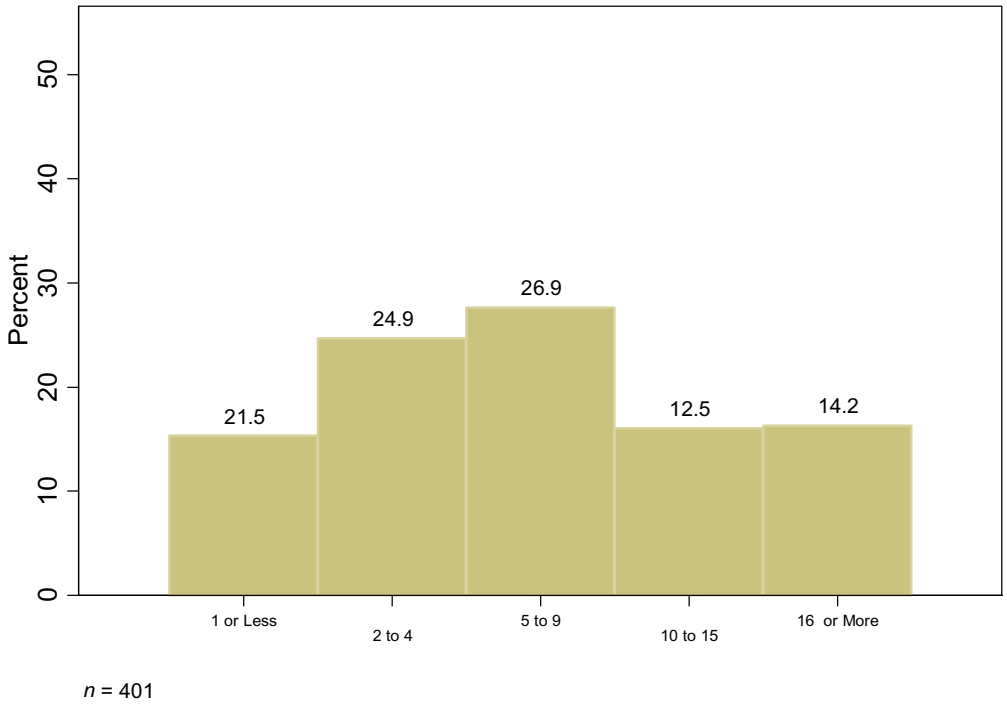

Figure 3.5. Histogram showing the study sample by experience working in current position.

Plans to become a teacher. Of the 385 individuals who provided information about their plans to become a teacher, more than two thirds (67.3%) of the respondents indicated they did not. It is unclear why this item received the lowest response rate on the demographic question section of the survey except to posit that within schools, the principals may know who is pursuing teacher education (possibly the school is providing tuition reimbursement) and, therefore, this item might have been considered by the participants to be a barrier to anonymity.

Status as certified teaching assistant. Of the 408 participants who provided information on whether they are New York State certified teaching assistants, 38.2% indicated that they are teaching assistants.

Status as certified teacher. Of the 407 participants who provided information on whether they are New York State certified teachers, 2.7% indicated that they are teachers

working as paraeducators. This differs from what one would find in a public school where it would be common for many of the paraeducators to be certified teachers. In some public school districts, every paraeducator is a teacher. A reason for taking a position as a paraeducator in a public school is that it could lead to a teaching position if one becomes available in the district. This situation is not evidenced in the private special education schools participating in the study. A possible explanation is that in the participating schools, salaries of teachers are 20-35% less than those salaries in public schools, and health and pension benefits are below, as well (R. Simon, personal communication, September 28, 2013). Certified teachers seeking teaching positions are more apt to work in public schools as paraeducators than in private special education schools as paraeducators.

The Setting of the Study

The subjects of the study were employed within 12 private special education schools affiliated with a statewide organization in New York that serves and advocates on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities. The schools serve children with physical and/or cognitive disabilities. Some serve children with autism or pervasive developmental disorder; others do not. The schools are components of multi-service, non-profit organizations which are members of this statewide organization. The non-profit organizations are governed by a volunteer board of directors. The chief executive officer is the agency's executive director who oversees all programs within the organization, which typically include programs for children, such as a school, and separate programs which serve adults with disabilities, such as vocational, day training, and residential programs. These organizations are tax exempt and are funded by a combination of public and private dollars.

To offer perspective of where this group falls within the spectrum of education in New York State, the following description is being offered.

Within New York, over 3.1 million children are served by a diverse network of 4,500 schools within 697 school districts, 37 Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), and 2,000 nonpublic schools (Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute, 2011). The last category, nonpublic schools, is comprised of religious-affiliated schools, private/independent schools, and private non-profit schools that serve children with special needs. The schools selected in this study are in the latter group of educational programs. As such, they certified by the New York State Education Department (NYSED, 2013) and are required to adhere to most of the same regulations imposed on public schools (NYS Regulations, 2012).

This group of schools is also referred to as approved providers, private special education schools, and 853 and/or 4410 programs, which indicate that their student population is school-age or preschool, respectively. In New York, there are approximately 490 programs that provide services to children from the ages of 3-5 with special needs, although the majority of the programs do not provide half-day or full-day school-based services. Rather, they provide educational and/or clinical services on an itinerant basis in the child's home, day care center, or preschool program. For students ages 5-21 who have moderate to severe special needs, there are approximately 125 school-based programs.

As private special education schools, the schools have the following in common:

- Schools employing the faculty members participating in this study serve those students which public school officials determine would be best served outside of the public school system. Hence, public schools refer those students to the private special education schools for educational and therapeutic services.

- The schools are required to adhere to public school regulations (NYS Regulations, 2012), including certification of teachers in special education, class size restrictions, and class ratio stipulations, such as 12:1:4 (12 students to one teacher and four paraeducators).
- Salaries and wages of faculty in these schools are considerably less than those for colleagues with the same experience employed in public schools. As an example, in 2008, the New York City Department of Education (NYC Department of Education, 2008) set a salary of $69,901 for a Master's level teacher who had been in the system for five years. Within private special education schools, such as mine, the salary for a teacher with comparable education and longevity was $53,000-$58,000. In 2008, a teaching assistant with no experience who was working for the New York City Department of Education earned $21,713 (NYC Department of Education, 2008). At that same time, a certified teaching assistant working in my school earned approximately $16,000. This pattern holds true within public school districts other than New York City, as well (A. Hernandez, personal communication, November 19, 2013; R. Simon, personal communication, September 13, 2013). Similarly, benefits such as health insurance and pension are not comparable to benefits offered in public schools.
- The participating schools are located within 60 miles of New York City.
- The school settings include five in urban areas, six in suburban areas, and one in a mixed suburban/rural area.
- Participants' school programs range in size based on enrollment of children from 50 to 250.

Data Collection

Collecting data from 12 schools took place over the three-month period from May through July 2013. The process began by requesting written consent from each organization's executive director to contact the school's principal and request participation from the paraeducators (see Appendix A). Subsequent to receiving written consent (see Appendix B), arrangements were made with each principal to visit the educational program, meet with the school's paraeducators, and administer a survey to teaching assistants and teacher aides who would volunteer to participate. All principals supported this research and dates and times of survey administration were set. Times were either during staff lunch break or after students had left for the day.

A sample invitation was emailed to the principals suggesting that they distribute it to all paraeducators, inviting their participation in research and assuring that responses would be anonymous and confidential (see Appendix C).

Depending on the time of day that the survey was administered at each of the 12 schools, I arranged for sandwiches for lunch and/or dessert to be available for participants. At the time of survey administration, I distributed to the subjects the following: (a) informed consent forms (see Appendix D), (b) survey instrument (see Appendix E), and (c) a thank you gift which was a pen that says "One Person Can Make A Difference."

At each school, an introductory script was read aloud (see Appendix F) to the group of paraeducators. In some schools, I met with all paraeducators together in one sitting. In others, the process was repeated each time a new group of staff arrived. For example, in one school, the paraeducators were invited during their lunch break and I provided lunch. Since there were three staff lunch periods, the survey administration process was conducted three times.

Participants were asked to sign a written, informed consent form which stated that it was not mandatory for them to complete the survey, nor would there be any penalty for not completing it (see Appendix D). They also read that if they were to find the survey uncomfortable, the paraeducator may withdraw from completing the survey at any time, also without penalty.

In the first two schools I visited, subjects were given the survey and completed it without having the questions read to them. Subsequent to those two visits, and based on a request from a paraeducator at my third school visit, I read the survey questions aloud to subjects, leaving time for completion of each item. Participants were told that the items have been translated into Spanish, if needed. If there were any words that needed explanation, I would provide that. No one requested translation, but there were requests for explanations of one particular word, "*tactful*," for which a standardized response was given: If one is tactful, it means that the person is careful not to offend or upset other people.

One of the schools surveyed has two off-site programs, in addition to its main program in its school building. In that situation, I met with the group at the main site. The principal then (a) arranged to disseminate the survey at a meeting with paraeducators at the two off-site schools; (b) read the script to the participants, allowing time for survey completion; (c) collected responses; and (d) the responses were then placed in an envelope and mailed to me.

In the school where I am the principal, three other school administrators disseminated the survey to the paraeducators. I was not in the vicinity of the survey administration. Since I was not the one to administer the survey in those three situations, a modified script was written for the survey administrator to read (see Appendix G).

Upon completion of surveys, responses were collected. Upon completion of survey administration at all 12 schools, the surveys were brought to the executive director of my organization who shuffled the responses to ensure that identification with a particular site could not be made.

Quantitative data from each survey was entered into Stata/IC version 12.1. Qualitative information from 105 responses to the open-ended, narrative item was read and analyzed for major themes. Then they were coded based on common sentiments, such as only having positive comments, only having negative comments about pay, and having comments that presented issues of role conflict or role ambiguity.

Survey Instruments

In selecting the survey instrument and items, three factors relevant to the participants were of particular importance: (a) ease of completion since it was felt that some paraeducators might not be accustomed to completing surveys or similar paperwork; (b) based on paraeducators in my school, it could not be assumed that English is a primary language and thus, language in the survey would need to be relatively easy to understand and a Spanish translation would need to be available; and (c) as critical members of the interdisciplinary classroom team, paraeducators do not have much time that they can be excused from their work responsibilities to assist with doctoral research. Thus, the survey would need to be designed to be reader-friendly and time-sensitive.

A small pilot study was done with paraeducators not participating in the study to gain feedback on the survey. Similarly, a meeting was held with administrators in my school to review the proposed survey and the survey administration process. Based on discussion and knowledge gained from those paraeducators and school administrators, it was decided that an

online survey would not be effective since not all paraeducators would have access to computers or possess computer skills. Consequently, a paper and pencil survey was used. Additional feedback was that some words on the survey would need to be modified for greater understanding by the subjects.

Time for completion would be during participants' lunch break, generally 30 minutes, or at the end of the day when students have been dismissed, also generally 30 minutes. During that time, the informed consent would need to be reviewed, directions given, survey questions read, and the survey completed. The survey was designed to be completed in less than 20 minutes and in each school, the entire survey administration process, including time to eat lunch or dessert, took less than 30 minutes.

Data were collected through a five-part survey administered to the 419 participants from 12 schools. The first part was the Abridged Job Descriptive Index. This instrument is derived from the Job Descriptive Index (Balzer et al., 2000). The format consists of five subscales representing five facets or specific aspects of job satisfaction: (a) the work, (b) supervision, (c) people, (d) pay, and (e) promotions.

The second part of the survey was the Job in General Index (Balzer, et. al., 2000) which ascertains the respondent's global, overall sense of job satisfaction. It is similar to the Job Descriptive Index, as it uses single words or short phrases as items. There is only one item on the Job in General Index.

Consent was granted to use the Abridged Job Descriptive Index and the Job in General Index (see Appendix H). However, it was decided that role conflict, and not job satisfaction, would be studied as the dependent variable and, therefore, job satisfaction data from both scales were not analyzed.

The third part of the survey was the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale (Rizzo et al., 1970). Sometimes referred to as the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Questionnaire, the RHL Scale, and the Rizzo Scale, it has two subscales, the Role Conflict scale and the Role Ambiguity scale, with a total of 14 items to assess role conflict and role ambiguity. Permission was granted by Cornell University to use those scales (see Appendix I).

The fourth part of the survey consisted of eight demographic items which asked for gender, age range, status as a New York State certified teaching assistant, status as a New York State certified teacher, plans to become a teacher, years of experience working with children who have disabilities, length of time in current position, and highest level of education completed.

The fifth part of the survey invited an open-ended, narrative response to a question asking about satisfaction with one's job and roles and responsibilities.

The research measures used in this study, which consisted of the two instruments, the eight demographic questions, and an open-ended, narrative question, are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

Role conflict measure. The Role Conflict scale is a subscale of the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale designed and published by Rizzo et al. (1970). It is an eight-item, Likert-type scale with seven choices for the respondent ranging from *very false* to *very true*. Each item on the Role Conflict scale is scored from 1 to 7 with scores of 1 indicating strong disagreement with the statement and scores of 7 indicating strong agreement with the statement (Cervoni, 2007; Keingstein, 2013). For purposes of this study, the scale, which was not developed for the paraeducator population, was modified to include five choices for the respondents ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Consequently, scoring was changed to 1 to 5 based on modifications. As determined by my pilot study, some individual words were changed for

greater understanding, ease of completion, and applicability to participants' roles within private special education schools. High scores represent higher levels of role conflict (Cervoni, 2007). The scale items for the Role Conflict scale and word changes made for this study are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Role Conflict Scale Items

Variable	Scale Item
role02 o	I have to do things that should be done differently.
role02 m	I have to do things that I feel should be done differently.
role04 o	I receive an assignment without the manpower to complete it.
role04 m	I receive assignments without enough people to complete them.
role06 o	I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.
role06 m	I have to break a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.
role07 o	I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently.
role07 m	I work with two or more people or groups who operate quite differently.
role09 o	I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.
role09 m	I receive incompatible or conflicting requests from two or more people.
role11 o	I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others.
role11 m	I do things that are likely to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others.
role12 i	I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it.
role14 i	I work on unnecessary things.

Note. This table shows the Role Conflict scale, a subscale of the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale (Rizzo et al., 1970). Items marked with the letters *m* and *i* were included in the survey. Those marked with the letter *o* show the original wording of the items. Those marked with the letter *m* indicate the wording of that survey item as modified by the researcher.

Role ambiguity measure. The Role Ambiguity scale is another subscale of the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale, designed and published by Rizzo et al. (1970). This instrument is

a six-item, Likert-type scale with seven choices for the respondent ranging from *very false* to *very true*. Each item on the scale is scored on a scale of 1 to 7 with scores of 1 indicating strong disagreement with the statement and scores of 7 indicating strong agreement with the statement (Cervoni, 2007; Keingstein, 2013). For purposes of this study, the scale, which was not designed to be used with the paraeducator population, was modified to include five choices for the respondents ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Consequently, scoring was changed to 1 to 5 based on modifications. As determined by my pilot study, one word was changed for ease of completion and applicability to participants' roles within private special education schools. Each of the role ambiguity items is negatively worded and is reverse scored before computing the scale scores. High scores represent higher levels of role ambiguity (Cervoni, 2007). The scale items for the Role Ambiguity Scale and the word change made for this study are shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2.

Role Ambiguity Scale Items

Variable	Scale Item
role01 i	I have clear, planned goals and objectives for my job. (R)
role03 o	I know that I have divided my time properly. (R)
role03 m	I know that I have used my time properly. (R)
role05 i	I know what my responsibilities are. (R)
role08 i	I know exactly what is expected of me. (R)
role10 i	I feel certain about how much authority I have. (R)
role13 i	Explanations are clear of what has to be done. (R)

Note. This table shows the Role Ambiguity scale, a subscale of the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale (Rizzo et al., 1970). Items marked with the letters *m* and *i* were included in the survey. The item marked with the letter *o* shows the original wording of the item. The item marked with the letter *m* indicates the wording of that survey item as modified by the researcher.

Qualitative Response to Open-Ended, Narrative Item

An open-ended, narrative question was included in the survey inviting respondents to add any comments about their satisfaction with their jobs or the roles and responsibilities they have at work. Such responses added qualitative data to the research.

Reliability

Rizzo, et al. (1970) reported reliability of .80 on the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale. Shepherd and Fine (1994) wrote that the reliability estimates of scale determined in the 20 years since it was first developed were considered acceptable. Those estimates included Jackson and Schuler's (1985) meta-analysis which yielded estimates of .79 for each scale. King and King (1990) determined that the reliability, while not poor, should be improved.

The reliability of the Role Conflict scale used in this study was assessed by calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. It was found to manifest an overall degree of reliability ($\alpha = .77$) considered reliable (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The detailed reliability and item analysis of the Role Conflict scale is shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3.

Reliability and Item Analysis of the Role Conflict Scale

Scale Item	Item-Scale Correlation	Item-Rest Correlation	Alpha if Removed
role02 w	0.53	0.38	0.75
role04 w	0.59	0.43	0.75
role06 w	0.58	0.44	0.75
role07 w	0.60	0.43	0.75
role09 w	0.69	0.55	0.72
role11 w	0.64	0.48	0.74
role12 i	0.69	0.55	0.73
role14 i	0.60	0.45	0.74

Note. Overall alpha = .77. For scale item labels, see Table 3.1.

The reliability of the Role Ambiguity scale used in this study was assessed by calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. It was found to manifest an overall degree of reliability (α = .68) considered marginally/minimally reliable (Cohen et al., 2007). The detailed reliability and item analysis of the Role Ambiguity scale is shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

Reliability and Item Analysis of the Role Ambiguity Scale

Scale Item	Item-Scale Correlation	Item-Rest Correlation	Alpha if Removed
role01 i	0.56	0.33	0.67
role03 w	0.59	0.40	0.64
role05 i	0.59	0.44	0.64
role08 i	0.73	0.56	0.59
role10 i	0.60	0.34	0.67
role13 i	0.68	0.45	0.63

Note. Overall alpha = .68. For scale item labels, see Table 3.2.

Validity

Shepherd and Fine (1994, p. 57) wrote that the measurement of role conflict and role ambiguity was dominated by the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale and that those wishing to use the scale "must contend with criticism about the scale's validity…." Although the Role Conflict and the Role Ambiguity subscales exhibit construct validity (Cervoni, 2007; House, Schuler, & Levanoni, 1983; Keingstein, 2013; Smith, Tisak, & Schmieder, 1993), this dimension of the scale has been discussed in the research since its inception. Rizzo et al. (1970), when first introducing the scale, wrote that the constructs of role conflict and role ambiguity were separate dimensions. Schuler, Aldag, and Brief (1977) expressed that the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale demonstrated construct validity. However, they cautioned that while the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale may be appropriate measures of role ambiguity and role conflict, it is critical to use them as such, and not as measures of other types of ambiguity and conflict one may

experience. Kelloway and Barling (1990), employing confirmatory factor analysis, added to the research supporting the construct validity of the Rizzo scales. Tracey and Johnson (1981) expressed that the scales were actually measuring one underlying construct, not two.

Dubinsky and Hartley (1986), from their study involving insurance agents, stated that the scale exhibited discriminant and predictive validity. However, King and King (1990), though not specifically addressing the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale, differed with researchers who supported the validity of the scale. They expressed that there were problems with discriminant and convergent validity of the constructs. King and King (1990) also criticized the scales for not sufficiently representing the content as defined by Kahn, et al. (1964). They stated that the definition of role conflict and role ambiguity needed to be clarified, re-examined and better defined. Face validity was confirmed by members of my pilot study who agreed that the scale appeared to cover the concept I am measuring.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, permission was granted by Cornell University to use the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale (see Appendix I).

Practicability and Relevance

A factor that influenced both the choice of the research design and the selection of the survey instrument was practicability. Given the scarcity of research on paraeducator role conflict, it was important that my research design include data from a large number of paraeducators so that data would be statistically significant and professionally meaningful within the field of special education. To achieve the objective of sampling a larger number of paraeducators than typically found in one or two schools, 12 schools located within 60 miles of New York City were selected. Four hundred and nineteen paraeducators ultimately completed the survey.

Since enlisting the interest and support of potential respondents was critical to gathering data, invitations were sent asking all paraeducators in the 12 schools inviting them to participate and explaining my connection to their school (as an administrator of a school within the same statewide network as their school). When meeting with groups of paraeducators, I explained how the collective results would be used and that they would be shared with their school leaders. This was clearly important to group members since they wanted their supervisors to know how they felt about job satisfaction and role conflict.

Practicability was also important in the selection of the survey instrument. It needed to be understandable, relevant, and considerate of time constraints. Consequently, at the recommendation of members of my pilot study, minor word changes were made to the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale. For example, instead of including the expression "buck a rule or policy," which the pilot study group felt was outdated and might not be understood, I substituted the term "break a rule or policy." Similarly, since paraeducators follow the direction of the teacher and the flow of the instructional day, and do not decide what tasks to do, the pilot study group did not feel that the expression "I know I have divided my time properly" was applicable. Therefore, it was substituted with "I know that I have used my time properly." These minor changes facilitated the completion of the survey with greater ease and more relevance to the work of the paraeducators.

Data Analysis

Using Stata/IC version 12.1, multiple regression models were developed to determine which, if any, of the independent variables were significant predictors of role conflict among the participants. Subsequent to analysis of several models, theory trimming techniques were applied to identify the model that would be used to provide the evidence necessary to respond to the research questions identified in this chapter.

Responses to the open-ended, narrative item inviting subjects to share comments about job satisfaction, roles, and responsibilities were reviewed and coded to determine dominant themes.

Coding

Qualitative information from open-ended, narrative response items was analyzed for major themes, such as pay, work with colleagues, and enjoyment from working with students. Then emerged themes were coded based on common sentiments, such as only having positive comments about the job, only having negative comments about pay, and having comments that presented issues of role conflict or role ambiguity.

Protection of Human Subjects

To address any potential risks or other negative consequences to human subjects, an informed consent form was distributed to subjects at each school and they were asked to read and sign the document. Informed consent stated that it was not mandatory to complete the survey and there would not be any penalty for not completing it. Subjects also read that if they were to find the survey uncomfortable, the paraeducator could withdraw from completing the survey at any time, also without penalty.

Bias and Ethical Considerations

Of considerable importance to the study are disclosure and control of potential researcher bias. While those were not predicted to be factors in relation to 11 of the selected schools, and did not evidence during the survey administration procedure, the data collection procedure had been modified for the particular school in which I serve as principal.

In that school, my role in survey administration was solely to orient administrative colleagues (an assistant principal, school workforce coordinator, and office manager) who volunteered to administer the survey according to the procedure I established. Three sessions

were held for this group of paraeducators and each one was held in a building separate from the school. I am not aware of who participated in the research or which session each participant attended. My colleagues read the script that was prepared for them, distributed and collected informed consent forms and surveys, and gave out snacks and gifts. They put completed surveys in envelopes, sealed them, and the three envelopes were subsequently opened along with the sealed responses from the other 11 schools and mixed together by the executive director of the organization in which I work in order to reduce bias.

The consideration of ethical implications has been a top priority throughout this study. This consideration was and will continue to be afforded to subjects, the schools they represent, the students they serve, and their school administrators. As per procedure, before data were collected, Long Island University/Post Campus' Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the purpose of the study, description of risks and benefits, survey instrument and consent form in regards to potential harm to human subjects and to confirm the worthiness of this study as it related to human subjects. IRB subsequently gave their approval and granted an exempt status to this research.

Limitations to Available Data

Limitations of this study and the available data include the ability to generalize findings across the larger group of paraeducators in New York State and elsewhere. While paraeducators are the group being studied, specifically, the study examined paraeducators in New York who work in 12 private special education schools affiliated with a statewide organization that advocates and serves persons with disabilities. The group did not include paraeducators in New York State who work in public schools, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)

schools, non-special education environments, or other private special education schools. The population studied also does not include paraeducators working in other states.

Subjective self-reporting (Kasl, 1977) is another methodological limitation of my study. A subject may have responded to a question based on a recent event or how well the day had been going. Respondents may have completed the survey based on what they considered the right answer, and not necessarily their personal response. Marczyk, DeMatteo, and Festinger (2005) pointed out that experimenter bias may occur if the participant is anxious about the testing process. While I did not have the sense that the respondents were anxious, and every effort was made to make the group feel at ease, this emotion might have been felt by members of paraeducator clusters being surveyed. Marczyk et al. raised the question of whether participants respond to questions, consciously or unconsciously, to meet what they perceive to be the expectations of the research setting.

Another limitation pertains to data that have been excluded because not all potential participants agreed to be part of the research. While the number of potential participants who opted not to participate was very small (54 persons or 11.4%), the question arises as to why this group opted out of the survey. Did that group experience more role stress than the respondents and did not want to share those feelings? Did they fear that their responses would be made known to supervisors? Those concerns and others might account for non-participation.

Chapter IV will present the findings and interpretations of the research. Responses to the research questions posed earlier in the study are found in this chapter. In Chapter V, my conclusions, suggestions for future policy and research, recommendations for practice, and view to the future will be presented.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this chapter, results of the research are presented**.** Chapter IV presents a model that was determined to be the most effective model in predicting role conflict given the variables in the study. Analysis of the data from the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale (Rizzo et al., 1970) and responses to demographic questions and the open-ended narrative item are presented. The Stata/IC version 12.1 statistical package was used for computations of the quantitative data set. Qualitative analysis through coding responses was done with the narrative item. Quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented, followed by a summary of the findings from the regression model.

As discussed in Chapter III, the study poses six research questions developed to gain an understanding of the relationship between the extent of role conflict experienced by paraeducators in private special education schools and the following variables: (a) role ambiguity, (b) gender, (c) age operationalized by age range, (d) experience working with children who have disabilities, and (e) length of time in their current positions.

Results of the Regression Analysis

The dependent variable in the model is role conflict. The independent variables are: (a) role ambiguity, (b) gender, (c) age, (d) experience working with children who have disabilities, and (e) experience in current position. Role conflict and role ambiguity were measured using data from the Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict subscales of the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale (Rizzo et al., 1970). The other variables were measured based on responses to the demographic questions on the survey instrument. Descriptions of each variable, their measures, and psychometric properties are discussed in greater detail in Chapter III.

This model includes data from 391 participants. Of the 419 paraeducators who participated in the research, 28 (7%) did not complete all items on the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale and were not included in the results of the final regression analysis. The trimmed regression model suggests that the variables in the model account for 20.2% of variance (R^2 = .202, Adjusted R^2 = .172, $F_{(14, 376)}$ = 6.78, p < .001). The independent variables role ambiguity, gender, age, experience working with children who have disabilities, and length of time in current position, which have been determined to be statistically significant predictors of role conflict, will be discussed.

Multiple regression analysis provided information on the following relationships: (a) Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity, (b) Role Conflict and Gender, (c) Role Conflict and Age, (d) Role Conflict and Experience With Children Who Have Disabilities, and (e) Role Conflict and Experience in Current Position. Table 4.1 summarizes the descriptive statistics and analysis results of the model.

Table 4.1

Multiple Regression Model Analysis: Five Variables Predicting Role Conflict Among Paraeducators

Variable	*b*	*SE*	*p*	β
Role Ambiguity	0.43	0.06	<.001	0.32
Gender	-0.23	0.10	.027	-0.11
Age Range				
26-34	0.17	0.11	.142	0.09
35-39	-0.09	0.13	.504	-0.04
40-49	-0.19	0.11	.102	-0.11
50+	-0.27	0.12	.030	-0.17
Experience With Children				
2-4 Years	0.21	0.14	.126	0.13
5-9 Years	0.35	0.17	.044	0.22
10-15 Years	0.16	0.20	.403	0.08
16+ Years	0.05	0.23	.848	0.02
Experience in Current Position				
2-4 Years	0.10	0.13	.440	0.06
5-9 Years	0.27	0.16	.093	0.17
10-15 Years	0.35	0.20	.079	0.16
16+ Years	0.66	0.23	.005	0.32
Constant	1.99	0.18	<.001	
$F(14, 376)$	6.78			
$p(F)$	0.00			
R^2	0.20			
Adjusted R^2	0.17			

Role Ambiguity

The margins plot displayed in Figure 4.1 shows the marginal effects of Role Ambiguity on Role Conflict based on a multiple regression model including Gender, Age Category, Experience Working With Children Who Have Disabilities, and Experience in Current Position as other independent variables or covariates. The graph shows a positive slope indicating that as role ambiguity increases, role conflict does the same. This variable ($b = .43$, $\beta = .32$, $p < .001$) is

a strong predictor of paraeducator role conflict. The beta weight indicates that role ambiguity has the greatest influence in determining paraeducator role conflict from among the variables included in the model. As seen in Table 4.1, after holding constant all other variables in the model, for each unit increase in role ambiguity, we can predict that role conflict tends to increase by almost one half of a point (.43 units).

This direct relationship between role conflict and role ambiguity was expressed by a survey respondent, who is a teacher aide, when she wrote, "We're told what to do by many people throughout the day….There are many times a conflict of interest occurs and I do not have a policy to make the decision." She expressed both role conflict and role ambiguity in that statement, despite having over 16 years of experience in the field and over 10 years of experience in her current position.

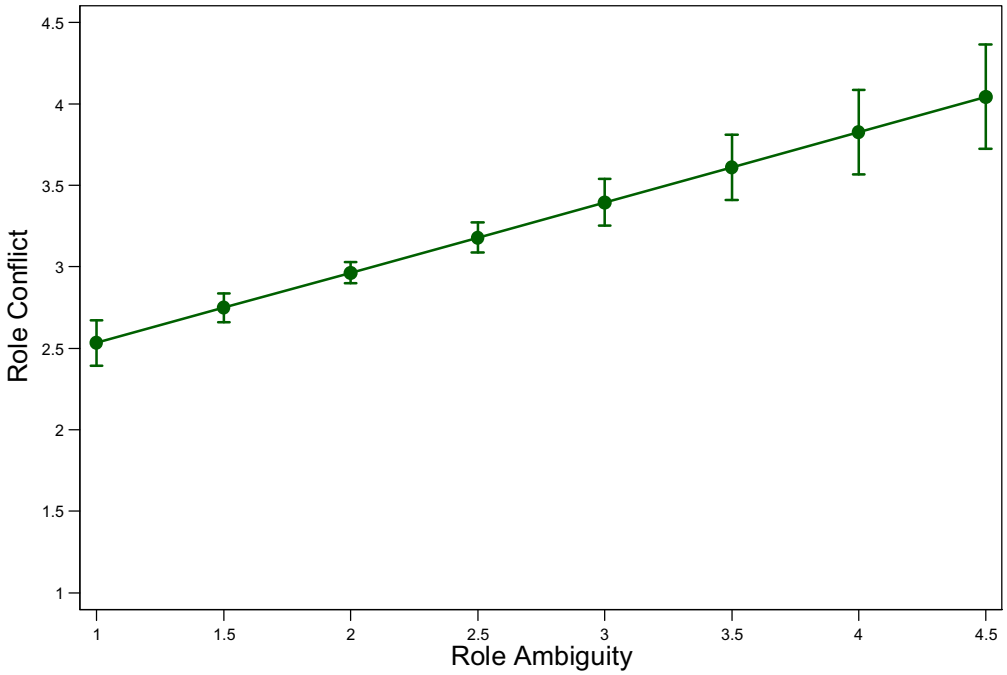

Figure 4.1. Margins plot showing the marginal effects of Role Ambiguity on Role Conflict based on a multiple regression model including Gender, Age Category, Experience Working With Children Who Have Disabilities, and Experience in Current Position as other independent variables or covariates.

Gender

The demographic item gender was also examined in the model to determine its predictive ability on role conflict. With both males and females, the graph shows a positive slope indicating that as role ambiguity increases, role conflict does the same. The margins plot displayed in Figure 4.2 shows the marginal effects of Role Ambiguity and Gender on Role Conflict based on a multiple regression model including Age Category, Experience Working With Children Who Have Disabilities, and Experience in Current Position as other independent variables or covariates.

Female paraeducators experience less role conflict than males (b = -.23, β = -.11, p = .03). The model determined that for every unit of role conflict a male paraeducator experiences, a female experiences a decrease in role conflict by almost one fourth of a point (.23 units).

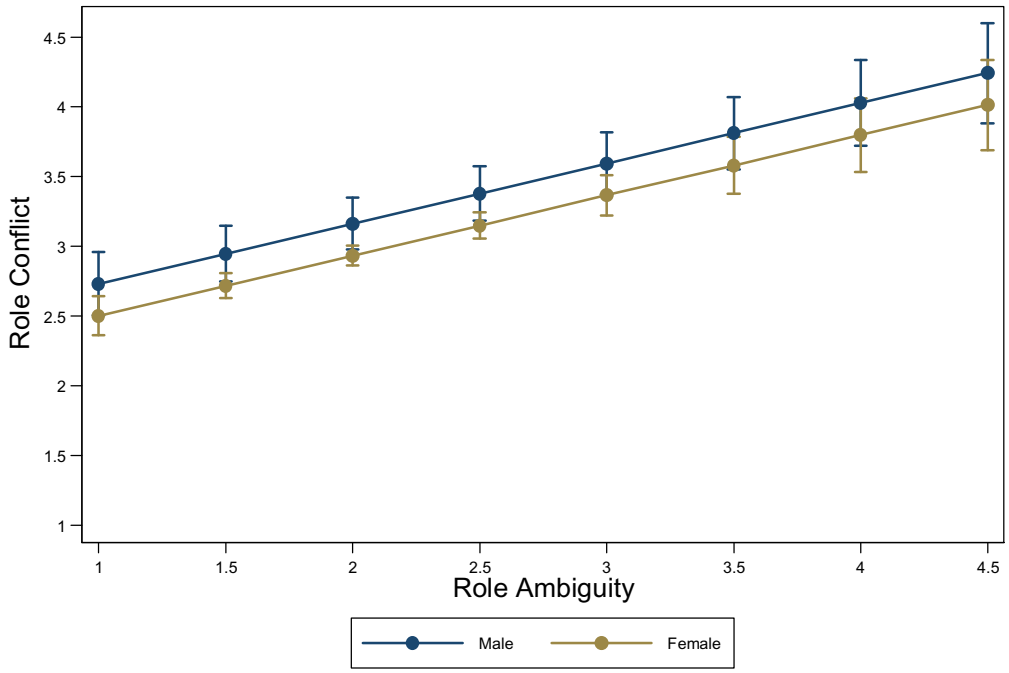

Figure 4.2. Margins plot showing the marginal effects of Role Ambiguity and Gender on Role Conflict based on a multiple regression model including Age Category, Experience Working With Children Who Have Disabilities, and Experience in Current Position as other independent variables or covariates.

Age

The relationship between age (operationalized by age range categories) of paraeducators and role conflict was analyzed in the regression model. Paraeducators in the age range category representing 50 years of age and older (b = -.27, β = -.17, p = .03) tend to experience a decrease of over one quarter of a point (.27 units) for each unit of role conflict experienced by those in the

18-25 year age range holding constant all other variables in the model. The correlations between role conflict and the other age range categories are not statistically significant.

With role conflict being considered a surrogate for job satisfaction, and role conflict being lowest among the oldest paraeducators, it can be expected that paraeducators in the oldest age category would experience the greatest job satisfaction. Qualitative responses support this conclusion. As seen in the age histogram, 30% of the respondents are 50 years of age and older so this group is well represented in the data. Comments from members of that group demonstrate the enjoyment they experience in their roles. For example, one paraeducator who has over 16 years of experience working with children with disabilities and over 16 years in her current position wrote, "This job has fit well into rearing my family during the years and I have continued to work here because it was dear to me." Another in the same age range, with the same level of experience and time in her current job shared, "I love to work with special children because they need help."

The margins plot displayed in Figure 4.3 shows the marginal effects of Age Category and Gender on Role Conflict based on a multiple regression model including Role Ambiguity, Experience Working With Children Who Have Disabilities, and Experience in Current Position as other independent variables or covariates.

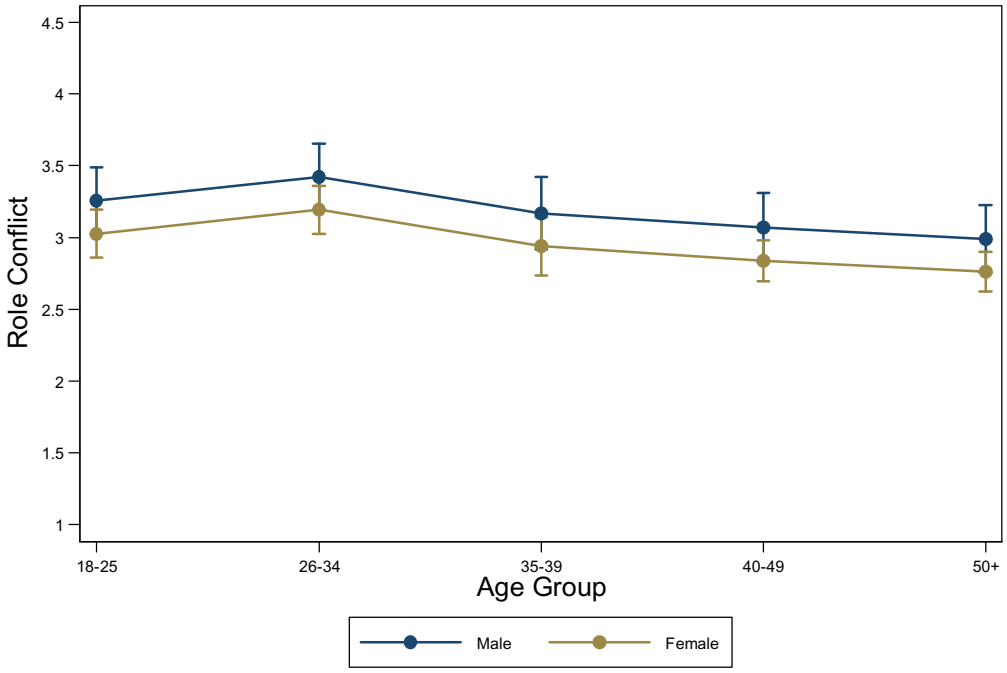

Figure 4.3. Margins plot showing the marginal effects of Age Category and Gender on Role Conflict based on a multiple regression model including Role Ambiguity, Experience Working With Children Who Have Disabilities, and Experience in Current Position as other independent variables or covariates.

Experience Working With Children Who Have Disabilities

The regression model includes a variable representing the years of experience the respondents have had working with children who have special needs. The margins plot displayed in Figure 4.4 shows the marginal effects of Experience Working With Children Who Have Disabilities and Age Category on Role Conflict based on a multiple regression model including Role Ambiguity, Gender, and Experience in Current Position as other independent variables or covariates.

At all experience levels other than 5-9 years, the relationships are not statistically significant. After holding all other variables in the model constant, the variable representing paraeducators who have 5-9 years of experience (b = .35, β = .22, p = .04) demonstrates a tendency toward increased role conflict.

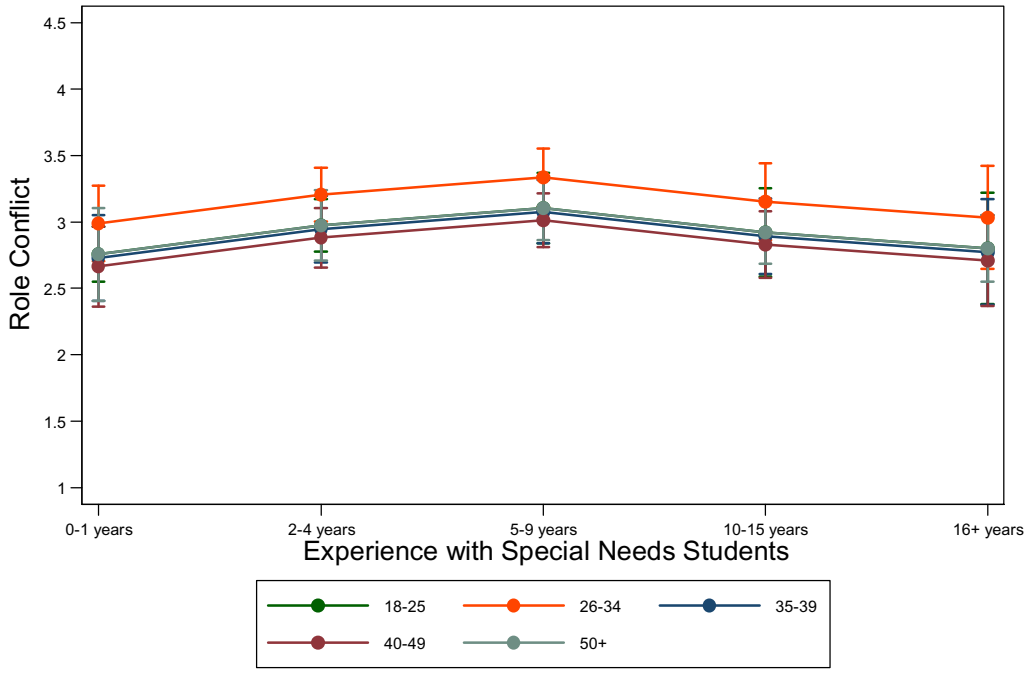

Figure 4.4. Margins plot showing the marginal effects of Experience Working With Children Who Have Disabilities and Age Category on Role Conflict based on a multiple regression model including Role Ambiguity, Gender, and Experience in Current Position as other independent variables or covariates.

Experience in Current Position

This study looked at the effect that experience in the paraeducator's current position has on role conflict. The regression model shows that role conflict increases as a paraeducator gains seniority in the position. The margins plot displayed in Figure 4.5 show the marginal effects of

Experience in Current Position and Gender on Role Conflict based on a multiple regression model including Role Ambiguity, Age Category, and Experience Working With Children Who Have Disabilities as other independent variables or covariates.

The results of the model demonstrate that compared to those paraeducators with little experience in their current positions, and holding constant all other variables in the model, paraeducators at higher levels of experience in their current positions indicate increasing role conflict. Role conflict increases at 5-9 years of experience in the position (b = .27, β = .17, p = .09), at 10-15 years in their current position (b = .35, β = .16, p = .08), and most prominently among those who have 16 years and more in their current job (b = .66, β = .32, p = .01). As the beta weight indicates, seniority in one's position as a paraeducator is an influential factor in predicting paraeducator role conflict.

Role conflict was expressed by a paraeducator who has over 10 years of experience in her current position when she wrote, "The job is done with more satisfaction if people were more observant of situations when they've come in the middle of a situation and don't know what occure [*sic*] before but know how to remedy the situation with the facts."

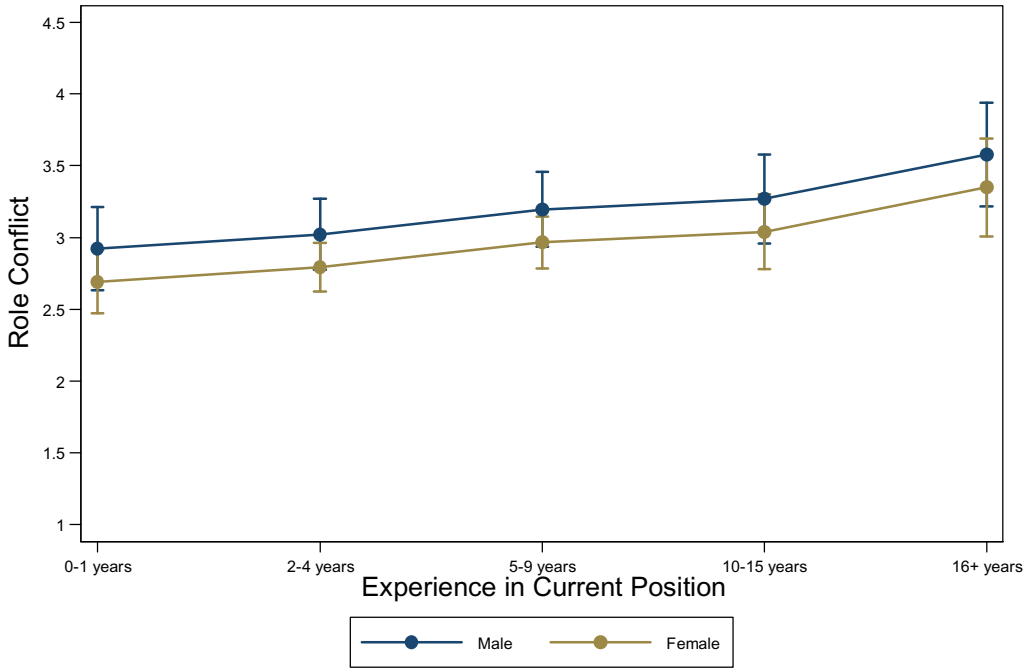

Figure 4.5. Margins plot showing the marginal effects of Experience in Current Position and Gender on Role Conflict based on a multiple regression model including Role Ambiguity, Age Category, and Experience Working With Children Who Have Disabilities as other independent variables or covariates.

The regression model determined that role ambiguity, gender, age range of 50 years and older, experience of 5-9 years working with children who have disabilities, and seniority in one's current position as indicated by 5 or more years on the job are statistically significant or approaching statistical significance in predicting role conflict.

The age demographic 26-34 years, 35-39 years, and 40-49 years are not statistically significant. The levels of experience working with children who have disabilities representing 2-4 years, 10-15 years, and 16 years and greater are also not statistically significant. In analyzing

length of experience in current position, the category 2-4 years did not demonstrate statistical significance or approach statistical significance. These variables will not be discussed further.

Results of the Qualitative Analysis

Of the 419 respondents to the survey, 25% (n = 105) include comments on the survey item inviting them to "Please feel free to add any comments below about your satisfaction with your job or the roles/responsibilities you have at work." The data was analyzed by coding each response for concepts. As described in Chapter III, analysis of what was written was done to identify dominant themes. The following nine themes emerged: (a) job satisfaction without any concerns expressed; (b) pay and/or benefits concerns without job satisfaction expressed; (c) job satisfaction coupled with concerns about pay and/or benefits; (d) concerns about matters other than pay and/or benefits without job satisfaction expressed; (e) job satisfaction coupled with concerns related to matters other than pay and/or benefits; (f) predominantly expressed feelings of being unappreciated; (g) manifestations of role conflict and/or role ambiguity; (h) statements about position and goals; and (i) the survey process. Each of these will be presented with examples of comments.

Job Satisfaction Without any Concerns Expressed

Twenty-one percent of the 105 responses (n = 22) contain only positive expressions of job satisfaction. Of that group, eight use the words "love" in reference to their jobs or the students they serve. Expressions of satisfaction from respondents include:

- I love working at my job. It's a big challenge. I like it.
- I love what I do. I'm happy working with the children. I love my children.
- They make my day.
- My satisfaction is I make them happy.

- I am happy working here. It's a blessed job.

Within this grouping, adjectives describing feelings about work include rewarding, fun, great, blessed, proud, and satisfying. The paraeducators who identify with this theme show a strong connection to children; they feel that the job that they are doing on a daily basis makes a difference to the children and thus, makes work enjoyable.

Pay and/or Benefits Concerns Without Job Satisfaction Expressed

The second theme, which represents those responses that are specifically related to salary and/or benefits and do not include any positive statements, are also found in 22% (n = 23) of the responses. It is important to note that the New York State Education Department has not increased the tuition rate paid to private special education schools serving students with disabilities in four years. Consequently, while costs of operating the schools and costs of living have increased, many schools have been unable to adjust salaries for at least the past four years. Among this grouping of responses, the following statements are included:

- I've been here five years making $9 an hour and haven't had a raise.
- It has been a few years with no salary increase. I believe it is time now to get one.
- People at McDonald's make more than we do.
- I feel like I should make a little money. Been here too long and never complained about it!
- Huge amount of responsibility for insulting pay.

Some responses were short and to the point: "higher pay," "need raise," "need more money," and "money." The paraeducators who identified with this theme are strongly influenced by their financial situation which overshadows any expressions of enjoyment or job satisfaction.

Job Satisfaction Coupled with Concerns About Pay and/or Benefits

This theme is present in 18% (n = 19) of the responses. These responses include negative statements about pay; however, they also include positive statements about job satisfaction. Paraeducators in this group indicate that they while they experience job satisfaction, they also have serious concerns rooted in remuneration. Examples of these include the following:

- I love my job. However, I feel I should get paid more for what I do every day with the children.
- I only have one problem with my job and it is the pay.
- I love working with these kids and I'm excited to come to work. Just wish the pay was better.
- I love my job. Sadly, the pay is poor (and a sad face drawing was added).
- I love my job. I feel so empowered to work with the children and young adults that I work with. However, we do not get paid the salary we deserve, for all that we do.
- I absolutely love my job. I just wish I could make a living doing it.

From this grouping, as well as from the second grouping, strong negative sentiment is expressed about pay. As evidenced by the statements from this group, mixed feelings are experienced by these paraeducators. In their own words, they love their jobs; however, those feelings are tempered by feelings of being underpaid and struggles associated with living with those ramifications. This is consistent with the findings of Castle et al. (2006), Parsons et al. (2003), and Will and Simmons (1999) who determined that among the nurses' aides they studied, the greatest satisfaction came from the work itself and the least satisfaction came from pay.

Concerns About Matters Other Than Pay and/or Benefits Without Job Satisfaction Expressed

Another theme expressed by 10% (n = 10) of the respondents is that of unfavorable aspects of work other than pay and/or benefits. These include the following comments:

- Not enough flexibility for single-parents.
- My director is not very professional.
- One person kills the positivity of the room.
- No communication.
- Exhausting.
- I feel we could do more for those children.
- This present employer does not allow for an open door policy about other co-workers.

This group expressed concerns about various workplace issues such as collegiality, closed communication, professionalism, and not feeling that enough was being done for the students. Because of the singular response associated with each of these items, it would behoove school administrators to assess which of these matters, if any, impact their faculty.

Job Satisfaction Coupled With Concerns Related to Matters Other Than Pay and/or Benefits

This theme was found in 6% (n = 6) of the respondents and represents job satisfaction in conjunction with negative sentiments about the job related to matters other than pay and/or benefits. Among the mixed sentiments expressed are:

- I enjoy my job though it does not fulfill my needs.
- Very rewarding job, but can also be overwhelming and exhausting.

- It is extremely rewarding working with children who have special needs. However, I find most of the staff have very bad attitudes and can be somewhat lazy.
- My classroom runs smoothly. Other rooms do not operate nicely and supervision is not as strict as it should be.

Predominantly Expressed Feelings of Being Unappreciated

This theme, which represents comments that predominantly express feelings of not being appreciated, are found in 8% (n = 8) of the responses. Quotes include the following:

- I am grateful that I have a job. It is better than none. I enjoy what I do for the kids. I hope the company appreciates us more for what we do here for the kids.
- I think we are not appreciated enough and we should be paid good [*sic*].
- I feel unappreciated even if my work attendance is impeccable. When we are short staff, no help is sent to us, but whenever someone is out, we are always pulled out to work (in another class).
- Everybody talks the talk. But they think we are uneducated and of a different class as we get low pay, no raise, and they smile in your face and expect us to run the agency.
- Lack of resources and appreciation. Higher ups do not sympathize nor acknowledge what is required for the job and how the staff are affected by this negligence [*sic*].
- A huge amount of responsibility is placed on us with little acknowledgement.

As presented in Chapter I, research on acknowledging and showing appreciation of paraeducators' efforts and successes was conducted by French (2003). French's advice is that

administrators should demonstrate acknowledgement and appreciation for the work done by paraeducators. She suggested that such acknowledgement can counteract some of the effects associated with poor pay and it can influence paraeducators' willingness to remain in their jobs. Giangreco et al. (2001) specifically cited role clarification, training, support, compensation, and opportunities to give input as tangible ways to demonstrate respect, appreciation, and acknowledgement to paraeducators. Another example of demonstrating respect for this group is by seeking their participation in research as was done by Locke, Kasari, and Wood (2013) who assessed paraeducators' and teachers' social skills ratings of children with and without autism spectrum disorder.

Manifestations of Role Conflict and/or Role Ambiguity

Eight percent of the respondents (n = 8) who included comments on the survey wrote expressions of role ambiguity and/or role conflict. Examples from this group include:

- The job is done with more satisfaction if people were more observant of situations when they've come in the middle of a situation and don't know what occure [*sic*] before, but know how to remedy the situation without the facts.
- We're told what to do by many people throughout the day. Yet we're trained by our peers. There are many times a conflict of interest occurs and I do not have a policy to make the decision.
- The upper management changes the rules often and they do not know what goes on in the classroom. The head boss is really busy.
- Placed in classrooms to assist for long periods of time without being asked.
- Occasionally one may encounter different co-workers with different approaches to the same situation. At times, that can be frustrating…

One school in the study, in a measure to cut costs, recently scaled back its cleaning contract and instead, expects all staff to collect their trash at the end of the day, tie the trash bags, and place them in the hall. This situation may be the source of another comment related to role conflict, "Now we have to take out the trash?"

The qualitative responses express role ambiguity consistent with the definition offered by Kahn, et al. (1964). For example, expressions of being told by many people what to do and being expected to follow rules that change often, represent situations of role ambiguity.

Similarly, role conflict is expressed when stating that people come into a situation, do not know what occurred, but try to remedy the situation, as well as the comment describing the situation in which different co-workers present different approaches to managing a situation.

Statements About Position and Goals

Five percent (n = 5) of the respondents took the opportunity to write about their positions or goals as follows:

- I am trying my best to provide the highest quality of services to each individual each day.
- Currently working on my AA degree in Education Studies.
- I assist the teacher in the classroom and also work with the students.

The Survey Process

Four percent of the respondents (n = 4) offered comments about the survey process. These include:

- Form was a little confusing.
- By doing this survey, will there be any changes or attempt changes be done [*sic*]?

- Thanks for taking the time to help us make the teaching experience more productive.

Although only one person wrote the question about whether any changes will come about as a result of this study, the question was raised many times as I thanked each paraeducator group for participating in the study. My response was that while I could not say what their administrators will do with the results, I would personally ensure that they received copies of the study along with my expression of appreciation for the participation of their paraeducators in my research.

Participants used the open-ended, narrative item predominantly to express themes of satisfaction, dedication, enjoyment, and love towards the students, and to express great dissatisfaction with their rate of pay. Positive sentiment about their job is found in 45% of the responses. Negative sentiment about current level of pay is evident among 40% of the total responses received.

Responses to Research Questions

Paraeducators experience role conflict as a function of many variables beyond those studied here. However, in analyzing the impact that role ambiguity, gender, education, age, relevant experience, length of time in their current position, plans to become a teacher, status as teaching assistant, and status as teacher have on role conflict, it is clear that some have predictive ability and others do not. Some proved to be statistically significant, others approached that criteria, and still others could not be considered statistically significant. Responses to the research questions posed in Chapter III will be presented as follows.

RQ1: In what ways do paraeducators experience role conflict?

Role conflict is expressed by paraeducators when discussing their daily responsibilities. For example, a teaching assistant who switches roles and becomes classroom teacher in the

absence of the teacher experiences conflict when assuming the position of supervisor during that time. A paraeducator experiences role conflict by being told what to do for the student by members of the multidisciplinary team who may give incompatible instructions. Another experience of role conflict occurs when peers ask a paraeducator to take action in a particular way and the teacher requests that it be done a different way. That paraeducator is caught in the middle and conflict can arise. The possible situation of experiencing role conflict is compounded because paraeducators in private special education schools often are moved from class to class throughout the school year to cover a vacancy or an absence in another class.

RQ2: In what ways and to what extent does role ambiguity contribute to role conflict for paraeducators in their positions?

This research question examines role ambiguity as a predictor of paraeducator role conflict. The most potent variable in predicting role conflict in this study is role ambiguity. As role ambiguity increases, role conflict increases, as well. It is experienced by paraeducators who move from class to class in which different responsibilities are expected to be handled, yet, insufficient training is provided. It occurs because new paraeducators are hired without job descriptions or without sufficient review of the job descriptions.

RQ3: To what extent does gender contribute to paraeducator role conflict?

Results from the regression model show that female paraeducators experience less role conflict than this finding cannot be compared to the literature. Of interest, however, is that in considering role conflict a surrogate for job satisfaction, my result differs from Bishay's (1996), in which he found that male teachers felt higher levels of job satisfaction than females.

RQ4: To what extent does age contribute to paraeducator role conflict?

The regression model shows that age at the oldest age range contributes to decreased role conflict among paraeducators in private special education schools. Paraeducators in the age

range category representing 50 years of age and older tend to experience the least amount of role conflict. The regression model presents that younger paraeducators experience the greatest role conflict and that the oldest paraeducators experience the least amount of role conflict.

RQ5: To what extent does experience with children who have disabilities contribute to paraeducator role conflict?

The regression model shows that paraeducators who have 5-9 years of experience working with children who have disabilities have a tendency to experience increased role conflict. Role conflict appears to peak at 5-9 years of experience and then decreases to its lowest point, which is with workers who have 16 years or more working with children who have disabilities. Although Acker (2003) found that mental health workers with more relevant work experience had higher levels of role conflict, she did not further define this in terms of years of experience, so comparisons with my results are limited.

RQ6: To what extent does experience in current position contribute to paraeducator role conflict?

This research question asks about the effect that experience in the paraeducator's current position has on role conflict. The results of the regression model show that compared to those paraeducators with little experience in their current positions, paraeducators at all other levels of experience in their current positions indicate greater role conflict. Seniority in one's position as a paraeducator is an influential factor in determining paraeducator role conflict. Role conflict tends to increase as a paraeducator gains seniority in the position.

Summary and Conclusions

Chapter IV presented findings from this study on role conflict involving 391 paraeducators in private special education settings. From the research, I learned that there are

five statistically significant predictor variables which provide us with information about sources of role conflict among that group: (a) role ambiguity, (b) gender, (c) age range of 50 years and older, (d) experience of 5-9 years working with children who have disabilities, and (e) seniority in one's current position as indicated by 16 or more years on the job. Experience of having 5-9 years and 10-15 years in one's current position are two other variables that approach statistical significance. These findings can be used to lower role conflict faced by this important group within a school's workforce.

The final chapter, Conclusions, Implications for Policy and Research, and Recommendations for Practice, synthesizes results of the study and recommends actions that can be taken to address and lessen role conflict among paraeducators.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND FUTURE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Conclusions

From the results of this study, it becomes clear that there is a relationship between role ambiguity and role conflict, and between role conflict and gender, age, relevant experience, and experience in one's current position as a paraeducator. Key findings from the quantitative data emerged and possible explanations are presented in this chapter. Qualitative data from 105 of the respondents yielded strong negative sentiment toward remuneration, coupled with strong expressions of commitment, concern, and deep affection for the students.

Demographic Conclusions

Analysis of demographic data yields four key conclusions: (a) females experience less role conflict than males, (b) role conflict is least among paraeducators who are 50 years of age and older, (c) role conflict reaches a peak at 5-9 years of experience and then decreases, and (d) role conflict increases the longer someone stays in a particular job. Each of these will be discussed with possible sources of the role conflict.

Gender matters. Female paraeducators experience less role conflict than male paraeducators. Results of this study indicate that female paraeducators experience less role conflict than male paraeducators. Perhaps an understanding of this analysis can be gained by considering the traditional roles of woman as nurturer and man as breadwinner which may contribute to this situation. Paraeducators in special education classes are nurturers of the students. Typically, the duties of paraeducators often resemble the role of being caregiver to the students. They feed students, diaper them, take them to the bathroom, and change the children's

clothing when needed. They take students to the nurses' office and stay with them during nursing treatments and when they are ill. This role may come more easily, and with less conflict, to women who may have performed that same role in their personal lives. Male paraeducators are also expected to perform these same duties; however, males may be less comfortable with those responsibilities and may find them more challenging and more conflicting, perhaps because of less experience with these duties. Because of societal expectations of males as the traditional breadwinners, males may also experience more role conflict as a result of financial pressure resulting from poor pay. Males may feel conflicted about being in the role of paraeducator and not in a job that has sufficient remuneration.

Another possible reason that men appear to experience greater role conflict than women could be that the woman's historical role in the workplace has more often been subordinate to her male supervisor, rather than the reverse. Because of these societal norms, men experience more role conflict as a paraeducator where they are required to follow the leader of the teacher, who is typically female.

Age matters. Role conflict in paraeducators decreases with paraeducators past the age of 34 years and is lowest at the age of 50 and older. My analysis indicates that younger paraeducators (ages 18-34) experience the greatest role conflict; as they grow older, role conflict decreases. Perhaps an explanation of this situation is that younger persons lack a history of work experience compared to their older colleagues. They may not know what is expected as a worker and will not have the same confidence that someone who has succeeded in a job for a few years will have gained. Findings suggest that older workers, particularly those in the age range category of 50 years and older, experience less role conflict at work. Perhaps this is a result of

life experiences that come with age, which, in turn, build confidence. As one matures and becomes acclimated to the demands of work and its expectations, role conflict decreases.

Experience working with children who have disabilities matters. Role conflict is greatest among paraeducators who have 5-9 years of experience working with children who have disabilities. Paraeducators with the least amount of relevant experience tend to feel the least amount of role conflict. Those who have minimal relevant experience report that their body of knowledge is small. Perhaps they do not know the demands of caring for students with special needs and do not know what is expected of them as a paraeducator. They sense that their supervisors and colleagues do not expect them to possess professional knowledge; rather, they are often treated as knowing only the basics, representing what they have been taught in their orientation. This lack of expectation from their supervisors and colleagues could possibly be the reason that we see less role conflict within the one year or less experience group.

Interestingly, the study suggests that after one year of working with children who have special needs, role conflict increases in the next two age groups studied. Role conflict peaks with those who have 5-9 years of experience. This study confirms that category. Why that particular age category then becomes a marker for the downward trend of role conflict is difficult to understand. However, the subsequent decline in role conflict associated with extensive relevant experience (beyond 9 years) may be associated with feelings of security, confidence, and comfort that are associated with knowledge.

Staying in one's job matters. Role conflict increases the longer someone stays in the same job. Role conflict increases with length of time a paraeducator spends in the current position. A cause of this may be the sense that knowledge gained after so many years of work brings with it expertise that is not recognized because of the status of a paraeducator being the

lowest ranked person in the classroom. The seasoned paraeducator may reflect the following thoughts: I have been here the longest; I know what to do; I have been through two teachers who were right out of school and two experienced teachers; Teachers come and go, but I stay here with the children; I know what to do and I can do everything, but I still am not given enough responsibility or pay; and I feel limited and conflicted.

Role Conflict-Role Ambiguity Relationship Conclusions

Role ambiguity matters. In addition to conclusions that are based on demographics, the data have shown that role conflict increases as role ambiguity increases. This is consistent with literature indicating a direct relationship between role conflict and role ambiguity with teachers and others (Acker, 2003; Brauer, 1980; Wolverton, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 1999). It is incumbent upon school administrators to examine their schools for evidence of ambiguity among paraeducators' jobs and to present solutions that facilitate role clarity. Recommendations for role clarification and reduction of role conflict are included in this chapter.

Open-Ended, Narrative Response Conclusions

Job satisfaction from working with children who have special needs is strong. But so are concerns surrounding pay and lack of appreciation. Responses to the open-ended, narrative questions yielded strong responses. From what respondents wrote, they experience love—hate relationships with their workplace. As one paraeducator explained, "I have to work two jobs for financial reasons. I don't get much sleep, but I know that I'm going to see my students in the morning and I'm happy." They expressed love towards the students who are entrusted in their care. They wrote that they come to work each day and stay in their jobs because of the children. Taking care of the children is their motivation, their pride, their satisfaction, and their joy. However, what comes with that is strong dissatisfaction with their

pay, made worse by the actualization of not receiving raises in four or five years and having a very difficult time making ends meet. These concerns are consistent with what was found in the paraeducator literature (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; French, 2003; Frith & Mims, 1985; Giangreco et al., 2001; Giangreco et al., 2003; Mueller, 2002; Patterson, 2006; Pickett, 1996; Pickett & Gerlach, 2003).

Given these conclusions, there are implications for future policy and research which can impact role conflict among paraeducators. These will be presented as follows.

Implication for Policy

An implication for policy pertains to the economics of being a paraeducator and the mechanism established by New York State to fund private special education programs. Paraeducators working in private special education schools are notoriously poorly paid and it has been that way even before the economic hardships experienced by many people in recent years.

Recently, I was doing some paperwork in a coffee house and nearby a young woman was being interviewed for a position as a barista. She was told by the interviewer that the starting salary was $10 an hour, and that health coverage for her and her dependents, including domestic partner, adoption assistance, and tuition reimbursement were part of the benefits package the company offered. While I respect workers in every line of work, I could not help but feel angered that paraeducators who work with the most fragile and most dependent children receive less pay and fewer benefits than workers in a coffee house.

Without adequate funding, role conflict and job dissatisfaction arising from a worker's financial stresses may not be able to be resolved by school administrators alone. To further address this issue, the New York State Education Department is presently studying the mechanism by which preschool and school-age components of private special education schools

have been funded. An executive committee has been formed to recommend changes to the New York State Board of Regents and the Division of the Budget to right the funding situation which has resulted in tuition freezes and consequently, no raises for staff and subpar hiring scales. As this executive committee moves ahead, private special education school administrators are optimistic that additional funding is forthcoming and will result in more appropriate pay and the infusion of more training opportunities. Until funding is adequate and paraeducators are no longer paid at wages that are lower than fast food chains and coffee establishments, and instead, are indicative of respect for this difficult, critical, and mandated faculty position, increased salaries, improved hiring scales, and intensive training programs remain goals for the future.

Implications for Future Educational Research

The findings of extant literature as stated in Chapter II implied that the presence of role conflict and role ambiguity impact job satisfaction **(**House & Rizzo, 1972: Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Kahn et al., 1964; Locke, 1976; Schuler, Aldag, & Brief, 1977). Likewise, the qualitative responses gathered in this study imply that a reduction of role conflict and role ambiguity could lead to job satisfaction for the population studied. Future studies of paraeducators in private special education schools examining the constructs of role conflict and role ambiguity on job satisfaction would add to a body of knowledge that is limited. Of particular interest would be to examine job satisfaction within this population to gain understanding of which facets, other than role ambiguity and role conflict, could influence job satisfaction and to what extent. Another question to be considered is whether the results of this study would be consistent with results if the subjects were paraeducators in public schools in the same geographic region.

An area of research to pursue would be the comparison of role conflict experienced by paraeducators in public schools with those in private special education schools. Results could

enable both sectors to learn from each other and address role conflict. Future research could also look at the relationship between remuneration and job satisfaction among administrators, teachers and paraeducators in private special education schools and examine that impact that the salaries in that sector have on satisfaction.

Although demographics of age, gender, relevant experience, and time in current position were analyzed, a demographic that was not studied was ethnicity. Future research could include ethnicity as a covariate to see if role conflict differs among cultural groups. Similarly, analysis could be done which examines role conflict and the gender of paraeducators compared with the gender of supervisors; however, with so few males in the positions of paraeducators and special education teachers, samples would most probably be limited.

Recommendations for Practice

As a principal of a private special education school with 250 students and 210 faculty members, of which 100 are paraeducators, I find merit in the responses of the 419 paraeducators surveyed. Therefore, I am making recommendations for administrators of special education schools based on their responses, with the objective being decreased role ambiguity, decreased role conflict, and greater job satisfaction among paraeducators in their schools.

This study reminds us as the practitioners that it is important to be aware of paraeducators' extent of experience working with students with special needs, seniority in the position, and age of the staff member, as these variables offer better understanding and management of role conflict.

With some adjustments to current practice by school administrators, and resultant reduced role conflict and role ambiguity, practitioners can anticipate greater job satisfaction

among paraeducators in private special education settings. Recommendations are offered as measures that can be taken to achieve those end results.

Capitalize on Demographic Findings from the Study

Of course, recruiting and hiring only females who are 50 years and older or those who do not have 5-9 years of relevant experience, or ignoring job applications from males, not only reduces the labor pool considerably, such a practice does not comply with federal and state laws and regulations. It also diminishes the value that comes from having a diversified workforce.

This study reminds us as practitioners that it is important to be aware of the conflict that paraeducators may be experiencing. Included among the measures that can taken are becoming aware of causes of role conflict that may be unique to male staff, and heightening awareness of role conflict among paraeducators who have experience working with students with special needs and those who have seniority in their position. Opening up dialogue with the groups that were found to have the most role conflict could contribute to better understanding and management of role conflict among all paraeducators. What school leaders can do, however, is to talk with younger staff about what they think can be done to make their roles less ambiguous.

From personal reflection in an effort to reduce role conflict, I established a monthly *Dialogue With Dee*, in which set times are established for staff to meet with me to discuss concerns, ideas, and frustrations. An announcement is sent via email or placed in mailboxes inviting participation. For the near future, based on the results of this study, as the principal and the ultimate supervisor of paraeducators, I will capitalize on these findings. I will personally invite younger paraeducators to meet with me to discuss concerns related to role conflict and role ambiguity. Similarly, speaking with paraeducators who have seniority to learn why they might

be experiencing role conflict would be valuable. Adjustment of policies and practices can be made based on information garnered from these two groups of paraeducators.

Suggestions for Role Clarification Upon Interviewing and Hiring

A paraeducator's job can be physically demanding, emotionally challenging, and brings with it a host of varied responsibilities which can range from working on pre-reading skills with a preschool student to changing the diaper of a teenage student. Therefore, it is incumbent upon school leaders to ensure that this wide scope of responsibilities is presented to candidates for the position upon interviewing. The hiring process may include a short DVD that presents a synopsis of a day in the life of the paraeducator and a tour of the school. Once new paraeducators are hired, a paraeducator mentor could be assigned to help them better understand their roles and learn the varied duties of the position.

After seeing the results of this study, I now have a better understanding as to why certain initiatives have worked and how others could have been strengthened. A major financial commitment to paraeducator training and adjustment to the role was made in my school with the decision to establish a full-time, administrative-level position specifically focused on recruiting, hiring, training, and troubleshooting all issues related to paraeducators. One of the first changes instituted by the new School Workforce Coordinator was to establish a Paraeducator Training Program (PTP), which takes place during a new paraeducator's first five days on the job (after the three-day, agency-wide New Employee Orientation). PTP consists of the new paraeducator attending training sessions and shadowing a Paraeducator Training Coach, who has been given that designation based on merit. The coaches receive a small stipend to recognize the added responsibility of preparing a new hire for upcoming placement in a classroom. Over the five day training, new paraeducators receive training from the coaches, clinicians, the School Workforce

Coordinator, and me. They learn more about their roles and responsibilities, school policies, conflict resolution procedure, and meeting the educational, physical, and social-emotional needs of the students. Clinical staff members provide training in feeding, lifting, emergency management, using augmentative communication devices, and behavior management. The new paraeducators spend most of the time working alongside a Paraeducator Training Coach in skills-training focusing on what is needed when working in academic, functional life skills, augmentative communication, and preschool classrooms. The approach used in skills-training is three-part: first, the coach demonstrates the skill; then the coach assists the new staff member in performing the skill; and last, the new paraeducator performs the skill independently. All trainers and coaches sign off in the new hire's binder to indicate that training was completed and the paraeducator met the training program's requirements. Data to ascertain each new paraeducator's pre-PTP knowledge and comfort level and post-PTP knowledge and comfort level are taken. Results of data analysis over a year period have shown that the new staff members feel more skillful and comfortable working with the students at the time they are assigned to a classroom and that the paraeducator on-the-job retention rate has improved. The investment of adding an administrator and offering focused training and support of new staff has proven to be worth the time and financial resources it requires. Continued analysis of retention rate, role conflict, and job satisfaction will be done.

Job Descriptions as Required Reading and Signing

From this study in which role ambiguity was found to correlate with role conflict, we have gleaned that it is crucial for the employer to have a comprehensive job description for each candidate and that it be presented at the time of interview and reviewed after the candidate accepts a position. Because some of the applicants may not have strong reading and writing

skills, it would be helpful to have the job description on a website or in audio form so the applicant can take the time needed to fully understand what the job entails. Prior to beginning work, each newly hired paraeducator should be asked to sign a copy of the job description and a copy would then be given to the new hire.

Annual Review of Job Descriptions

Administrators at one of the schools participating in the study face resistance from staff every summer when the school's pool becomes operational. Some paraeducators resist taking the children in the pool. The job description does not stipulate the requirement that all staff are required to go into the pool with the children, although new hires are told about the summer session and pool expectations upon hiring. This is an example of where role ambiguity and role conflict can be addressed if the duties of paraeducators are examined annually and job descriptions reviewed and modified by school administrators at that time.

Supervisors' Clarification of Roles and Expectations of Multidisciplinary Team

Every September, when a new multidisciplinary team begins its "coming together" transition period, the team leader (typically the teacher) could stem role ambiguity and role conflict if the opportunity was taken to clarify the roles of each team member. There are predictable points of role confusion that can be discussed before school is in full swing. As an example, the role of teaching assistant may be inherently confusing to the teaching assistant and to the team members. A teaching assistant may wonder if she is more of a teacher and less of a paraeducator, vice versa, or right in the middle. Role ambiguity becomes more pronounced when the teacher is out of the classroom and the teaching assistant legally assumes the role of teacher. One teaching assistant expressed this confusion by stating, "Teachers have the title and

the degree, but we work together. But there's really not a big difference in what we do and it gets confusing."

Another point of confusion is differentiating the roles of teaching assistant and teacher aide. Consistent with the above recommendation, if a team has a certified teaching assistant and one or more teacher aides, role conflict within the classroom team can be heightened if role differentiation is not discussed in advance of role confusion. Frustration can also result from role ambiguity and this was demonstrated by a teacher aide who expressed her confusion between the responsibilities of the teacher and those of a teacher aide by stating, "I do as much as any teacher."

A multidisciplinary team consists of the teacher, paraeducators (teaching assistants and teacher aides), and clinicians from the disciplines of physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, social work, psychology, and nursing. Other disciplines may also be represented on the team, including vision therapy, art therapy, music therapy, and adaptive physical education. It is recommended that the teacher, at the beginning of the school year, be proactive and have a roundtable discussion whereby each member of the multidisciplinary team could better understand each team member's role and how it fits within the collective focus on the students.

Generally speaking, communication between team members and parents is encouraged in special education schools, particularly since many of the students cannot communicate effectively about their school experiences to their parents. It is recommended that team members clarify with parents their professional domains. The teacher could present in writing to the families the names of the multidisciplinary team members and highlight each member's role, which would also address potential role ambiguity.

Plan and Prepare to Manage Conflict

Interpersonal conflict is inevitable within a complex organization like a school. It is recommended that each school develop a conflict resolution policy that directs staff to procedures for addressing the conflict. An example of potential conflict is when a teacher aide is promoted to teaching assistant and consequently, roles in the classroom are changed. There may be confusion and possibly dissent in the classroom between the teaching assistant and a teacher aide regarding new positions on the classroom hierarchy, and changed roles and responsibilities. The conflict resolution policy might encourage them to first try to work it out among themselves and if that is unsuccessful, to bring the matter to the teacher. If that is not successful, further resolution routes may include discussing the matter with the teacher's supervisor, asking for advice from the Human Resources manager, or using another school leader as a sounding board. This procedure should be in writing and distributed to all faculty. My school is in the process of converting its full page conflict resolution procedure into a small, laminated card that can be inserted into each faculty member's name badge pouch for easy reference.

Workplace Considerations

As suggested by Eckman (2004), schools would do well by considering ways to make their organizations and their policies more family-friendly as a means to reduce role conflict. Such policies could reduce role conflict by facilitating balance between a paraeducator's professional and personal responsibilities (Kahn et al., 1964). Among ways to address this are on-site day care, child care subsidies, sick time that can be used for family illness, as well as for the staff member's illness, and affordable health insurance for the staff member and family. If possible, and in consideration of the salaries paid to paraeducators, an organization might be able to offer short-term loans for emergencies. Given the salary structure found in the schools where

the respondents work, it is critical that school administrators and board members take a strong advocacy position toward improved staff salaries. This latter recommendation will be discussed further on in this chapter.

Provide Effective Supervision to Paraeducators

The role of supervisor is considered quite challenging for teachers who find themselves in that position, often with many paraeducators. Teachers enter the teaching profession to work with children, not to supervise adults. Courses in supervision are not included in the coursework required to become a certified special education teacher.

The New York State Education Department considers effective supervision to be a key element in providing quality special education programs and has determined that supervision from qualified staff is a finding of concern upon audit of special education programs (Geary, 2013). At a recent conference I attended, I asked a teacher who was sitting next to me to share her feelings about supervising the paraeducators in her classroom. She told me, "I wish it wasn't my job. Forty percent of the job is teaching the adults to do their job. But there are plenty of times that the paraeducators also teach me what to do." I asked another teacher the same question and she responded, "Supervising staff can be quite challenging. I'm the youngest adult in the room. I never thought I'd be supervising adults older than me."

Clearly, teachers find this role to be quite challenging. School administrators could address this by assessing the scope of this challenge in their schools, ascertaining ideas from the teachers about ways to address it, and provide supervision training to their teachers. This can be done in-house by school leaders, by supporting teachers' attendance at conferences or webinars, by working cooperatively with a local university, or through other means of professional development.

Advocate for Improved Salaries for Paraeducators

My work as a principal includes hearing about the real-life stresses my staff experiences as a result of being poor. Some paraeducators have great interest in attaining a college education; however, that cannot be pursued because they must hold down two or three jobs and do not have time to take courses. They request pay advances and even short-term loans just to pay for rent, fix their roofs, or pay for their child's college tuition. My real-life findings are consistent with the literature on paraeducator issues which cited financial stresses as a major cause of concern and role conflict among paraeducators (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco et al., 2003).

The number of private schools that serve children with disabilities is dwarfed by the number of public schools and the concerns those schools have, as well as the concerns the State Education Department has expressed about public education. Consequently, relatively little attention is paid to the concerns of the private special education school sector. It is imperative that school leaders and board members of non-profit organizations that operate special education schools take a strong advocacy role with the State Education Department for improved tuition rates for private special education schools. I believe that is the only way paraeducators can be relieved of some of the stresses and conflicts caused by inadequate remuneration.

View to the Future

It is anticipated that this research will foster analysis of levels of role conflict and bring to discussion among school administrators and faculty members the human resources issues impacting role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction. Results and recommendations will be shared with professional organizations, school administrators, and faculty, including paraeducators. Principals and other administrators of the participating private special education

schools will benefit from findings and recommendations. Research findings will also be shared with executive directors of the non-profit organizations which oversee each participating school, either individually or at a meeting of the statewide association of which they are members. Results of this study will be shared by presentations at annual conferences of organizations serving children with disabilities and organizations representing paraeducators. I have already been asked to present at the New York State Council for Exceptional Children's annual conference which includes school faculty, including paraeducators, and university professors who are involved in special education.

This study found that there are five statistically significant predictor variables of role conflict among the group of paraeducators surveyed which yielded the following results: (a) role ambiguity has a direct relationship with role conflict, (b) females experience less role conflict than males, (c) role conflict decreases with paraeducators who are older than 34 years of age and is lowest among those ages 50 and older, (d) 5-9 years experience working with children who have disabilities presents as a time that paraeducators experience increased role conflict, and (e) role conflict increases the longer a paraeducator stays at one job**.**

Some of the most salient aspects of this study comes from the qualitative responses; the paraeducators expressed deep commitment to serving the children in their schools which brings them enjoyment and strong feelings of job satisfaction.

It has been my experience as a school administrator that my colleagues and I may be taking for granted the commitment that paraeducators have shown to students with special needs. It is my hope that we can better serve this population of paraeducators through better understanding of role conflict and role ambiguity among this group. By doing so, I believe that

we will succeed in creating more professional and less stressful experiences for this critical component of our workforce.

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Appendix A

Letter to Executive Directors

April 16, 2013

Executive Director
, New York

Dear

By way of introduction, I am Diane (Dee) Berger, Principal of UCP Nassau's school, the Children's Learning Center. I have been with UCP Nassau for over 30 years, as program director, assistant executive director, and since 1996, school principal.

I am also a doctoral candidate at LIU Post in the Educational Administration program and it is in that capacity that I am writing you today. My doctoral research will examine the impact of role ambiguity and role conflict on job satisfaction among paraeducators (teaching assistants and teacher aides) in educational settings like ours. To do this, I need the participation of your agency, specifically, your school program. I am requesting permission to invite your paraeducators to participate by completing an anonymous survey. This will be on a volunteer basis and they will be asked to read and sign an informed consent form. Ultimately, while I will know who participated in the study because I will have their informed consent form, the surveys will be completed anonymously and I will not even know at which school a survey respondent works. I will also invite the paraeducators to fill out a separate form if they are interested in being interviewed by telephone or in person. I am only looking for 5-10 volunteers for this interview. Once I receive your approval, I will contact your education director/principal, who already knows about my doctorate quest, to work out logistics, such as the distribution/collection of the surveys.

I believe that my study will yield relevant data for executive directors and education directors regarding job satisfaction among paraeducators and their feelings of clarity, ambiguity, and conflict.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have and to share with you the results of the study. Your signature on the following page will indicate your approval for your staff to be invited to participate in this study. With your help, I will be allowed to begin collecting data and move ahead in the doctoral process. **If you could mail this or fax it (516 378-3791) to me by Thursday, April 25th, it would enable me to begin collecting data this summer, instead of waiting for the fall.**

Thank you so much for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Dee Berger

Appendix B

Executive Director Consent

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RESPONSE FORM

Name

Title

Organization's Name

Address

Phone Number

Email Address

Fax Number

Signature

Date

Please check one of the following:

_____ I GIVE permission for Diane Berger to enlist the participation of my organization by working with the education director/principal/designee to invite teaching assistants/teacher aides to complete an anonymous survey.

_____ I DO NOT GIVE permission for Diane Berger to enlist the participation of my organization by working with the education director/principal/designee to invite teaching assistants/teacher aides to complete an anonymous survey.

Please mail this in the enclosed envelope to:
Dee Berger
or fax it to: Dee Berger at 516 378-3791.

Thank you very much!

Appendix C

Invitation to Participate in Research

JOB SATISFACTION RESEARCH

Come be a part of important research about
JOB SATISFACTION

Dee Berger, principal of UCP Nassau's school, The Children's Learning Center, is working on her doctorate degree. She is studying job satisfaction and what leads to job satisfaction among teaching assistants and teacher aides working in private, special education schools.

It's easy to participate. All you have to do is fill out a quick survey. Your answers will be completely **anonymous and confidential**. No one will know what **you** have written.

School:
Date: **Wednesday, June 5, 2013**
Time: Your lunch break: 11:05, 1:40 or 2:05
Location: Conference Room

Lunch that day will be provided by Dee for all participants.

Thank you.

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY-Brookville/Post
Informed Consent Form for Human Research Subjects

You are being asked to volunteer in a research study called The Relationship Between Job Satisfaction, Role Ambiguity, and Role Conflict Among Paraeducators in Private Special Education Schools conducted by Diane Berger, Department of Educational Leadership and Administration under the supervision of Dr. Jan Hammond, chairperson, dissertation committee, Department of Educational Leadership and Administration. The purpose of the research is to examine job satisfaction among paraeducators working in private special education schools and to study the effect that their roles and responsibilities have on their job satisfaction.

As a participant, you will be asked to complete a survey that will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. It will be given to you at your school/educational program at a date and time arranged with your principal/education director. You will also be able to volunteer to be interviewed by phone or in person and asked six questions about your job. There are no risks or aspects of discomfort associated with this study. While there is no direct benefit to you for participation in the study, it is reasonable to expect that the results may provide information of value for the field of special education.

Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. Your name will not be included in any forms, questionnaires, etc. This consent form is the only document identifying you as a participant in this study; it will be stored securely in a file in my home available only to the investigator. Data collected will be stored for a five year period to use with possible further research. Results will be reported only in the aggregate. If you are interested in seeing these results, you may contact the principal investigator.

If you have questions about the research you may contact the investigator, Diane Berger, 516-641-2452 or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Jan Hammond, 516 299-2244. If you have questions concerning my rights as a subject, you may contact the Executive Secretary of the Institutional Review Board, Ms. Kathryn Rockett at (516) 299-2523.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinue participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your signature indicates you have fully read the above text and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures of this study. Your signature also acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form as well as your willingness to participate.

_____

Typed/Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

Diane Berger

_____

Typed/Printed Name of Investigator

Appendix E

Survey Instrument

Jobs have different levels of interest and satisfaction. I am studying how people feel about their jobs and the roles/responsibilities within their jobs. Please complete the 3 sections below in relation to your job as a paraeducator (teaching assistant/teacher aide).

The responses will be completely anonymous and will be kept completely confidential. No one, including me, will know who filled out the particular survey, where you work, etc. The only information I will have will be which schools had any staff members who completed the surveys.

PART I. THE ABRIDGED JOB DESCRIPTIVE INDEX

1. Work on Present Job- Think of the work you do at present. How well does each of the following words of phrases describe your work? In the blank beside each word or phrase below, **write:**

Y for "Yes" if it describes your work
N for "No" if it does not describe it
? for "?" if you cannot decide

__ Fascinating
__ Satisfying
__ Good
__ Exciting
__ Rewarding
__ Uninteresting

2. Pay- Think of the pay you get now. How well does each of the following words or phrases describe your present pay? In the blank beside each word or phrase below, **write:**

Y for "Yes" if it describes your work
N for "No" if it does not describe it
? for "?" if you cannot decide

__ Barely live on income
__ Bad
__ Well paid
__ Underpaid
__ Comfortable
__ Enough to live on

Opportunities for Promotion- Think of the opportunities for promotion that you have now. How well does each of the following words or phrases describe these? In the blank beside each word or phrase below, **write:**

Y for "Yes" if it describes your work
N for "No" if it does not describe it
? for "?" if you cannot decide

__ Good opportunities for promotion
__ Opportunities somewhat limited
__ Dead-end job
__ Good chance for promotion
__ Fairly good chance for promotion
__ Regular promotions

3. Supervision- Think of the kind of supervision that you get on your job. How well does each of the following words or phrases describe this? In the blank beside each word or phrase below, **write:**

Y for "Yes" if it describes your work
N for "No" if it does not describe it
? for "?" if you cannot decide

__ Praises good work
__ Tactful
__ Influential
__ Up to date
__ Annoying
__ Knows job well

4. People on Your Present Job- Think of the majority of people with whom you work or meet in connection with your work. How well does each of the following words or phrases describe these people? In the blank beside each word or phrase below, **write:**

Y for "Yes" if it describes your work
N for "No" if it does not describe it
? for "?" if you cannot decide

__ Boring
__ Slow
__ Responsible
__ Smart
__ Lazy
__ Frustrating

In the blank beside each word or phrase below, **write:**

Y for "Yes" if it describes your work
N for "No" if it does not describe it
? for "?" if you cannot decide

__ Good
__ Undesirable
__ Better than most
__ Disagreeable
__ Makes me content
__ Excellent
__ Enjoyable
__ Poor

_ _

PART II. RIZZO, HOUSE, LIRTZMAN ROLE CONFLICT AND AMBIGUITY SCALE
Please circle the response below each question regarding your present job.

1. I have clear, planned goals and objectives for my job.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2. I have to do things that I feel should be done differently.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

3. I know that I have divided my time properly.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

4. I receive an assignment without enough people to complete it.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

5. I know what my responsibilities are.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

6. I have to break a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

7. I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

8. I know exactly what is expected of me.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

9. I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

10. I feel certain about how much authority I have.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

11. I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

12. I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

13. Explanations are clear of what has to be done.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

14. I work on unnecessary things.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

PART III. PLEASE TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF.

1. Gender Male __ Female __

2. Age Range 18-25__ 26-34__ 35-39__ 40-49__ 50+__

3. Are you a New York State certified teaching assistant? Yes __ No __

4. Are you a New York State certified teacher? Yes __ No __

5. Years of experience as a teaching assistant or teacher aide working with children with disabilities

0-2 __ 3-5 __ 6-8 __ 10-15__ 16+__

6. Years of experience in your present position 0-2 __ 3-5 __ 6-8 __ 10-15__ 16+__

7. If you are not already a teacher, do you plan on becoming a teacher at some point in your career? Yes__ No__

8. Highest level of education completed:

High School	__	
Some College	__	
Bachelors Degree	__	
Masters Degree	__	
Other	__	Please specify.

9. Please feel free to add any comments below about your satisfaction with your job or the roles/responsibilities you have at work.

Thank you so much for completing the survey and being part of this research.

Appendix F

Investigator's Script

Hello. I am Diane Berger and I am principal of the Children's Learning Center at United Cerebral Palsy Association of Nassau County. First and foremost, thank you for volunteering to participate in my doctoral dissertation research. For many years, I have wanted to pursue a doctorate degree and I can't believe that I am at this final part of the process. I truly appreciate your help.

You are being asked to participate in a research study looking at the relationship between job satisfaction, role ambiguity, and role conflict among paraeducators in private special education schools. The purpose of this research is to examine job satisfaction among teaching assistants and teacher aides working in private special education schools and to study the effect that their roles and responsibilities have on their job satisfaction. As a participant, you will be asked to complete a survey that will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. You are also being asked if you would like to volunteer to be interviewed by phone or in person by me. There are no risks or aspects of discomfort associated with this study.

Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. Your name will not be included in any forms, questionnaires, etc. Your participation in this research is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinued participation at any time will involve no penalty.

There are three parts to the survey (and if the survey questions are being read aloud, say "I will be reading you each part.") When you're done, the surveys will be collected. If you would like to be considered for a possible interview, please put your name and phone number on the index card which will also be collected and will be kept separate it from your survey. Please know that I may only be interviewing 5-10 people chosen at random. Do you have any questions? Okay, let's begin. (Would begin reading the questions aloud) (At conclusion) Thank you again for being part of the study. Please accept a gift from me. I truly appreciate your help!

Appendix G

Survey Administrator's Script if Investigator is not at the Site

Thank you for agreeing to be part of a doctoral research study. The study is being conducted by Diane Berger who is the principal of the Children's Learning Center at United Cerebral Palsy Association of Nassau County. She truly appreciates your help.

You are being asked to participate in a research study looking at the relationship between job satisfaction, role ambiguity, and role conflict among paraeducators in private special education schools. The purpose of this research is to examine job satisfaction among teaching assistants and teacher aides working in private special education schools and to study the effect that their roles and responsibilities have on their job satisfaction.

As a participant, you will be asked to complete a survey that will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. You are also being asked if you would like to volunteer to be interviewed by phone or in person by Diane Berger. There are no risks or aspects of discomfort associated with this study.

Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. Your name will not be included in any forms, questionnaires, etc. Your participation in this research is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinued participation at any time will involve no penalty.

There are three parts to the survey (and if the survey questions are being read aloud, say "I will be reading you each part."). When you're done, I will collect them and put them in an envelope. If you would like to be considered for a possible interview, please put your name and phone number on the index card, which will also be collected, separated from your survey, and then mailed to Diane. Please know that she may only be interviewing 5-10 people chosen at random.

Do you have any questions? Okay, let's begin. (Would begin reading the questions aloud) (At conclusion) Thank you again for being part of the study. Diane would like to give you a gift pen. She truly appreciates your help.

Appendix H

Consent to Administer AJDI/JIG Scale

Terms of Use
A. Consent to use of an electronic signature for accepting the terms of use for JDI-related scales.

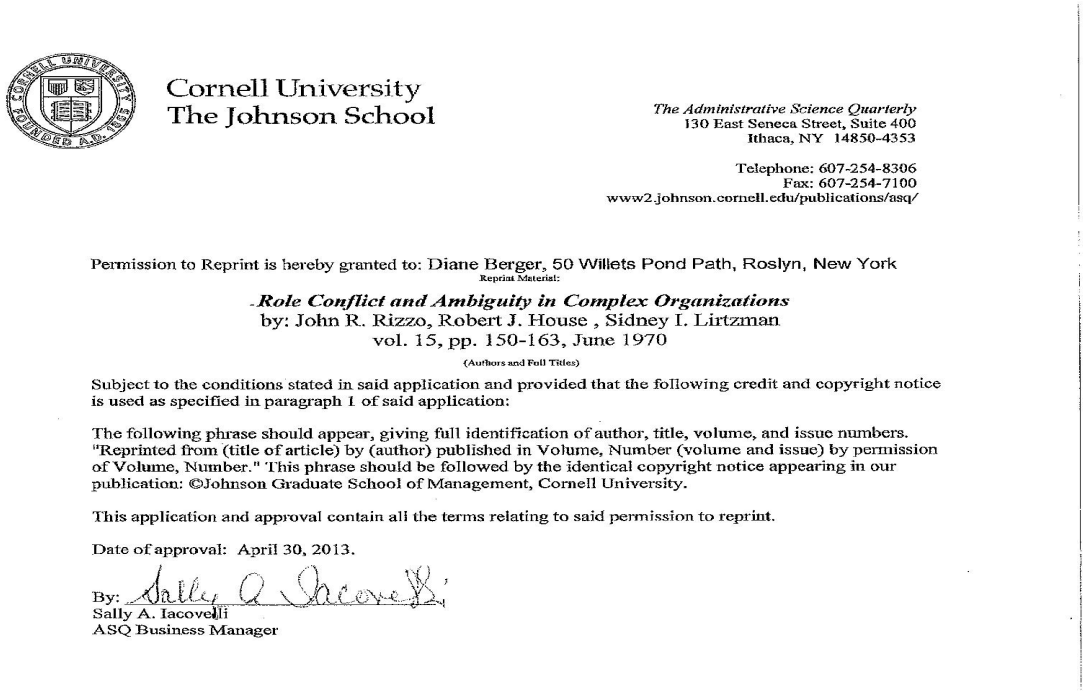
The "Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act" requires that individuals provide consent to sign electronic records that would otherwise be legally effective only if provided to you as a printed or written paper record. As a result, in order to accept the terms of use for JDI-related scales electronically, you must provide your consent that you have the capability to receive such disclosures and are fully aware of the consequences of agreeing to sign records electronically.
Definitions:
Record - The term "record" means information that is inscribed on a tangible medium or that is stored in an electronic or other medium and is retrievable in perceivable form.
Electronic Record - The term "electronic record" means a contract or other record created, generated, sent, communicated, received, or stored by electronic means.
Electronic Signature - The term "electronic signature" means an electronic sound, symbol, or process, attached to or logically associated with a contract or other record and executed or adopted by a person with the intent to sign the record.
1. Electronic Signatures and Records. Upon accepting the terms below, you are providing your electronic consent to the use of an electronic signature for these terms. In particular, you acknowledge receipt of this notice and consent to the use of an electronic signature for accepting the terms of use for JDI-related scales.
2. Minimum Hardware and Software Requirements. The following are the software requirements to accept the terms of use for JDI-related scales:
Operating Systems: Windows 98, Windows 2000, Windows XP or Windows Vista; or Macintosh OS 8.1 or higher.
Browsers: Internet Explorer 5.01 or above or equivalent
Other Applications: Adobe Acrobat Reader or equivalent for PDF files.
3. Capability to Receive Such Disclosures. Upon accepting the terms below, you will receive a copy of the terms via e-mail in PDF format.
4. Right to NOT USE electronic signatures. Each individual has the right to agree to these terms in paper form. If you choose to sign a paper copy of the terms of use for JDI-related scales, contact the JDI office by phone at (419) 372-8247 or by e-mail at jdi_ra@bgsu.edu.

B. Terms of Use for JDI-related scales (i.e., JDI/JIG, aJDI/aJIG, SIG, and TIM)

1. I understand that the JDI scales provided on this website are owned by BGSU, are proprietary to BGSU and BGSU owns the copyright to these JDI scales.
2. I understand that the JDI scales provided on this website are provided free of charge, but that a valid e-mail address is required for access to and use of the JDI scales. (Note: We respect your privacy and will never distribute or sell your information to any third party.)
3. I understand that the JDI Office may occasionally contact me via e-mail about its products and services.
4. I understand the scales are for my sole use only and will not distribute them to any third party.
5. I understand the scales may not be reprinted or otherwise published in their full form, and I will contact the JDI Office to obtain specific sample items that may be published should the need arise.
6. I understand the scales were developed by researchers at Bowling Green State University and any publication/presentation involving the scales must include proper and scholarly citation.
7. I understand the scales are intended to be used "as is" without any modifications to the items and/or the scoring procedure.

Appendix I

Consent to Use Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale



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By: Sally A Iacovelli
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