

Dynamics Between Special Education Teachers and Paraeducators in Special Day
Classroom Settings Serving Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities

A Dissertation by
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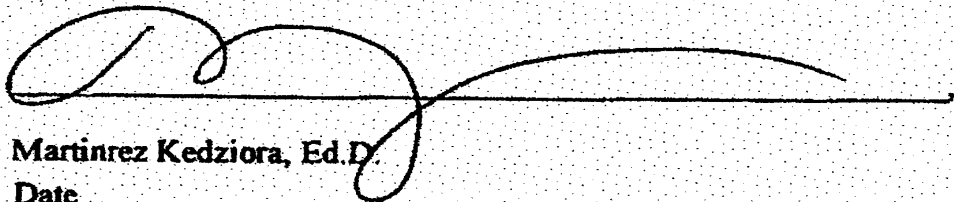
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Classroom Settings serving Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Dynamics Between Special Education Teachers and Paraeducators in Special Day

Classroom Settings serving Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities

by Sharon Ishida Nakama

Purpose: The purpose of this causal-comparative research mixed methods study is to identify the SE teacher leadership skills that SE teachers and SE paraeducators perceive are most important to SDC team effectiveness in secondary special education programs that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Methodology: A causal-comparative mixed methods study was conducted to identify the SE teacher leadership skills that SE teachers and SE paraeducators perceive are most important to SDC team effectiveness. A sequential exploratory design demonstrating the emphasis on the quantitative section of the study prior to examining relationships between the findings of the qualitative data was implemented. A descriptive survey was distributed among two school districts in Riverside County, and individual interviews also took place.

Findings: Special educators believe visionary leadership, professionalism, and maintaining integrity are key skills special education teacher leaders need to possess to develop or improve team effectiveness in the classroom. Participants expressed extremely similar responses in understanding the importance of the impact a special education teacher leader can have on the special day classroom's team effectiveness. Specific barriers and strategies were discovered in this study.

Conclusions: Several conclusions were produced from this study. Staffing and scheduling are the major issues in many special day classrooms impacting team

effectiveness. Special education teacher leaders need to be visionary, to possess organizational skills, and to maintain integrity to develop trust. Special education teachers must provide respect and effectively communicate to build team effectiveness in the SDC. Additionally, special education staff need increased administrative and colleague support.

Recommendations: School administration must consider the importance of providing opportunities for special day class teams to collaborate on an on-going basis. Districts need to consider providing leadership training sessions specifically designed for special education teachers who are placed in situations with two or more paraeducators in their classrooms. Districts also need to reconsider providing on-going training for special education paraeducators, focusing on the paraeducator as a professional. Finally, school districts need to reevaluate the situation of substitutes for special education teachers and paraeducators.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Globally, the United States is a world leader in serving students with disabilities throughout the country's borders. Most countries continue to struggle with meeting the needs of students with disabilities in educational settings. In many third world countries, people with disabilities do not receive an education at all. One in every ten children in the world cope with a disability, and only 2-3% of children with disabilities go to school (The World Bank Group, 2013).

The United States government's effort to uphold many disability laws, such as the Individual with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA), continues to have serious challenges nationwide. Originally, the United States Congress enacted IDEA in 1975. It ensured that children with disabilities have the opportunity to receive educational services, just like children without a disability. The law has been revised many times over the years but is still relatively new, despite its detailed and powerful history (NICHCY, 2012).

IDEA includes six major mandates that must be implemented throughout the United States: (a) Zero Reject, in which no child with a disability may be excluded from a public education; (b) nonbiased, nondiscriminatory identification and evaluations are to be used, (c) A free and appropriate public education (FAPE) is provided to all children with disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disabilities; (d) students with disabilities will be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE), (e) due process safeguards are to be provided to students and their parents to protect their rights, and (f) parent and student participation and shared decision-making are provided to ensure

parents' participation in the design and implementation of the services recommended and agreed upon (IDEA, 2004).

As school districts across the country implement the requirements of IDEA to serve students with disabilities, they struggle to find and retain qualified special education (SE) teachers. A shortage of qualified SE teachers continues throughout the country due to their being part of a high risk group, being prone to low job satisfaction, exhibiting low self-efficacy, and suffering from increased stress and burnout. The attrition rate of special educators is particularly high, contributing to an overall shortage of qualified teachers throughout the United States (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010).

In addition to the concerns relating to the insufficient number of qualified SE teachers working with students with special needs, concern about the need for qualified SE paraeducators is also growing. Paraeducators (e.g. an aide, instructional assistant, or teaching assistant) with the skills and experience to support the classroom teacher are critical to the success in SE classroom settings. In SE classrooms, also known as special day classes (SDC), SE teachers are provided paraeducators to create a more personalized learning environment and support the special needs of children with disabilities. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) clearly states that a paraprofessional may, if working under the direct supervision of the teacher, be used for one-on-one tutoring, assisting with classroom management, instructional services, and for other supportive reasons; SE teachers rely heavily on paraeducators' support in the SDC setting.

Few districts have implemented comprehensive training programs to support and develop paraeducators. The lack of appropriate training has led to ineffective job performance, which continues to intensify as class sizes increase in special education

classrooms. Furthermore, student behaviors challenge both teachers and paraeducators in SDC settings that serve students with intellectual and physical disabilities, who often present numerous challenges to their teachers and other professionals (Lindberg, Walker-Wied & Beckwith, 2006, p.107). Autism, emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, and traumatic brain injury headline some of the severe disabilities.

In California, many school districts share the dilemma of having limited resources to develop and implement comprehensive training programs that target improved job performance for paraeducators. School districts throughout California lack the adequate support necessary for SE teachers who work side by side with SE paraeducators in their classrooms, which negatively impacts the job performance of paraeducators working in SDC settings.

It is commonplace for a SE paraeducator to be hired, processed, and then placed in a special education classroom with minimal to no training. SE paraeducators are dependent on the SE teacher and/or other paraeducators to provide them with guidance, which is often presented inadequately through poor communication and limited expectations. Byrnes (2002) stated, “The instructional assistants [paraeducators], reported that they received mostly on-the-job training from other instructional assistants by talking with each other, and job shadowing so that patterns of interactions by instructional assistants were passed on” (p. 252). SE teachers who are frequently overwhelmed with student behavioral issues, implementing effective instructional methods, and administrative work tend to find little time to train paraeducators.

SE teachers must have the teacher leadership skills necessary to provide training and support for paraeducators. A classroom teacher’s inadequate teacher leadership skills

or lack of time to support the paraeducator will negatively affect team effectiveness with the paraeducator, the paraeducator's job performance, and the overall classroom environment. Providing teacher leadership training to assist SE teachers in learning the strategies and skills necessary to support paraeducators is an integral element of classroom effectiveness. Guidance for directing paraeducators' work is typically provided perfunctorily, if at all, during teacher preparation programs (Burnette & Peters-Johnson, 2004, p.42). Giving paraeducators the critical resources for improving their job performances and team effectiveness will only develop their abilities to meet the needs of the children they serve on a daily basis.

Problem Background

A gap between research and practice (Cook & Smith, 2012) continues to plague special education and negatively influence team effectiveness and collaboration between SE teachers and paraeducators. The review of literature describes increased spending as well as identification of student eligibility for services in special education program. SE teacher challenges, SE paraeducators' roles, and the role of team effectiveness in this study are also examined throughout this section.

In the review of literature related to this study, the researcher explored the nature of SDC settings and the dynamics between classroom teachers and paraeducators who work in the SDC setting and serve students with intellectual and physical disabilities. Specifically, the researcher probed the teacher leadership skills important to developing a strong and effective team of SE teachers and SE paraeducators. Finally, environmental factors impacting both teachers and paraeducators were investigated.

Problem Statement

Successful SE paraeducator job performance in SDC settings that serve students with intellectual and physical disabilities is critical in secondary SE programs. According to the 22nd Annual Report to Congress (OSEP, 2000), 238,127 paraprofessionals provided services to students with disabilities; paraprofessionals constitute more than half of the non-teaching personnel who assist students with disabilities. In SDC settings, students with severe behavioral problems or multiple disabilities often require intense care on a daily basis. In 2009, The American Federation of Teachers reported that most non-nursing personnel never anticipated performing healthcare procedures when they prepared to become teachers or school employees. Many non-nursing personnel expressed apprehension because of this additional responsibility while simultaneously having to provide a high quality education for their students (AFT, 2009). Assistants [paraeducators] working with students with severe, profound or multiple disabilities, perhaps in special settings, are engaged in very different tasks from those who work in classrooms and support students with less complex or temporary needs, a reality that presents challenges for those involved in designing training programs for assistants.

Many issues raise concerns regarding SE paraeducators' job performance. SE teacher leadership skills are seldom taught in university teacher credentialing programs or in school districts. Without sufficient training, SE teachers are on their own to lead, some possess the natural ability to lead, and some do not. For those who possess insufficient SE teacher leadership skills, collaboration and team effectiveness between the teacher and the paraeducator may suffer. Success in moderate to severe SDC depends

on the SE teacher and the SE paraeducator working together. Lindberg et al. (2007) averred the importance of working as a team,

Working to make sure your assistant is invested in the success of your students should be your main goal. This means you need to make it clear that you are willing to include this person in the planning and execution of your lessons. If your assistant will be regularly teaching a certain type of lesson, you may want to model for him or her to be sure your expectations are understood (p.116).

The recommendations made at individualized educational program (IEP) team meetings between parents, teachers, service providers, and administrators requiring paraeducators to be able to function as additional support for students with severe disabilities or medically fragile needs are demanding on SE paraeducators if they are properly trained or appropriately informed. Paraeducators usually do not receive behavioral or job performance training prior to starting their position. The paraeducator depends on individual knowledge, leadership from the SE teacher, or assistance from peers to guide them through their jobs. The quality of the instructional services that paraeducators provide is directly related to the training they receive (Gately and Gately, 2001).

Apprehending the dynamics between SE teachers and SE paraeducators plays an important role in understanding how SE teacher leadership can impact a SE paraeducator's job performance. Very few studies have examined SE teachers' and SE paraeducators' team effectiveness and collaboration. There was a need to better comprehend the ways in which SE teachers' leadership can positively impact team

effectiveness and success in the SDC setting. Ascertaining the role of SE teachers' leadership resulted in developing understandings between the two variables.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this causal-comparative research mixed methods study was to identify the SE teacher leadership skills that SE teachers and SE paraeducators perceived are most important to SDC team effectiveness in secondary special education programs that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities. Data was gathered through individual interviews and a quantitative survey in two school districts within Riverside County.

Research Questions

The following five questions preserved the centrality of the topic at hand for this study:

1. What are the teacher leadership skills SE teachers perceive as most important to their role in developing an effective team?
2. What are the teacher leadership skills SE paraeducators perceive as most important to the teacher's role in developing an effective team?
3. Does a statistically significant difference exist between the responses of teachers and paraeducators?
4. What are the barriers to SDC team effectiveness as perceived by teachers and paraeducators?
5. What do teachers and paraeducators perceive as the strategies to improve team effectiveness?

Significance of the Problem

SE teachers and SE paraeducators depend on each other and sway student success. Building an effective team is critical to this outcome. Without teacher leadership training to support the SDC classroom environment, potential challenges will arise, hampering student achievement, health and safety.

SE teachers are the team leaders in SDC classrooms. Team leaders must influence others and inspire them to meet the goals of the initiative or project (Roman, 2011, p.2). Gerlach (2010) expressed similar sentiments,

Leadership is a critical factor for team success. The leader is always the teacher or another school professional who has been designated as the paraeducator's supervisor. The supervisor's role is similar to that of a coach. It involves assessing the paraeducator's skills and helping the paraeducator use them to the fullest. Paraeducators contribute more effectively when they are "coached" and encouraged to make optimal use of their strengths and resources. A supervisor provides direction and ideas, helps identify alternatives, raises questions, and supplies feedback (p.4).

Students will be more successful when SE teacher and SE paraeducator teams work well together. The position of the paraeducator can be just as important as the teacher's position.

Gerlach (2010) stated that to be successful, the teacher and the paraeducator must view themselves as a team and partners in the educational process. The team members must solicit input from each other and share ideas. Teamwork does not happen by accident; it requires effort and commitment, a willingness to accept the challenges of

working together. Teachers and paraeducators need to form a relationship built on good communication and mutual respect, “The effective deployment of assistants [paraeducators] focuses on their relationship with teachers and on the importance of establishing teams and collaborative partnerships to support the needs of students with SEN (special educational needs)” (O’Neill, 2010, p. 266).

This study’s significance was in its ability to provide a broader understanding of the dynamics between SE teachers and the SE paraeducators they work with on a daily basis in SDC settings.

Definitions

Disability. A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (Understanding Special Education, 2014).

Free and Appropriate Public Education. A provision of regular and/or special education, related aids, and services that are designed to meet individual needs of persons with a disability as well as the needs of their peers who do not have disabilities.

Individual needs are met and based on adherence to procedural safeguards outlined in the law (Ed.gov, 2013).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It ensures special services to children with disabilities throughout the United States. (Ed.gov, 2013).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The placement of a special needs student in a manner promoting the maximum possible interaction with the general school population. Placement options are offered on a continuum including regular classroom with no support services, regular classroom with support services, designated instruction services,

special day classes and private special education programs (Understanding Special Education, 2014).

NICHCY. The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities currently gives information on disabilities and disability related issues focusing on children ages 0 – 22. On September 30, 2014, NICHCY will be disbanded (NICHCY, 2012).

No Child Left Behind Act. An act supporting standards-based education reform based on the idea that establishing high standards and measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education (Ed.gov, 2013).

Nondiscriminatory Identification and Evaluations. Non-biased, multi-factored methods of evaluating students to determine if a child has a disability (Snell & Brown, 2011).

Paraprofessional. Related to a teaching position and generally supervised by the classroom teacher, a paraprofessional is responsible to provide assistance in general or for special education classroom settings. The position is also known as paraeducator, instructional assistant, educational assistant, teacher's aide or classroom assistant (American Federation of Teachers, 2009).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to finish tasks and obtain goals (Council for Exceptional Children, 2009).

Shared Decision-Making (SDM). SDM is a strategy in which stakeholders communicate using the best available evidence when confronted with making decisions (Dieker, 2011).

Special Day Class. A self contained special education class that provides services to students with special needs that cannot be met by the general education program, RSP or DIS program (Understanding Special Education, 2014).

Special Education. The practice of educating students with special needs (Ed.gov, 2013).

Zero Reject. A rule requiring educators to offer FAPE to all age-eligible students with disabilities (Snell & Brown, 2011).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to SE teachers and SE paraeducators. The study participants work specifically with students with moderate to severe disabilities at the secondary level. Table 1 displays the socio-economic and ethnic make-up of Riverside County as compared to the State of California's student population. Data collected for this table identifies the student population between the ages 0 to 17. The data exhibits Riverside County's student population was comparable to the State of California's student population allowing the researcher's collected data to be generalizable.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) referred to qualitative research as not being generalizable to all other settings, [but] it is likely that the lessons learned in one setting might be useful to others (p.78). The time of the study took place October 2014 to March 2015. The school districts used in this study were within Riverside County in the State of California. The study's quantitative component was delimited to a survey instrument, and its qualitative component was delimited to interviews to gather data.

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Table 1

Socio-Economic and Ethnic Make-Up of Riverside County as Compared to the State of California Student Population

<i>Ethnic & Socio-Economic Facts</i>	<i>Riverside County</i>	<i>State of California</i>
Student Population*		
Child Population by City, School District & County (Regions of 65,000 or More)	621,040	9,239,306
Ethnic		
African American/Black	6.7%	6.3%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.6%	0.6%
Asian/Asian American	2.9%	8.6%
Filipino	1.9%	2.5%
Hispanic/Latino	60.6%	52.7%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.4%	0.5%
White	24.3%	25.5%
Multiracial	2.2%	2.4%
Socio-Economic		
Median Family Income (Regions of 65,000 Residents or More)	\$59,437	\$66,215
Children in Poverty (Regions of 65,000 Residents or More)	24.9%	23.8%
Children Living in Low-Income Working Families (Regions of 65,000 Residents or More)	27.7%	26.2%
Homeownership, 2008-2012	67.5%	56%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2008-2012	\$248, 100	\$383,900
Median household income, 2008-2012	\$57,096	\$61,400
High school graduate or higher, % of persons age 25+, 2008-2012	79.2%	81.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2008-2012	20.5%	30.5%

Source: The contents of this table were retrieved from kidsdata.org, A Program of Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health and the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (October, 2013).

Organization of the Study

The study comprised of five chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter 2 contains the review of literature, including knowledge of the current situation and challenges in special education, the special education teacher, the paraeducator, special education team effectiveness, the special day class setting, and leadership skills supporting team effectiveness. Chapter 3 described the descriptive research design and the mixed methodology of the study. In detail, the population, sample, data collection procedures and instruments were described. A summary of the study's findings were presented and analyzed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 included the summary, findings, conclusions, and recommendations for actions and further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives on team effectiveness between special education (SE) teachers and the SE paraeducators they work with in special day classrooms (SDC) serving students with moderate to severe disabilities. Thorough detailed research the review of literature identified theories and publications that were closely related to the research topic.

For this study, identifying both the barriers that prevent team effectiveness and strategies that engender team effectiveness were identified through interviews in correlation to the quantitative data that was collected to establish triangulation. In order to develop this triangulation, Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) wrote that the literature review involved locating and assimilating what is already known. To do this, the writer must experience what is described as “immersion in the subject” by reading extensively about areas that either directly or indirectly related to the topic under study (p.50). Through your search, you will begin to identify the relevant classic works and landmark studies, as well as the most current work available.

This study’s literature review included articles, books, journal articles, and dissertations. Since this topic is rarely examined, the researcher needed to demonstrate the relationship between the two participant groups by seeking out further examples of materials that were published at earlier dates. The material resources were accessed through Brandman University’s Leatherby Library online, Chapman University’s Leatherby Library, ProQuest, ERIC, and various internet sites. ERIC, Education Resource Information Center, is an internet-based digital library of education and

sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education (ERIC, 2014).

Throughout the review of literature, the researcher identified the gaps in research writings and discussed the concerns that were evident in the research. The following topics were addressed: (a) special education (SE), (b) SE challenges, (c) SE teachers, (d) SE paraeducators, (e) SE team effectiveness, and (f) leadership skills that support team effectiveness.

At the end of each section of the literature review, the researcher emphasized research implications. The end of the chapter includes a summary that detailed knowledge gained from the literature review, and explained the ways in which this research advanced this field of study.

Literature Review

Special Education in the United States

In the US, special education is provided to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities. In 1975, the federal government passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), also known as Public Law 94-142 (LD Online, 2013). The EHA originated as a way to ensure that students with disabilities receive an appropriate public education (LD Online, 2010). EHA later became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The nation's federal special education law ensures public schools meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. IDEA requires that schools provide special education services to eligible students as outlined in a student's individualized education program (IEP). IDEA also provides very specific requirements to guarantee a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for students

with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). FAPE and LRE are protected rights of every eligible child, and they hold in all fifty states and in the U.S. Territories (CEC, 2009).

Special education means specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities, including instruction conducted in the classroom, home, hospitals and institutions, at no cost to the parents. If requirements are met for other services, special education can also include speech language pathology, travel training, vocational education, and other related services, provided the service is considered special education rather than a related service under state standards (U.S. Department of Education Regulations: Part 300/A/300.39, 2004). Such instruction may be delivered using various instructional arrangements, including collaborative-teaching, small-group instruction, or individual instruction (Snell & Brown, 2011).

IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, when several additions were included to IDEA's purpose (Ed.gov, IDEA 2004, Title I, Section 601d).

- To ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living; to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected; and to assist States, localities, educational service agencies, and Federal agencies to provide for the education of all children with disabilities.
- To assist States in the implementation of a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system of early intervention services

for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

- To ensure that educators and parents have the necessary tools to improve educational results for children with disabilities by supporting system improvement activities; coordinated research and personnel preparation; coordinated technical assistance, dissemination, and support; and technology development and media services.
- To assess, and ensure the effectiveness of, efforts to educate children with disabilities.

IDEA 2004 has successfully improved the quality of education for all children with disabilities in the public schools. Aligned with No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Title I, as amended by NCLB, sets high standards that teachers and paraprofessionals must meet (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The United States government has noticed the enormous influx of children with disabilities in our nation. The number of students being identified for special education services along with the enormous amount of costs in recent years has significantly affected our nation's spending in educational reform.

Students with moderate to profound disabilities are provided special education services to meet their educational needs. More than 15% of school-age children — near 10 million children — had a disability in 2006-08 according to a study in the *Journal Pediatrics*, up 2.3% from 12.8% in 1997-99 (USA Today, 2011). The identification of autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders has accounted for most of the percentage increase.

Between 1996 and 2005, an estimated 40% of new spending in education went to special education services. Special education spending consumed about 21 percent of all

education spending across the nation in 2005 (compared with 18% in 1996 and 17% in 1991), or \$110 billion in that year alone (Levenson, 2012, p. 8). The American Federation of Teachers (2009) reported that in 2006, the average general education student's education totaled \$7,552, less than half the cost for the average special education student's education, which totaled \$16,921.

According to Davis and Palladino (2011), "The number of students identified as having an eligibility to receive special education services had increased 47% between 1977 and 1995, as compared to a 2% increase in the general education population" (p.4). This data evidences a phenomenon that is influencing the decision-making processes that affect special education classrooms throughout the United States.

Special education services are provided when a student has an identified eligibility. IDEA and its corresponding Code of Federal Regulations (CFR, 2006) define 13 distinct disability categories (34 CFR 300.8). Thirteen eligibilities would qualify a student for special education services based on a thorough nondiscriminatory evaluation, an IEP team's recommendation, and parent agreement (NICHCY, 2012): (a) autism, (b) deaf-blindness, (c) deafness, (d) emotional disturbance, (e) hearing impairment, (f) intellectual disability, (g) multiple disabilities, (h) orthopedic impairment, (i) other health impairment, (j) specific learning disability, (k) speech or language impairment, (l) traumatic brain injury, and (m) visual impairment (including blindness).

Educators who work with students with severe disabilities represent this study's target population. Snell and Brown (2011) expressed that although the term severe disabilities is used extensively in the professional literature, no single authoritative

definition exists. The amendments to IDEA 2004, a common source of special education terminology, do not define severe disabilities.

Ensuring that a nondiscriminatory assessment is implemented is critical to accurately placing students with moderate to severe disabilities, as Snell and Brown (2011) explained,

NCLB of 2001 is focused on the important role of assessment in determining the progress of schools, districts, and states in meeting the goal of having all students reach proficiency in key academic areas. NCLB specifies that all students, including those with severe disabilities, must be assessed annually (p. 186).

Understanding the importance of nondiscriminatory assessments when identifying students with severe disabilities creates for appropriate placing in the least restrictive environment. Snell and Brown (2011) summarized the challenges as

Being unique in meeting these requirements of students with severe disabilities. This is a small population of students, with great variability in their characteristics. Some have motor impairments, some have communication impairments, and some have social skills deficits. All have intellectual impairments, but to greatly varying degrees. Some of these students have sensory impairments that affect vision and/or hearing, and some have complex health care needs (p. 74).

The research gathered in this special education section was valuable because it identified an overwhelming dilemma occurring in SDC settings today. Comprehending the importance of catering to every student who is placed in SDC classroom settings was

critical to meeting their needs and understanding how to best serve each individual student.

Special Education Challenges

Matthew Brault of the U.S. Census Bureau (2011) cited that of the 53.9 million school-aged children (aged 5 to 17) in the U.S. civilian non-institutionalized population, about 2.8 million (5.2 percent) were reported to have a disability in 2010. In California, students with disabilities number nearly 690,000, or about 10% of total enrollment – up from about 612,000 just a decade before (SI&A Cabinet Report, 2013). Miranda (2013) explained how these increased numbers are creating SE teacher shortages,

The need for special-education teachers is rising in California and across the country. California faces a shortage of special-ed. teachers to serve disabled students. The number of California kids needing special-education programs is nearing 700,000, or 10 percent of total enrollment, and rising. Special-ed. students are more expensive to teach because additional aides or specialists are hired. The state spends about \$9 billion on special education. While it credentials 4,000-5,000 special-ed. teachers a year, that's not enough to meet the demand. To close the gap, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing issues about 2,500 interim documents or emergency permits to allow some to temporarily teach special-needs students. Another 2,000 or so are unassigned in a special-ed. setting. (p.2)

Additionally, Mary Vixie Sandy, executive director of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, declared, "We think we are preparing about half the numbers of special education teachers that the state might actually need. And so it's an issue that

we really do need to attend to” (Sacramento, KABC, 2013, p.2).

SE teachers struggle to provide quality instruction to the students they serve. Large numbers of students, intense behavioral challenges, demands from parents, and lack of support are everyday factors contributing to burnout among SE teachers. Cook and Smith (2012) wrote, “Special educators are overwhelmed” (p. 294). These sentiments have been repeatedly echoed as federal and state regulations have doubled and requests from parents and demands from child advocates multiply. Indeed, burnout is one of the leading factors in special education teacher attrition (Davis & Palladino, 2011, p. 4). It was also expressed some difficulties that generate teacher burnout,

Feelings of isolation, too little time with students, lack of administrative support, and increasing demands are challenges facing special education teachers and contributing to teacher shortages. If we are to provide the high quality programs necessary for our children and youth with disabilities, while ensuring that they make good progress toward attaining their goals and meeting increasingly rigorous academic standards, the recruitment and retention of qualified, committed and talented teachers is essential (p. 4).

Miranda (2013) stated, “The main problem is attracting people to the job” (p.2). Moreover, a misconception exists that SE teachers make more income than general education teachers. They actually make the same as general education teachers, yet they are required to obtain a special education credential in addition to a general education credential. Furthermore, the demands of society for the teaching profession call for teachers to be many things to many different types of learners, as Kennedy (2008) explained,

As a society, we hold different ideals for good teaching. In one ideal, the teacher plays a cultural role, representing an educated person. In another ideal the teacher is a nurturer who helps young people grow, learn and develop. In another the teacher is a political actor, striving to right social wrongs, and in yet another the teacher is a professional with specialized expertise. (p. 1199)

Many of the children receiving special education services may need teachers to adopt special approaches to providing education or other accommodations based on the IEP team's recommendation. Hatcher and Waguespack (2004) defined accommodations as a variety of techniques and supports intended to provide a student with disabilities full access to the general curriculum. Appropriate accommodations include changes in instructional activities, testing procedures, or materials that minimize or eliminate a disability-related barrier without creating favor for students with disabilities. The authors further stated,

Educators face significant challenge in determining whether a student needs accommodations and in selecting specific accommodations that are linked to a student's functional limitations, given his or her disability. The challenge for educators rests in providing accommodations to level the playing field for students with disabilities, without creating an unfair advantage for these students over their non-disabled peers (Hatcher & Waguespack, 2004, p.74).

The review of literature demonstrates that special education issues continue to expand, making the job of special educators increasingly difficult. Growth in the SE

student population, SE teacher burnout, lack of SE teacher retention, and high levels of societal demands place special education in the spotlight of accountability.

Special Education Teachers

In 1923, at the first Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) meeting, one of the CEC's original aims entailed establishing professional standards for teachers in the field of special education. The CEC has been an organizational leader in improving special education teacher quality over the past 91 years. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, 1996) described the influence of teacher quality in three primary levers, similar to a three legged stool: (a) accreditation of teacher preparation programs, (b) initial licensing of entry-level teaching professionals, and (c) advanced certification of teaching professionals. These levers represent areas in which every new and veteran special education teacher should understand the impact that specific area has on their profession. The levers are dependent variables supporting one another.

The CEC has established the Initial and Advanced Professional Content Standards and Knowledge and Skills Sets to ensure professionals entering the field of special education possess the abilities to practice safely and effectively. The following constitute the nine content standards: (a) foundations, (b) development and characteristics of learners, (c) individual learning differences, (d) instructional strategies, (e) learning environments and social interactions, (f) language, (g) instructional planning, (h) assessment, professional, and ethical practice, and (i) collaboration (CEC, 2009, pp. 47-50).

Within the compounds of these standards, many areas are addressed related to instructional learning, teaching strategies and professional development. Initial Content

Standard 5: Learning Environments and Social Interactions addressed the need to “provide guidance and direction to paraeducators and others” (CEC, 2009, p.46). Also, in Initial Content Standard 10: Collaboration, the teacher should be “routinely and effectively collaborating with families, other educators, related service providers, and personnel from community agencies in culturally responsive ways” (CEC, 2009, p. 48).

The literature is clear that high standards for special education teacher quality have been established. The weakness lies in the difficulty to abide by these standards in many school districts regarding collaboration. Too many schools lack the necessary energy for learning that arises from commitment—commitment from teachers and principals to a joint enterprise and commitment from teachers and students to a school they have chosen (Glenn, 1989). Dieker (2001a) identified an additional challenge that many districts faced in implementing IDEA – disjointed service delivery. In many ways, disjointed service delivery is an example of a failure of individuals to effectively collaborate.

Collaboration can be particularly challenging when the school lacks strategies and structures necessary to support the inclusion of students with disabilities (Billingsley, Griffin, Smith, Kamman, & Israel, 2010). In Billingsley’s article “The Challenges of Inclusion and Collaboration” (2010), he stated the following examples of challenges in collaboration with novice special education teachers:

- Physical location of teachers. Classrooms that are separate from other teachers reduce the special education teacher’s opportunities to interact with them.

- Large numbers of students. Collaboration can be hampered when special education teachers have many different students.
- Ineffective communication. Collaboration is hindered by inadequate meeting time and lack of shared professional development opportunities.
- Inadequate preparation. Inadequate knowledge and skills about how to collaborate can create difficulties.

Although the research attests to the high standards of professionalism the CEC has placed on special education teachers, further research is necessary on building collaborative teams. Research frequently cites the barriers teachers encounter in collaborating effectively with each other and with their general education teacher peers. Further research was needed in this area to identify if similar barriers exist between SE teachers and the SE paraeducators they work with in SDC classrooms.

Special Education Paraeducators

Paraeducators are essential for delivering individualized services and are becoming increasingly involved in instructing individuals with exceptional learning needs at all ages (CEC, 2009). Additionally,

The role of the paraeducator has been around for over fifty years. Paraeducators bring a variety of backgrounds and experience to their jobs. In the United States, 29% have high school diplomas, 38% have completed college, and 32% hold an associate's degree or higher. Paraeducators with college experience have increased confidence in collaborating and communicating with teachers. The majority of paraeducators are supervised by special education teachers (CEC, 2009).

CEC (2009) asserted that ideally, “Paraeducators should have available ongoing, effective, continuing training with professional educators and training that is specifically targeted for paraeducators” (p. 189). The challenges associated with lack of funding have created a significant gap between what is being provided and what is necessary to properly prepare paraeducators for their important roles in special education classrooms.

Special Education teachers are a paramount element of the training, resource and support system for paraeducators. In addition, the relationship between teacher and paraeducator is extremely important. Teachers’ failure to intentionally establish strong communication with their paraeducators and carefully review their paraeducators’ roles and responsibilities can engender misunderstandings and conflicts, as Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) expressed,

It is your [teacher] duty to identify and correct serious misunderstandings about the extent of your paraeducator’s responsibility and authority and to know the limitations that the school and the district place on responsibilities that can be assigned. This ensures that you all work in the bounds of the law and follow good safety practices. However, the important point is that you should be very explicit in communicating what you want – and do not want- your paraeducator to do.

(P.16)

As mentioned in the Chapter 1, the paraeducator is often placed in a classroom to work with the teacher and students but has not been provided with the basic training to be successful. The paraeducator is dependent on the SE teacher to provide the necessary training, but unfortunately, most teachers receive no preparation in teacher training on how to supervise paraeducators (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001).

Research reveals that paraprofessionals often have concerns about their roles due to the lack of training, which results in resistance and potential conflict with the teacher. In addition, Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) wrote that paraeducators' age and classroom experience may create resentment from a younger teacher entering the classroom (p.85). Also paraeducators' lack of prior educational experience may cause them to feel intimidated by the teacher they work with. Having to be trained may cause paraeducators to feel inferior as they reflect on their past education and experience in the SDC classroom.

Special Education Team Effectiveness

SE teacher credentialing programs concentrate on providing important guides to train and prepare SE teachers. Most credential programs focus on teachers gaining the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful in working with students having special needs. However, very little time is devoted to teachers acquiring the skills necessary to work successfully with paraeducators in SDC classrooms. According to Ashby (2012, p.89), courses in special education focus on the disability definitions that guide federal funding, causes and origins of disabilities, characteristics traditionally associated with each of the categories, and tactics recommended to ameliorate these characteristics. The focus remains on the students, which is critical in SDC classrooms, but effectuating team effectiveness strategies is needed to strengthen the relationship between SE teachers and the paraprofessionals they work with.

Time represents an additional area of concern that impacts SE teachers' and paraprofessionals' ability to develop teamwork and collaboration. Pickett and Gerlach (2003) emphasized the supervisory needs of paraeducators in inclusive settings,

especially within a team approach. The steady movement toward general education being the preferred primary placement for students with disabilities has transformed the paraeducator's role to being primarily instructional in nature, especially when supporting students in the general education setting (Giangreco, Smith, & Pinckney, 2006).

SE teachers and paraeducators are often overwhelmed with the responsibilities of maintaining the day to day routine without being provided collaboration time to receive or provide appropriate training. Often paraeducators who work in SDC classrooms and serve medically fragile students are provided training during instructional time for gastronomy-tube feedings or physical/occupational therapy support trainings.

Paraprofessionals in special education classrooms have traditionally been faced with the possibility of providing health services to students. These services include catheterizations, tube feedings and cleaning tracheotomies. Paraprofessionals in regular classrooms are increasingly exposed to the possibility of providing health services that range from the most basic to extremely complex, invasive procedures, since many school districts are placing special-needs students into regular education classrooms. Many paraprofessionals perform such procedures with inadequate training or no training at all. (AFT, 2009, pp. 31-32)

The lack of appropriate training for paraeducators is on the rise as the population of students with intense medical and behavioral needs continues to grow in special education programs. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health reports that it is beyond the capacity of any employee to manually lift a person of more than 50 pounds once a day. Yet it is not uncommon for some school staff to lift 10-20 times that

amount as they assist children with diapering, toileting, and transportation (AFT, 2009, p. 39). If provided sufficient time to work with paraeducators, SE teachers can demonstrate the need to improve the quality of supervision through leadership skills, building team effectiveness, and working collaboratively with their paraeducator(s). Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) summarize the advantages of a strong SE teacher/paraeducator relationship,

As the leader of the classroom instructional team, there are many benefits: another adult perspective in the classroom, someone else's lifetime of experiences and skills, another pair of hands and eyes to help you learn more about your own effectiveness as an educator; an opportunity to facilitate another adult's learning and professional development; and (in the experience of most teacher-paraeducator teams encountered) a tremendous source of support for the important work you [the teacher] do as an educator. (pp. 95-96)

Snell and Brown (2011) mentioned that schools and educational teams are advised to rethink their practices and policies concerning the use of paraprofessionals so that problems are prevented. Classroom teachers and paraprofessionals should have basic training in systematic instruction, including ways to promote peer interaction.

Paraprofessionals need job descriptions that outline their responsibilities and line of supervision. When their responsibilities include participation on the student's planning team, paraprofessionals have input and can benefit from team thinking (Snell & Brown, p.132).

The review of literature identified several areas of concerns in SE teacher and paraeducator collaboration and team effectiveness. The literature attested to the high demands placed on special education teachers.

In order to understand the severity of the situation facing special educators, we need to understand the basic numbers. Russ, Chiang, Tylance, and Bongers (2001) conducted a qualitative study about the links between instructional group size and student engagement, caseload, academic achievement, and special education teacher attrition. (Davis & Palladino, 2011, p.4)

Even at the beginning of SE teachers' careers, it is critical for them to be able to work effectively with the paraprofessionals in their SDC classrooms, especially when the classroom comprises students with severe disabilities and medical fragility. Often, novice teachers with inadequate training in leadership and team effectiveness are placed in such classrooms.

In his findings, Billingsley et al. (2009) found paraprofessionals are a source of support for novice special education teachers. However, many new teachers find it challenging to work with them. Novice special education teachers often report inadequate preparation for supervising, managing, and coordinating paraprofessionals. Specific challenges include learning how to set expectations, determining a structure and scheduling for paraprofessionals, dealing with paraprofessionals who interact inappropriately with students, and finding time to work with paraprofessionals. In some cases, tensions may arise when novice

teachers must supervise paraprofessionals who are older and more familiar with the school and students than they are (NCIPP Doc. No. RS-1).

There continues to be a gap in the literature that addressed the seriousness of building team effectiveness between SE teachers and the SE paraeducators they work with. The literature showed that SE educators lack the necessary support to plan effectively to develop team effectiveness within their classrooms.

Leadership Skills Supporting Team Effectiveness

As the student population in special education classrooms grows, stronger SE teacher leadership is required to develop team effectiveness. More people appear to be recognizing the importance of teamwork; as jobs get bigger, organizational structures get more complex, and more companies become multi-national in scope (Naquin & Tynan, 2003).

Notwithstanding the abundant research that highlights the need for stronger SE teacher/paraeducator teams, teachers and paraeducators often are not fully supported by their administrations. Harvey and Drolet (2005, pp. 169-180) suggested following eight principles to build strong, powerful people, leading to a stronger organization:

1. You empower people when you give them important work to do.
2. You empower people when you grant them discretion in doing their work.
3. You empower people when you give them resources to do their work.
4. You empower people when you give them praise and recognition.
5. You empower people when you make them feel that their survival is in their own hands.

6. You empower people when you enhance and build task skills.
7. You empower people when you encourage them to work in teams.
8. You empower people when you welcome surprise.

Successful teacher-paraeducator teams can have successful student outcomes if they are willing to work together through communication, collaboration and a shared vision. De Meuse (2009) summarized,

Successful teams become stronger when members learn to work together. They have clear, acceptable goals. The members trust and respect one another. They communicate often and openly. Members have talent. The leader “fits” the needs of the team. The organization supports the team (p.137).

Conclusion

The review of literature pertaining to this study revealed the limited amount of research on the challenges impacting SE teacher-SE paraeducator teams. In each section information was given to support the study’s importance. Presenting the present climate around special education in the United States was critical to help the reader understand the seriousness of current SE teacher shortage and ascertain the importance of strong SE teacher/paraeducator relationships. Accordingly, a discussion of the challenges that were faced in special education environments was provided. SE teachers’ roles and the obstacles they encounter were identified and discussed. The importance of the paraeducator was identified along with the training they need.

The review of special education team effectiveness identified the importance of having sufficient time to address planning, training and preparation in, which leads to building an effective team. Groups lacking a common task are simply involved in

parallel play; they do the same thing, not together, but side by side. Teachers frequently exemplify this (Harvey & Drolet, 2005, p.16). In the last section, leadership skills valuable to team effectiveness were addressed in addition to the ways in which empowerment plays an important role in change.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Limited research has investigated the impact teacher leadership skills have on team effectiveness between special education (SE) teachers and the SE paraeducators they work with in special day classrooms (SDC). The purpose of this study was to contribute to the research in this area. The focus in this study entailed ascertaining the perceptions of SE teachers and SE paraeducators on the teacher leadership skills necessary to develop team effectiveness in SDC settings. Related to the research questions, the study involved analyzing responses from both groups that addressed the specific barriers and strategies that support building effective teams in SDC. Findings from the review of literature revealed the increasing challenges SDC settings are encountering involving team effectiveness, challenges that were evident in this study's relevance.

Overview

In this chapter, a detailed explanation of the methodology and procedures used to conduct this study was described thoroughly. The chapter includes the purpose statement, research questions, research design, population and sample, instrumentations used, instrument validity and reliability, field-testing, data collection methods, data analysis methods, study limitations, and a brief summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this causal-comparative research mixed methods study was to identify the special education (SE) teacher leadership skills most important to special day

classroom (SDC) team effectiveness in secondary special education programs serving students with moderate to severe disabilities as perceived by SE teachers and SE paraeducators. Data was gathered through a quantitative survey and individual qualitative interviews in two school districts within Riverside County, California.

Research Questions

1. What are the teacher leadership skills SE teachers perceive as most important to their role in developing an effective team?
2. What are the teacher leadership skills SE paraeducators perceive as most important to the teacher's role in developing an effective team?
3. Does a statistical difference exist between the responses of SE teachers and SE paraeducators?
4. What are the barriers to special day classroom team effectiveness as perceived by SE teachers and SE paraeducators?
5. What do SE teachers and SE paraeducators perceive as the strategies to improve team effectiveness?

Research Design

In this study, a causal-comparative research mixed methods design was used to describe the dynamics between SE teachers and the SE paraeducators they work with by reporting their perspectives on teacher leadership skills and team effectiveness. The researcher examined the factors that influence team effectiveness between the two populations as well as their possible causes. Patten (2012) described causal comparative research as, "research in which researchers look to the past for cause(s) of a current

condition. It is used primarily when researchers are interested in causality, but it is not possible to conduct an experiment” (p.9). Recognizing teacher leadership skills and their important role in SE teacher and SE paraeducator team effectiveness was the rationale for this study. The researcher identified ways to improve team effectiveness between the two groups to further enrich SDC settings based on the findings.

An analysis of the attitudes and opinions of SE teachers and SE paraeducators about team effectiveness were thoroughly examined through qualitative, open-ended interviews. A sequential exploratory design that emphasized the quantitative section of the study was implemented prior to examining relationships between the findings of the qualitative data. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described a sequential explanatory design as a quantitative and qualitative data collection that is implemented in two phases, with quantitative methods receiving the primary emphasis. This was followed by qualitative data collection and analysis. “The qualitative data is needed to explain quantitative results or to further elaborate on quantitative findings” (p.401).

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This design was selected to report findings to questions about the current beliefs and perspectives held by the participants in order to further elaborate on building team effectiveness. Identifying their perspectives on the barriers hindering team effectiveness and acknowledging strategies that were productive created an understanding of procedures necessary to improve team effectiveness within the SDC setting.

The quantitative portion of the study involved gathered data using an electronic survey to identify the perceptions SE teachers and SE paraeducators had about the necessary teacher leadership skills necessary to build teams. Passmore et.al (2002)

explained surveys instruments, or questionnaires, are used to collect data about subjects' demographics, personal histories, knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes. Many researchers administer a survey when they need information or wish to answer a question about their patients, colleagues, or learners (p.281).

It was imperative to provide additional data through qualitative interviews to fully recognize the strategies in improving, and defining the barriers preventing team effectiveness through the perceptions of both participating groups. Patton (2002) clearly described the purpose of interviewing.

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. The issue is not whether observational data are more desirable, valid, or meaningful than self-report data. The fact is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (p.341).

Selecting a mixed methods approach using a sequential explanatory design allowed the researcher to establish triangulation of the data that was collected and produced detailed findings. The use of two sample groups, SE teachers and SE paraeducators, was used for this study. The triangulation of data was utilized to gather thoughts, feelings, and opinions on the research topic involving their perspectives on

teacher leadership skills and team effectiveness. Identifying teacher leadership skills, and its impact on SE teacher and SE paraeducator team effectiveness, supported the rationale for this study. Being able to identify areas of necessary improvements in team effectiveness in the SDC setting contributed in the area of this research topic.

Population

The population was special educators of students with moderate to severe disabilities. This study investigated two public school districts within Riverside County, California. Patten (2012) stated researchers infer that the characteristics of the sample probably are the characteristics of the population (p.45). The characteristics of this population were the special educators who work at a public high school within the districts in Riverside County at the secondary level.

Sample

The sample strategy chosen for this study was convenience sampling. Due to time constraints and accessibility of the participants in this study, convenience sampling was selected. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) states in convenience sampling a group of subjects are selected on the basis of being accessible or expedient (p.137). Participants in this study were samplings of special educators who were teachers or paraeducators. The researcher resides within the Riverside County.

An estimated sample of a minimum of twenty participants from each of the two sampling groups from each of the following districts was included in the quantitative portion of the study:

- Hemet Unified School District
- Moreno Valley Unified School District

For the qualitative portion a minimum of four participants from each sampling group was interviewed using open-ended questions.

There are fewer SDC classrooms serving students with moderate to severe disabilities within the Riverside County at the secondary level compared to SDC classrooms serving students with mild to moderate disabilities. In the data report compiled by the Legislative Analysts' Office (LAO, 2013), Ehlers and Kuhn reported about ten percent of California students have disabilities affecting their education. Of all of the students with disabilities, there are an estimated 41% of students with mild to moderate disabilities, compared to 25% of students with moderate to severe disabilities (p.4). This difference results in fewer SDC settings serving students with moderate to severe disabilities.

The socio-economic and ethnic make-up of the participating districts as compared to Riverside County and the State of California's student populations are similar in comparison (See Table 2). The comparison allowed for the data collected in this study to be generalizable with other school districts.

Table 2

Socio-Economic and Ethnic Make-Up of the participating districts as Compared to the Riverside County and State of California Student Populations

Ethnic & Socio-Economic Facts	Hemet Unified School District	Moreno Valley Unified School District	Riverside County	State of California
Child Population by City, School District & County (Regions of 65,000 or More)	34,787	51,027	621,040	9,239,306
African American/Black	7.7%	17.1%	6.7%	6.3%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.1%	.03%	0.6%	0.6%
Asian/Asian American	1.2%	2.0%	2.9%	8.6%
Filipino	1.0%	1.7%	1.9%	2.5%
Hispanic/Latino	51.3%	66.5%	60.6%	52.7%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.5%	0.7%	0.4%	0.5%
White	33.9%	9.6%	24.3%	25.5%
Multiracial	3.3%	1.9%	2.2%	2.4%
Median Family Income (Regions of 65,000 Residents or More)	\$42,212	\$50,645	\$59,437	\$66,215
Children in Poverty (Regions of 65,000 Residents or More)	32.7%	34%	24.9%	23.8%
Children Living in Low-Income Working Families (Regions of 65,000 Residents or More)	29.1%	31%	27.7%	26.2%
Homeownership, 2008-2012	N/A	N/A	67.5%	56%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2008-2012	N/A	N/A	\$248, 100	\$383,900
Median household income, 2008-2012	N/A	N/A	\$57,096	\$61,400
High school graduate or higher, % of persons age 25+, 2008-2012	79.6%	74.7%	79.2%	81.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2008-2012	N/A	N/A	20.5%	30.5%

Source: The contents of this table were retrieved from kidsdata.org, A Program of Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health and the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (October, 2013). *Estimated population are ages 0-17.

Most school districts in Riverside County have an average of eight to twelve SE teachers serving the secondary population with moderate to severe disabilities, along with two to up to seven, or even eight, paraeducators working in each of those SE teachers'

classrooms. The sample size group will be 10% to 20% of the population in the two school districts selected.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation developed was a quantitative survey and a qualitative interview to gather data supported by evidence the researcher used to demonstrate triangulation (See Appendices A and B). This strategy adds rigor, breadth, and depth to the study and provides corroborative evidence of the data obtained (Creswell, 1998). Triangulation supported the credibility of this study. Using multiple methods of data collection supported the evidence necessary. It was critical when attempting to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Quantitative surveys were distributed among participants to determine if there was a statistical significant difference between the responses. Within the survey, the Participant's Informed Consent, and the Brandman University's Bill of Rights were included in the electronic survey. Eight qualitative interviews were completed with individual participants. The researcher coded the interview transcripts to be able to accurately analyze the findings to allow for detailed findings. Themes were developed to organize the provided responses.

An advantage of the survey methodology was its relatively unobtrusive and relatively easily administered and managed (Fowler, 1993). The researcher created a survey to address research questions number one and number two. Nine items related to teacher leadership skills, and team effectiveness, were included in the survey, using the simplicity of a 5-point Likert scale. By gathering data on the perceptions SE teachers and SE paraeducators had on selected teacher leadership skills most important to the SE

teachers' role in developing team effectiveness were revealed in the findings. This expanded on the understanding of the possible impact a SE teacher's leadership skills may have on team effectiveness within their own classroom.

The descriptive survey was developed using SurveyMonkey.com.

SurveyMonkey.com is an online survey secured provider. Passmore et al. (2002) defined descriptive surveys as a way to report factual data or opinions (p.282). Steps were taken in developing the survey, and the relationship to the research questions was examined. Focus groups, observations, and longitudinal surveys were not utilized for this research study due to the distance of the participants and time constraints.

A qualitative interview using open-ended questions was implemented among 4 participants, 2 teachers and 2 paraeducators, from each of the participating districts. This provided the researcher the ability to analyze the data gathered from the surveys, and determine a relationship between both groups.

Data Collection

In this section the researcher explained the data collection methods chosen, and the connection to the research questions and the research approach. A detailed description of how the researcher proceeded while maintaining the validity in the study was defined to generate the data needed to deliver a clear analysis of the findings.

Prior to beginning the collection of data, the researcher gained the approval of the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB). Once approval was met, the superintendents of each school district were contacted via a letter requesting permission to move forward with the study (Appendix C). The Director of Special Education from each district was then contacted via a letter (Appendix D). In the letter, the request of

participation in the casual-comparative study, from fifteen SE teachers and fifteen SE paraeducators, who worked at secondary school sites in SDC settings serving students with moderate to severe disabilities. The participant's informed consent was accepted via the electronic survey (See Appendix E), and they were provided Brandman University's Participants' Bill of Rights (See Appendix F).

Descriptive Survey

Following the sequential explanatory design of quantitative to qualitative, the researcher intended to use the developed descriptive survey. The survey was distributed using surveymonkey by email to each of the thirty participants from the districts. The rationale of using this method was the convenience of costs, time constraints, avoidance of interviewer bias, and the need for factual data.

Passmore et al. (2002) stated the quality of data obtained depends on how well respondents understand the survey items or questions. Such understanding is affected by respondents' reading level, cultural perspective, and language skills (p.281). Nine stems related to teacher leadership skills, and team effectiveness were included in the survey, using the simplicity of a 5-point Likert scale. Prior to the first stem, there was a question on the survey that was an initial question identifying their position as a teacher or as a paraeducator.

An expert panel consisted of educators in special education administration, and educational technology to determine the validity and reliability of the survey and interview questions. The professional experts conducted the pilot study, and provided

constructive feedback to the researcher to improve the validity and reliability of the two instruments.

Individual Interviews

The second part of the sequential explanatory designs of this quantitative to qualitative method was the individual interview. The researcher interviewed at least two participants from each sample group of each participating districts. Similar to the surveys, the interview questions were field-tested by the professional experts.

The rationale for using individual interviews was the interactivity between the interviewer and the interviewee, and to be able to gather rich, thick data. Although the researcher had minimal experience in interviewing, the importance of gathering data that was in-depth through individual interviews allowed for detailed explanations of interactions and nuances in the culture between the two groups. This allowed the researcher to develop thick descriptions. Patton (2002) refers to thick descriptions as the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting. Good description takes the reader into the setting being described (p.437).

A total of eight qualitative questions were used in the interviews to gather the information of their opinions, and perceptions using open-ended questions. All interviews were recorded, and remained confidential. This allowed the researcher to go back and review possible missed information that may be pertinent to the study, and to provide thick descriptions of the data collected. The participant was informed, once the interviews were completed and transcribed, the recordings were deleted. This process added to supporting the triangulation of the study, and the importance of confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, the analyzing of both methods of collection were combined and reported. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) states with a triangulation design the quantitative and qualitative data are analyzed concurrently in an integrated fashion. In this case, there is data mixing, in which quantitative and qualitative results are combined (p.406). Using a sequential explanatory method, the quantitative data findings were used in the qualitative analysis to report the findings or trends in the overall responses.

The 9 quantitative survey stems, focused on the responses of SE teachers and SE paraeducators, and their perceptions that were important to the teacher's leadership skills in developing team effectiveness. The researcher analyzed the findings to determine if there was a statistical difference existing between the responses of SE teachers and SE paraeducators.

Once the quantitative portion of the data collection was completed, the qualitative interviews began. The data gathered using the software program, Nvivo. NVivo is a systematic approach to analyzing unstructured data (QSR International, 2014). The transcriptions from the interviews had been recorded using the Nvivo coding software program. After reviewing several interviews a cluster of topics were generated to identify themes and patterns that had been formed. Using NVivo to assist with the organization of the qualitative interviews produced more data that supported the findings. The researcher reviewed transcripts and recordings for accuracy in the coding process.

The completion of the data analysis and the identification of themes and patterns, along with the findings from the quantitative descriptive surveys were combined to produce the final report for this study.

Validity and Reliability

The validity and the reliability of the study were established in several ways to ensure the participants' beliefs that a portrayal of their perceptions are delivered with accuracy, and accordingly, to their original context.

Communicating the bias that the researcher may have was another aspect of the study that was critical to maintaining the validity of this study. The researcher maintains her background was as a special education teacher in special day classroom, serving students with moderate to severe disabilities. For the past eight years, she had worked with a staff of up to seven SE paraeducators and/or private duty nurses. Early in her career, the researcher worked as a paraeducator for 3 years, and has been married for twenty-one years to a paraeducator, who worked in a moderate to severe SDC for thirty years. She currently works as an administrator overseeing special education programs, and serves on an executive board that serves adults with developmental disabilities.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) refer to evidence of credibility can take place in several forms. Clarify up front the bias that you, as the researcher, bring to the study. This self-reflection creates an open and honest attitude that will resonate well with the readers (p. 77). The researcher, throughout the study monitored any bias that might have occurred to prevent a strain in the validity of the research. It was important that the researcher did not influence responses of participants during interviews.

Limitations

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) identified surveys can be of limited value for examining complex social relationships or intricate patterns of interaction (p.82.). There may also be a concern regarding the validity of a survey depending on how well the participants understand the questions of the survey. Passmore et al (2002) reported the response rate can also limit a survey's usefulness. The lower the return rate, the more likely the characteristics of respondents differ from those of non-respondents. Therefore, the results may not be trustworthy. The low response rate casts doubt that the survey results accurately. It will be the responsibility of the researcher to gather data results accordingly (p.281).

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) acknowledge the limitations interviewees may have due to not all people are equally cooperative, articulate, and perceptive (p.83). Also, the interviewer required researcher skills. Another limitation requirement of interviews was interviews were not private. Information was shared openly with the interviewer, which may cause an uneasiness of the interviewee. The researcher, due to her background as a SE teacher, may also have some bias when asking questions of the interviewee.

The research was limited to high schools in the Riverside County. The participants were from Hemet Unified School District and Moreno Valley Unified School District. School districts outside of Riverside County were not selected due to the distance and time constraints.

Excluded from this study were educators from pre-school, elementary, middle, non-public schools and home/hospital programs that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities. The exclusion and limitations on this sample were due to the

complexity of their program scheduling, difference in roles and responsibilities, and variation of support at the multitude of levels.

This study focused on the perceptions of the SE teacher and the SE paraeducator towards understanding team effectiveness between the two groups.

Summary

This methodology section of the study was organized in several parts consisting of the introduction, overview, purpose statement, research questions, and research design, the population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, limitations and summary. Chapter 3 described the rationale for conducting a casual-comparative mixed methods research study.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This dissertation contains five chapters. In the first chapter, the problem is identified regarding a gap between research and practice that continues to plague SE and negatively influence team effectiveness between SE teachers and the paraeducators with whom they work. In Chapter 1, the question of whether or not a statistically significant difference exists between the perceptions of SE teachers and their paraeducators' perceptions regarding what teacher leadership skills are needed to build team effectiveness in the special day classroom is raised. The importance of discovering what barriers and strategies are impacting team effectiveness is also discussed. Chapter 2 encompasses an in depth review of literature compiled into several sections: (a) Special Education in the United States, (b) Special Education Challenges, (c) Special Education Teachers, (d) Special Education Paraeducators, (e) Special Education Team Effectiveness, and (f) the Leadership Skills Supporting Team Effectiveness. In chapter 3 the methodology of this study was thoroughly detailed. The type of study is identified, the research questions are revisited, and the research design is explained. The population and sample are identified and defined, and details of the instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, and study limitations are presented. Chapter 4 contains the presentation and thorough analysis of the data collected, and Chapter 5 consists of the findings, further recommendations for implementation, and possible future research studies.

Apprehending the dynamics between SE teachers and SE paraeducators is paramount for understanding how SE teacher leadership can impact a SE paraeducator's

job performance. Very few studies have examined SE teachers' and SE paraeducators' team effectiveness in the special day classroom, evidencing a need to better comprehend the ways in which SE teachers' leadership can positively impact team effectiveness and success in the SDC setting. Ascertaining the role of SE teachers' leadership can result in developing improvements between the two variables.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this causal-comparative research mixed methods study was to identify the special education (SE) teacher leadership skills most important to special day classroom (SDC) team effectiveness in secondary SE programs that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities, as perceived by SE teachers and SE paraeducators. Understanding the barriers and strategies to team effectiveness and determining the statistical significance in the perceptions of both groups was to be identified and analyzed.

Research Questions

The following five research questions (RQ) preserve the centrality of the topic at hand for this study:

- RQ1 What are the teacher leadership skills SE teachers perceive as most important to their role in developing an effective team?
- RQ2 What are the teacher leadership skills SE paraeducators perceive as most important to the teacher's role in developing an effective team?
- RQ3 Does a statistically significant difference exist between the responses of

teachers and paraeducators?

RQ4 What are the barriers to SDC team effectiveness as perceived by teachers and paraeducators?

RQ5 What do teachers and paraeducators perceive as the strategies to improve team effectiveness?

Instrumentation

Electronic Survey

The anonymous, descriptive quantitative survey containing nine items related to teacher leadership skills was developed to address research questions 1, 2, and 3.

Responses collected from the two groups, SE teachers and their SE paraeducators, were analyzed to discover if a statistically significant difference existed between the two groups' perceptions of the ways in which teacher leadership skills impact classroom team effectiveness. Using the simplicity of a 5-point Likert scale, participants rated the importance of each teacher leadership skill.

During the development of the survey, receiving feedback from the expert panel and implementing the pilot study helped ensure its validity. The relationships between the survey stems to the research questions were also examined. The two groups received the same survey stems. Attached to the electronic survey was the informed consent permission letter and the Brandman University Research Participant's Bill of Rights. The following research questions were related to the survey's nine stems and were provided to the participants:

- RQ1 What are the teacher leadership skills SE teachers perceive as most important to their role in developing an effective team?
- RQ2 What are the teacher leadership skills SE paraeducators perceive as most important to the teacher's role in developing an effective team?
- RQ3 Does a statistically significant difference exist between the responses of teachers and paraeducators?

The Likert scale responses ranged from 1 (*not important*) to 5 (*high priority*). The survey items identified the SE teacher as a leader in his or her SDC. To build effective teams, team members need to transform mindset and culture. Anderson and Anderson (2010) state high-leverage people strategies must be incorporated into the overall change strategy, such as conflict resolution, repairing broken relationships and reestablishing trust, communication, visioning and understanding the case for change, leadership development, self-development and personal growth training.

The following leadership skills were developed and addressed in the seven survey items (*SI*):

SI 1 Shows purpose (Harvey & Drolet, 2005) by focusing on the vision and sees the “big picture” in their classroom.

SI 2 Demonstrates conscious awareness (Anderson & Anderson, 2010) by showing confidence, recognizes his or her own strengths and weaknesses, and accepts constructive criticism

SI 3 Shows interaction (Harvey & Drolet, 2005) by demonstrating people skills by being an active listener and is supportive of his/her team members.

SI 4 Exercises the fifth source, energy (Harvey & Drolet, 2005). Demonstrates motivational skills by praising individuals accordingly, encourages team members, celebrates small wins, and assists the team.

SI 5 Shows clear composition (Harvey & Drolet, 2005) by leading by example and addressing conflicts.

SI 6 Maintains integrity when faced with illegal or unethical situations.

SI 7 Demonstrates professionalism by avoiding gossip, seeks the truth, and maintains confidentiality.

The last two items focused on the participants' perceptions of the importance of the SE teacher leader in impacting team effectiveness and the ways in which their team members in their own classrooms perceive team effectiveness.

Qualitative Interviews

The eight qualitative interview questions were developed to address research questions 1 through 5. The interview questions were based on the four characteristics of team effectiveness: purpose, composition, interaction, and structure/content (Harvey & Drolet, 2005). The open-ended nature of all the questions generated in depth responses that provided rich, thick data to supplement the responses from the survey. The first six interview questions were related to research questions 1 through 3.

RQ1 What are the teacher leadership skills SE teachers perceive as most important to their role in developing an effective team?

RQ2 What are the teacher leadership skills SE paraeducators perceive as most important to the teacher's role in developing an effective team?

RQ3 Does a statistically significant difference exist between the responses of teachers and paraeducators?

The six interview questions (IQ) follow here:

IQ 1 What is the vision of your special day class team?

IQ 2 Do you believe all team members, teachers and paraeducators, in the special day classroom you work in know the vision of the classroom? If yes, explain why? If no, explain why?

IQ 3 What do you believe are the teacher leadership skills necessary to build team effectiveness among your staff?

IQ 4 How are individual and team roles defined, and by who?

IQ 5 What do you believe is the role of the teacher in building team effectiveness?

IQ 6 What team building activities are implemented in the classroom to develop interaction (e.g. developing trust, addressing conflict, active listening) between team members?

Interview question 7 was specifically related to research question 4 to help identify the barriers to building team effectiveness.

RQ 4 What are the barriers to SDC team effectiveness as perceived by teachers and paraeducators?

The related interview question was as follows:

IQ 7 What do you perceive are the barriers to your special day classroom's team effectiveness?

Interview question 8 was specifically related to research question 5 to help identify the strategies used for building team effectiveness. Research question 5 was as follows:

RQ 5 What do teachers and paraeducators perceive as the strategies to improve team effectiveness?

The related interview question follows here:

IQ 8 What do you believe are the strategies that can improve team effectiveness in your special day classroom?

Expert Panel/Pilot Study

The expert panel consisted of 33.3% university level SE administration, 33.3% special educators, and 33.3% educational technology experts. The purpose of the panel was to determine the validity and reliability of the survey and interview questions. These professionals conducted the pilot study and provided constructive feedback to improve the instruments' reliability and validity.

Methodology

A causal comparative method was employed for this study to collect data to answer the research questions. Approval from Brandman University's Institutional Review Board allowed the study to proceed. From one school district, the superintendent granted permission to proceed with the study in her district. In the other school district, the Board of Education granted permission to begin research in its district. The school

districts' SE directors were informed that the study was conducted and were asked to provide email addresses of 30 special educators, 15 SE teachers, and 15 SE paraeducators. Individual consents were collected from each participant via the electronic survey, and each participant was provided the Brandman University Participants' Bill of Rights.

A sequential, exploratory design that demonstrated emphasis on the quantitative section of the study prior to examining relationships between the findings of the qualitative data was implemented. Data collected from the anonymous surveys were analyzed before conducting the qualitative interviews. A three week period was kept open to gather as many participant responses as possible. Out of 60 surveys that were distributed, 26 were collected, 14 (58.85%) from SE teachers and 12 (44.15%) from SE paraeducators. Eight (100%) individual interviews were completed sequentially over a period of one week.

Population and Sample

The study's population included all secondary education SE teachers and paraeducators who work daily in a SDC with students who have moderate to severe disabilities. All participants work in classrooms in public school campuses located in two school districts in Riverside County, California. The study involved a convenience sampling method, allowing for practical constraints and easy accessibility and efficiency, which were necessary due to time constraints.

Moreno Valley Unified School District and Hemet Unified School District comprised the two participating school districts. A letter was sent to both superintendents

requesting permission to conduct the research study in their districts. A copy of the superintendent's and Board of Director's permissions can be found in Appendix C. The directors of special education from both districts were contacted via email, and the letters sent to the directors with the study information can be found in Appendix D.

Demographic Data

Table 3

Descriptive Survey Participants' Demographic Data Including Special Educator's Position and Gender in a Moderate to Severe Special Day Classroom

Total Number of Participants	Females	Males	Special Education Teachers	Special Education Paraeducators
26	22	4	14 (53.85%)	12 (46.15%)

Table 4

Qualitative Interview Participants' Demographic Data Including Special Educator's Position and Gender in a Moderate to Severe Special Day Classroom

Total Number of Participants	Females	Males	Special Education Teachers	Special Education Paraeducators
8	6	2	4 (50.0%)	4 (50.0%)

The directors provided the researcher with the list of 30 secondary level special educators, 15 SE teachers, and 15 SE paraeducators. Sixty participants were contacted for the quantitative survey. Four SE teachers and 4 SE paraeducators from each district were selected and/or recommended by the directors to participate in the qualitative interviews. An optional gift card was provided as a gesture of appreciation to the

directors for their assistance in providing the participants' email addresses to the researcher.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

A sequential exploratory design with an emphasis on the quantitative section of the study was implemented to “explore relationships found in qualitative studies, [which allows] the researcher to use in-depth information from participants to determine relationships” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

quant → QUAL

The quantitative portion of the study generated data using a descriptive survey to identify SE teachers' and SE paraeducators' perceptions of the teacher leadership skills necessary to build teams. Passmore et al. (2002) explained that surveys instruments or questionnaires are used to collect data about subjects' demographics, personal histories, knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes. Qualitative data collection and analysis, achieved through interviews, followed the quantitative portion of the study. The qualitative data was necessary to report on the findings of the quantitative data collected.

Quantitative Survey Data Analyzed

The electronic survey contained nine scaled items with responses on a 5-point Likert scale. The participants rated the importance of each scaled item from 1 (*not important*) to 5 (*high priority*). Scales are used extensively in questionnaires because they allow fairly accurate assessments of beliefs or opinions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The participants' responses were rated to show their perceptions of characteristics necessary to be an effective SE teacher leader in their SDC. The scaled items were based on the four characteristics of team effectiveness: purpose, composition, interaction, and structure/content (Harvey & Drolet, 2005).

The purpose of distributing the quantitative survey prior to the qualitative interviews was to gather enough data to see the varying degrees of perceptions that SE teachers may have had compared to SE paraeducators. Collecting data from the two groups helped determine if a statistically significant difference existed between the perceptions of both groups.

Quantitative Survey Collection Results

The electronic descriptive survey was purposefully designed to gather SE teachers' and SE paraeducators' perceptions and to determine if a statistically significant difference existed between the perspectives of both participating groups. The survey items follow here:

Table 5 *Quantitative Survey Item One*

A special education teacher is a leader in his or her special day classroom. A special education teacher leader focuses on the vision and the “Big Picture” in the special day classroom that serves students with moderate to severe disabilities.

(Answered: 25; Skipped:1)

	(1) Not Important	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) A High Priority	Total	Weighted Average
Total Participants	0.00% 0.00	4.00% 1.00	8.00% 2.00	20.00% 5.00	68.00% 17.00	25	4.52
Paraeducator	0.00% 0.0	9.09% 1.0	9.09% 1.0	18.18% 2.0	63.64% 7.0	11	N/A
Teacher	00.00% 0.0	00.00% 0.0	7.14% 1.0	21.43% 3.0	71.43% 10.0	14	N/A
Statistical Analysis							
	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Total Participants	2.00	5.00	5.00	4.52	0.81		
Paraeducator	2.00	5.00	5.00	4.36	0.98		
Teacher	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.64	0.61		

Survey item 1 revealed that 68% of the participants responded to “the teacher leader focuses on the vision of the classroom” as a high priority. Additionally, 63.64% of the paraeducators’ and 71.43% of the teachers’ responses were significantly similar, with a standard deviation of 0.81 (see table 5).

Figure 1 below shows the breakdown of participants' responses to survey item 1.

Figure 1. *Total Participants' Responses to Survey Item One*

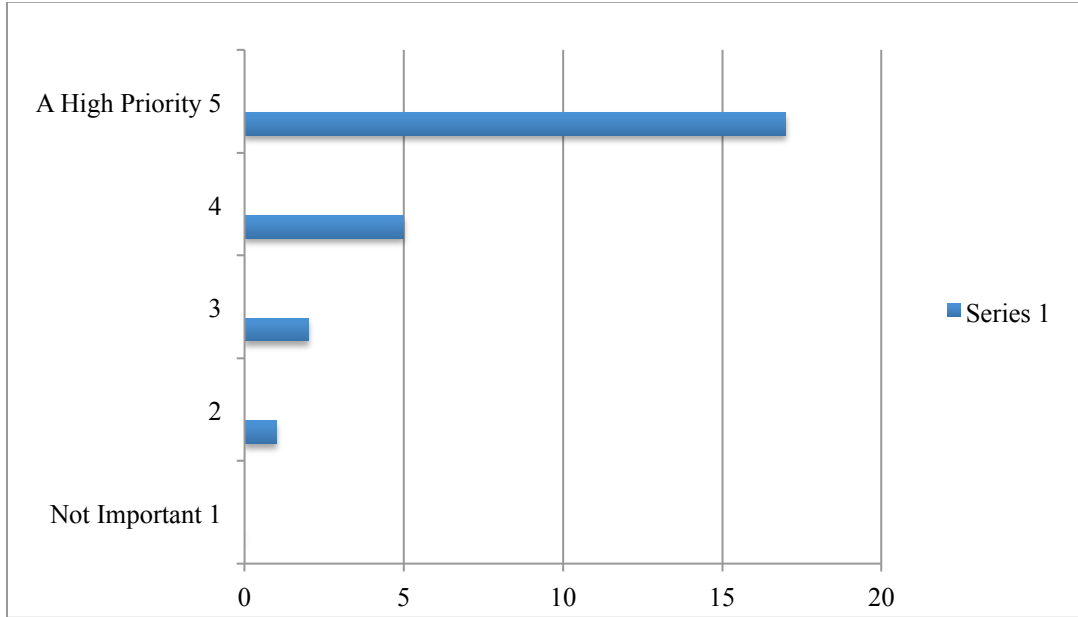


Table 6 *Quantitative Survey Item Two*

A special education teacher leader demonstrates confidence by recognizing his/her own strengths and weaknesses and is able to accept constructive criticism. (Answered: 25; Skipped:1)

	(1) Not Important	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) A High Priority	Total	Weighted Average
Total Participants	0.00% 0.00	0.00% 0.00	4.00% 1.00	20.00% 5.00	76.00% 19.00	25	4.72
Paraeducator	0.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	9.09% 1.0	27.27% 3.0	63.64% 7.0	11	N/A
Teacher	00.00% 0.0	00.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	14.29% 2.0	85.71% 12.0	14	N/A

Statistical Analysis					
	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total Participants	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.72	0.53
Paraeducator	2.00	5.00	5.00	4.36	0.98
Teacher	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.55	0.66

Survey item 2 revealed that 76% of the participants responded to “the teacher leader demonstrates confidence by recognizing his/her own strengths and weaknesses and is able to accept constructive criticism” as a high priority. Additionally, 63.64% of the paraeducators’ and 85.71% of the teachers’ responses were significantly similar, with a standard deviation of 0.53 (see table 6).

Figure 2 below shows the breakdown of participants' responses to survey item 2.

Figure 2. *Total Participants' Responses to Survey Item Two.*

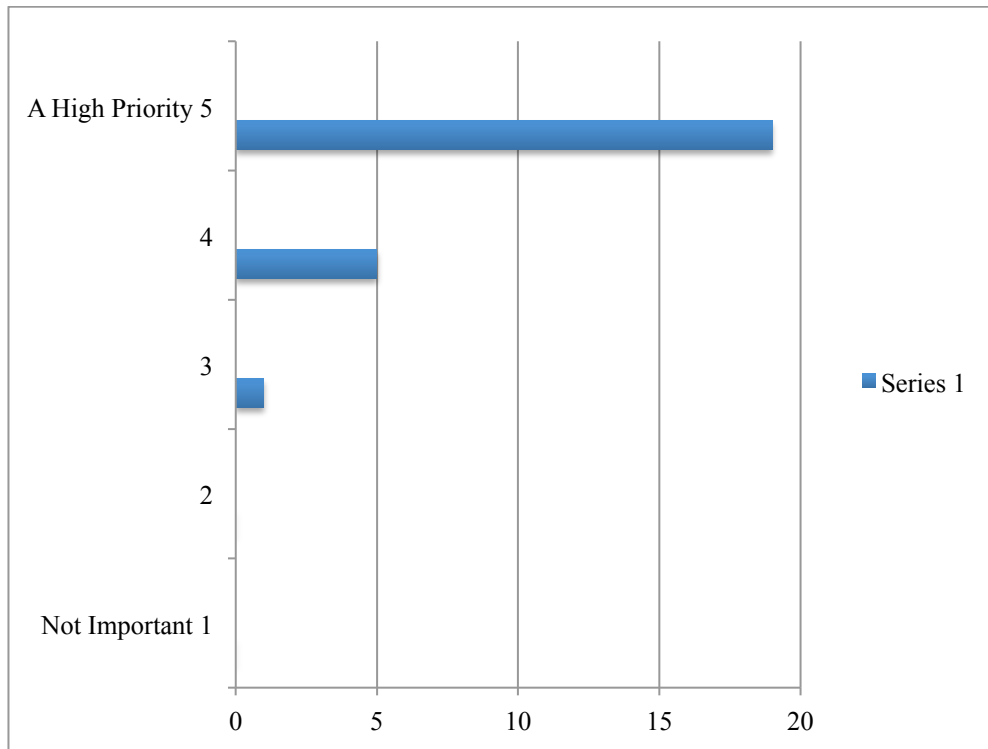


Table 7 Survey Item Three

A special education teacher leader demonstrates people skills by being an active listener and having flexibility and is supportive of his/her team members.

(Answered: 24, Skipped: 2)

	(1) Not Important	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) A High Priority	Total	Weighted Average
Total Participants	0.00% 0.00	0.00% 0.00	4.17% 1.00	16.67% 4.00	79.17% 19.00	24	4.75
Paraeducator	0.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	10.0 %	20.0% 2.0	70.00% 7.0	10	N/A
Teacher	00.00% 0.0	00.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	14.29% 2.0	85.71% 12.0	14	N/A

Statistical Analysis						
	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Total Participants	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.75	0.52	
Paraeducator	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.60	0.66	
Teacher	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.86	0.35	

Survey item 3 revealed that 79.17% of the participants responded to “the special education teacher leader demonstrates interaction by using people skills such as being an active listener and is supportive of his/her team members” as a high priority.

Additionally, 70.00% of the paraeducators’ and 85.71% of the teachers’ responses were somewhat significantly similar, with a standard deviation of 0.52 (see table 7).

Figure 3 below shows the breakdown of participants' responses to survey item 3.

Figure 3. *Total Participants' Responses to Survey Item Three*

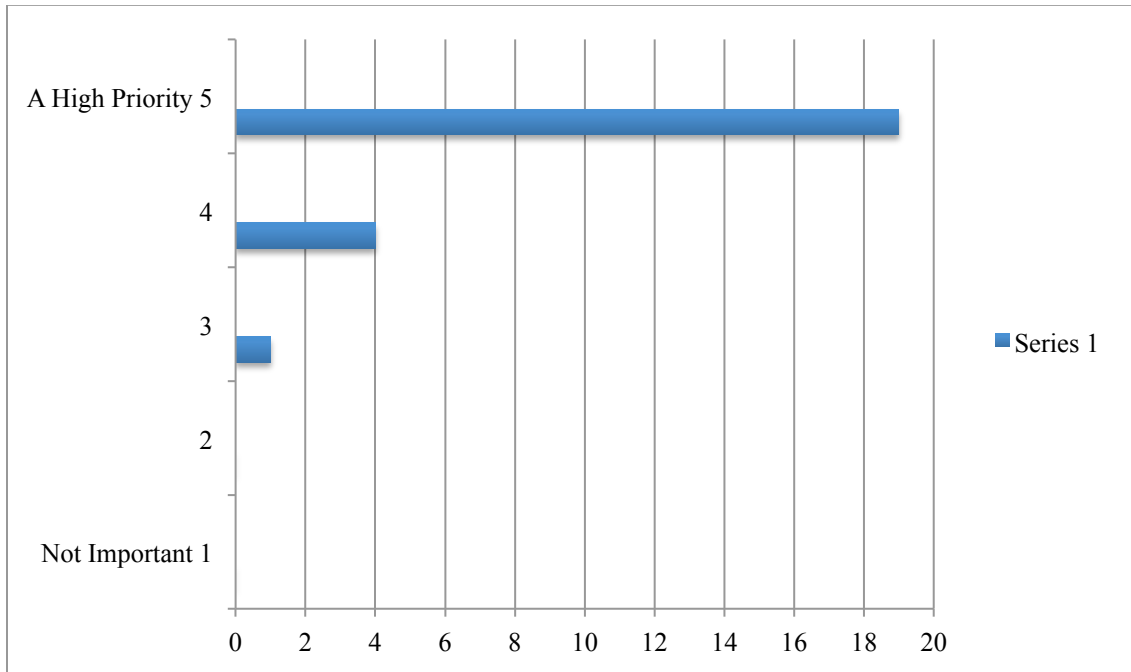


Table 8 *Survey Item Four*

A special education teacher leader demonstrates motivational skills by praising individuals accordingly, encouraging team members, celebrating small wins, and displays a willingness to assist the team. (Answered: 24, skipped: 2)

	(1) Not Important	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) A High Priority	Total	Weighted Average
Total Participants	0.00% 0.00	0.00% 0.00	4.17% 1.00	16.67% 2.00	87.50% 21.00	24	4.75
Paraeducator	0.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	10.0 % 1.0	20.0% 2.0	90.00% 9.0	10	N/A
Teacher	00.00% 0.0	00.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	14.29% 2.0	85.71% 12.0	14	N/A

Statistical Analysis					
	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total Participants	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.83	0.47
Paraeducator	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.80	0.60
Teacher	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.86	0.35

Survey item 4 revealed that 87.50% of the participants responded to “the special education teacher leader demonstrates motivational skills” as a high priority.

Additionally, 90.00% of the paraeducators’ and 85.71% of the teachers’ responses were significantly similar, with a standard deviation of 0.47 (see table 8).

Figure 4 below shows the breakdown of participants' responses to survey item 4.

Figure 4. *Total Participants' Responses to Survey Item Four*

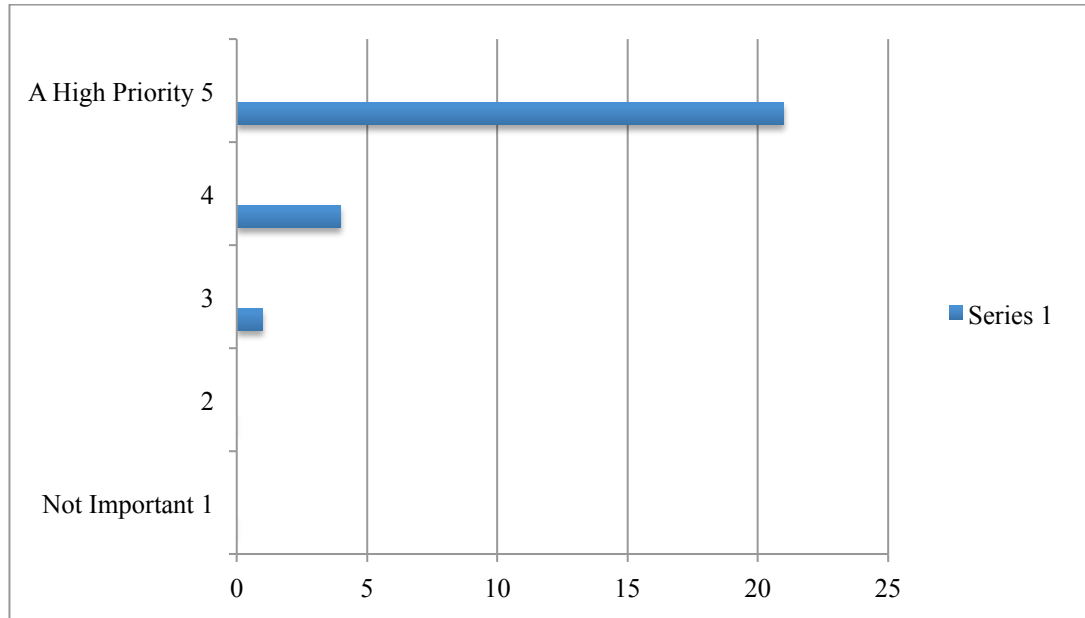


Table 9 Survey Item Five

A special education teacher leader demonstrates responsibility by addressing conflicts with the team and by leading by example. (Answered: 23; Skipped: 3)

	(1) Not Important	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) A High Priority	Total	Weighted Average
Total Participants	0.00% 0.00	0.00% 0.00	0.00% 0.00	26.09% 6.00	73.91% 17.00	23	4.74
Paraeducator	0.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	22.22% 2.0	77.78% 7.0	9	N/A
Teacher	00.00% 0.0	00.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	28.57% 4.0	71.43% 10.0	14	N/A

Statistical Analysis

	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total Participants	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.74	0.44
Paraeducator	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.78	0.42
Teacher	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.86	0.45

Survey item 5 revealed that 73.91% of the participants responded to “the special education teacher leader demonstrates responsibility by leading by example and addressing conflicts” as a high priority. Additionally, 77.78% of the paraeducators’ and 71.43% of the teachers’ responses were extremely significantly similar, with a standard deviation of 0.44 (see table 9).

Figure 5 below shows the breakdown of participants' responses to survey item 5

Figure 5. *Total Participants' Responses to Survey Item Five*

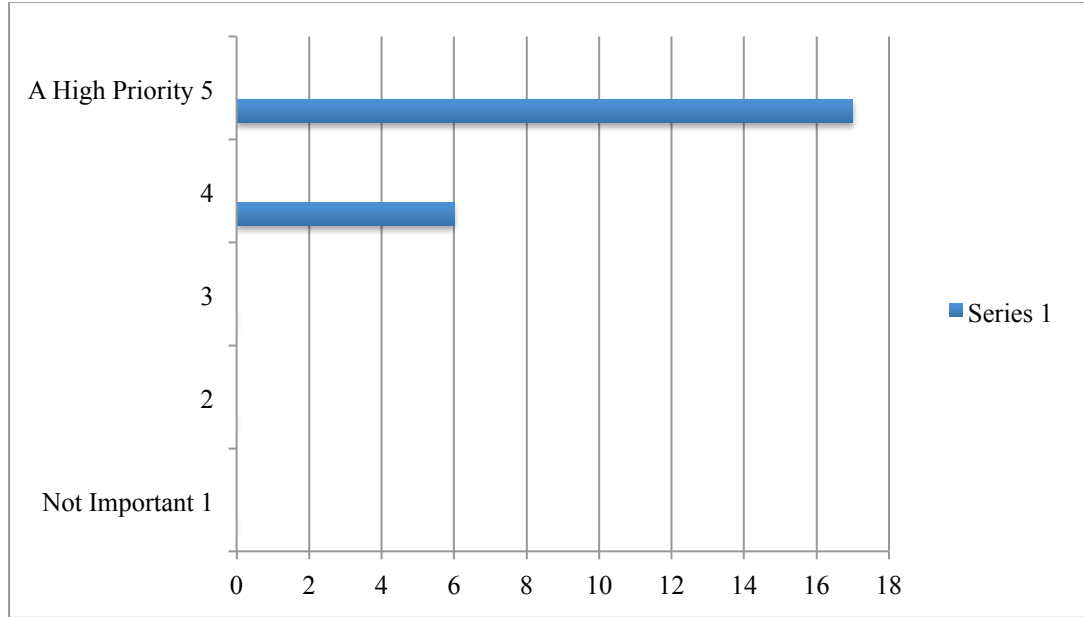


Table 10 *Survey Item Six*

A special education teacher leader maintains integrity when faced with illegal or unethical situations. (Answered: 23; Skipped: 3)

	(1) Not Important	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) A High Priority	Total	Weighted Average
Total Participants	0.00% 0.00	0.00% 0.00	4.35% 1.00	8.70% 2.00	86.96% 20.00	23	4.83
Paraeducator	0.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	0.00 % 0.0	0.00% 0.0	100.0% 9.0	9	N/A
Teacher	00.00% 0.0	00.00% 0.0	7.14% 1.0	14.29% 2.0	78.57% 11.0	14	N/A

Statistical Analysis						
	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Total Participants	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.83	0.48	
Paraeducator	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	0.00	
Teacher	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.71	0.59	

Survey item 6 revealed that 86.96% of the participants responded to “the special education teacher leader maintains integrity” as a high priority. Additionally, 100.00% of the paraeducators’ and 78.57% of the teachers’ responses were extremely significantly similar, with a standard deviation of 0.48 (see table 10).

Figure 6 below shows the breakdown of participants' responses to survey item 6.

Figure 6. Total Participants' Responses to Survey Item Six

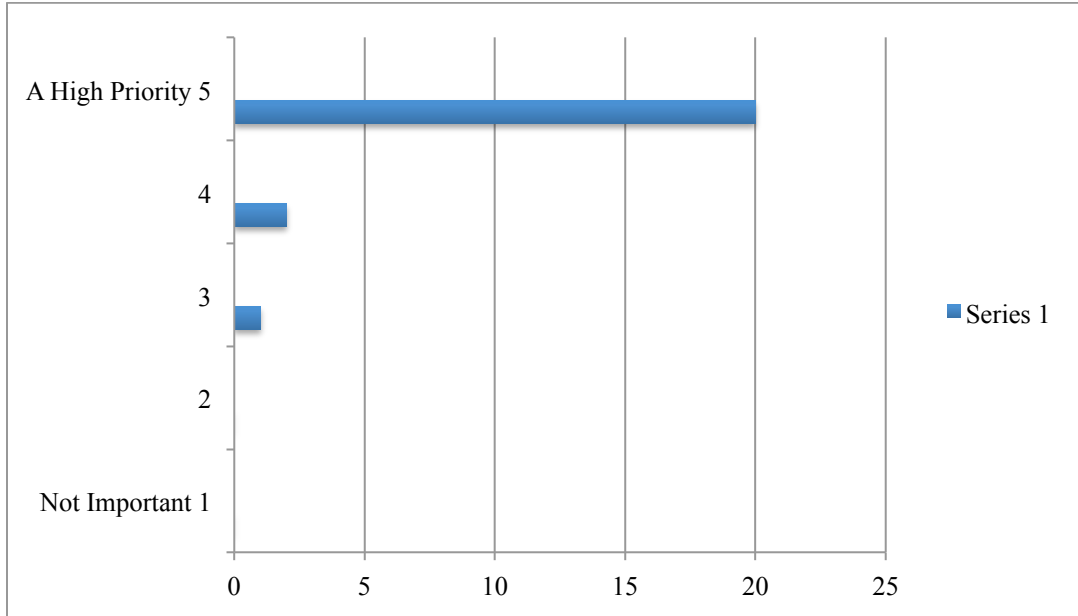


Table 11

Survey Item Seven

A special education teacher leader demonstrates professionalism by avoiding gossip, seeks the truth, and maintains confidentiality. (Answered: 24; Skipped: 2).

	(1) Not Important	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) A High Priority	Total	Weighted Average
Total Participants	0.00% 0.00	0.00% 0.00	4.17% 1.00	0.00% 0.00	95.83% 23.00	24	4.92
Paraeducator	0.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	0.00 % 0.0	0.00% 0.0	100.0% 10.0	10	N/A
Teacher	00.00% 0.0	00.00% 0.0	7.14% 1.0	00.00% 0.0	92.86% 13.0	14	N/A

Statistical Analysis					
	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total Participants	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.92	0.40
Paraeducator	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	0.00
Teacher	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.86	0.52

Survey item 7 revealed that 95.83% of the participants responded to “the special education teacher leader maintains professionalism” as a high priority. Additionally, 100.00% of the paraeducators’ and 92.86% of the teachers’ responses were extremely significantly similar, with a standard deviation of 0.40 (see table 11).

Figure 7 below shows the breakdown of participants' responses to survey item 7.

Figure 7. Total Participants' Responses to Survey Item Seven

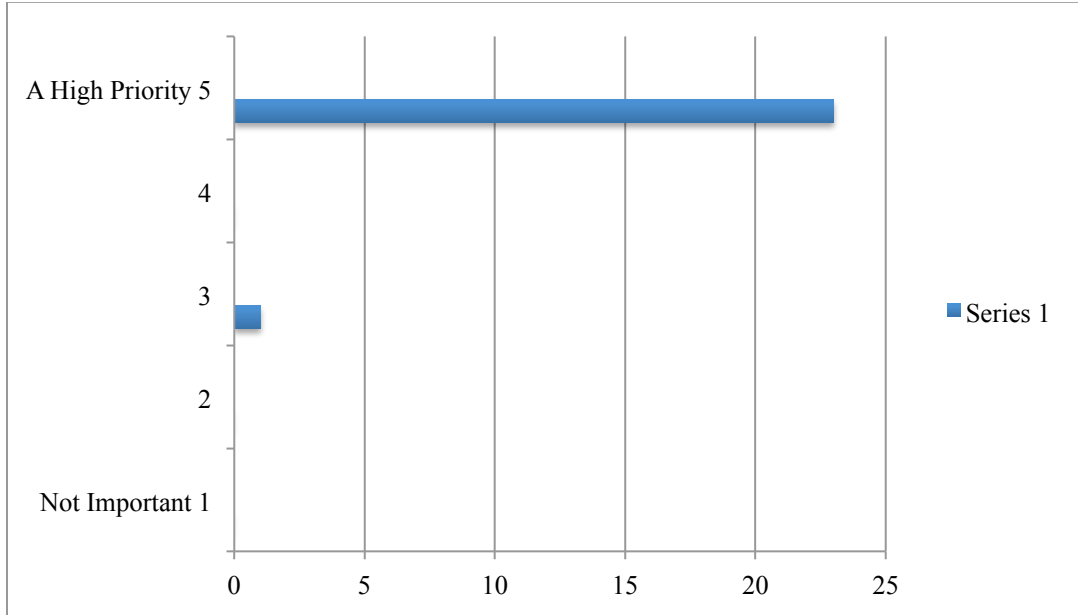


Table 12 *Survey Item Eight*

How important is the special education teacher leader’s role in impacting or improving team effectiveness in a special day classroom serving students with moderate to severe disabilities? (Answered: 23; Skipped: 3).

	(1) Not Important	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) A High Priority	Total	Weighted Average
Total Participants	0.00% 0.00	0.00% 0.00	0.00% 0.00	16.67% 4.00	83.33% 20.00	24	4.92
Paraeducator	0.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	0.00 % 0.0	1.00% 1.0	90.0% 9.0	10	N/A
Teacher	00.00% 0.0	00.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	21.43% 3.0	78.57% 11.0	14	N/A

Statistical Analysis

	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total Participants	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.83	0.37
Paraeducator	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.90	0.30
Teacher	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.79	0.41

Figure 8 below shows the breakdown of participants' responses to survey item 8.

Figure 8. Total Participants' Responses to Survey Item Eight

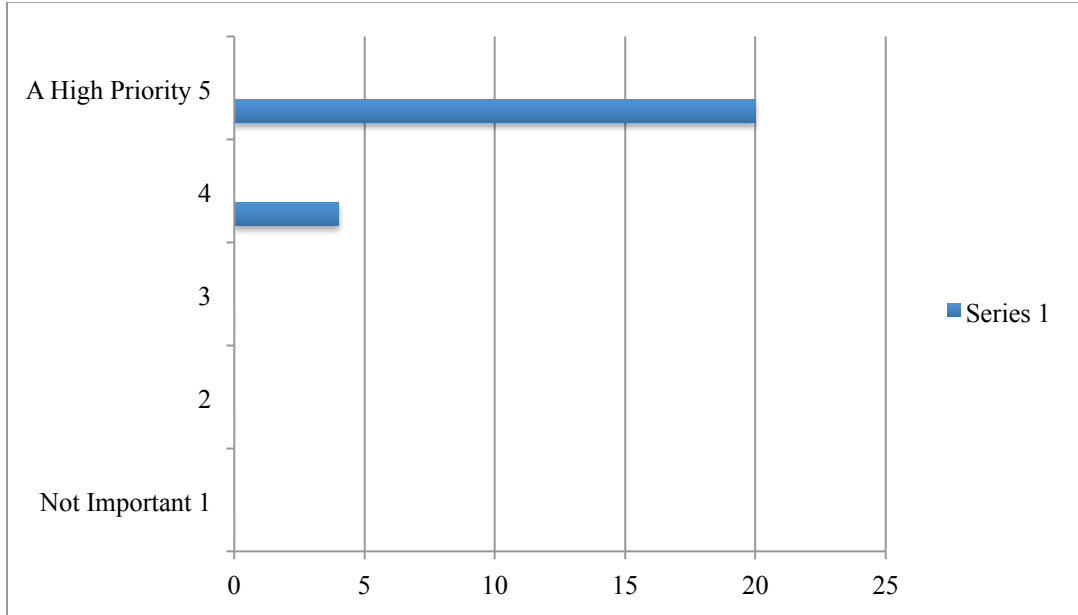


Table 13 *Survey Item Nine*

To build effective teams, team members need to develop team effectiveness competencies in several areas. These areas include conflict resolution, problem solving, communication, organizational understanding, decision-making, goal setting, performance management, and planning and task coordination (Gilley & Gilley, 2007; Spiegel & Torres, 1994; Stevens & Campion, 1999; Sundstrom et al., 1990). Currently, the team members, the teacher, and the paraeducators I work with perceive team effectiveness in our special day classroom that serves students with moderate to severe disabilities as.... (Answered: 24; Skipped: 2)

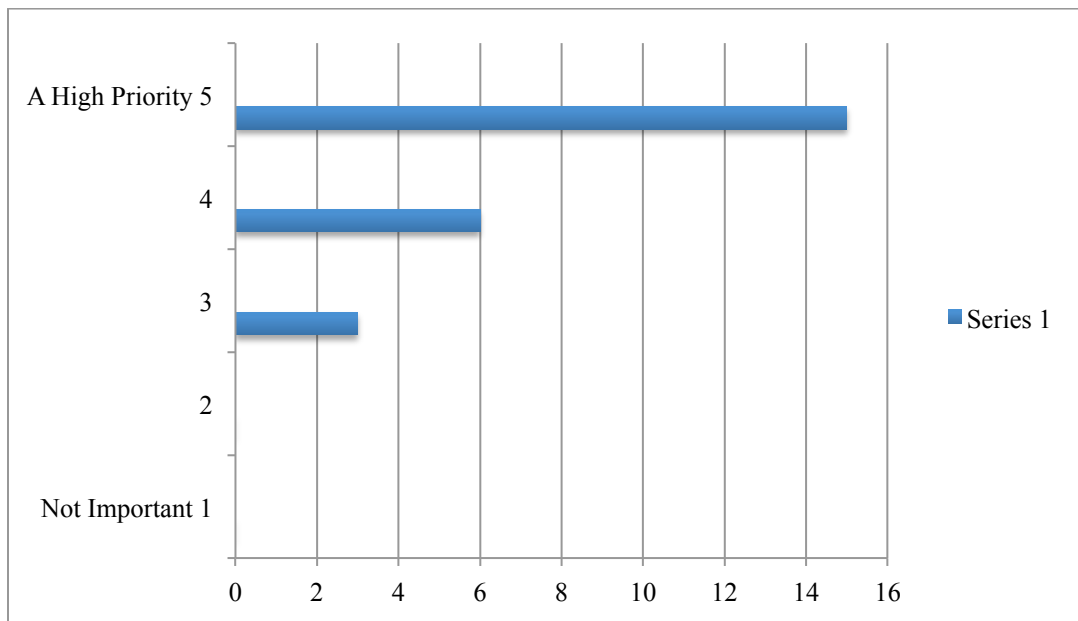
	(1) Not Important	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) A High Priority	Total	Weighted Average
Total Participants	0.00% 0.00	0.00% 0.00	12.50% 3.00	25.00% 6.00	62.50% 15.00	24	4.50
Paraeducator	0.00% 0.0	0.00% 0.0	10.00 % 1.0	10.00% 1.0	80.0% 8.0	10	N/A
Teacher	00.00% 0.0	00.00% 0.0	14.29% 2.0	35.71% 5.0	50.00% 7.0	14	N/A

Statistical Analysis					
	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total Participants	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.50	0.71
Paraeducator	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.70	0.64
Teacher	3.00	5.00	4.50	4.36	0.72

Survey item 9 revealed that 62.50% of the participants responded to the team effectiveness in their own special day classrooms as a high priority. Additionally, 80.00% of the paraeducators' and 50.00% of the teachers' responses were somewhat different, with a standard deviation of 0.71 (see table 13).

Figure 9 below shows the breakdown of participants' responses to survey item 9.

Figure 9. Total Participants' Responses to Survey Item Nine



Qualitative Individual Interviews Analyzed

Eight individual qualitative interview questions were designed for eight participants. From the two participating districts, four SE teacher and four SE paraeducator participants emerged. Prior to the face-to-face interviews, each participant signed their own individual consent form and received the Brandman University Participant's Bill of Rights.

The individual interviews constituted the secondary method of data collection. The in-depth interviews provided rich, thick data subsequently forming the basis of the findings of the study. Each interviewee was provided a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality, and the interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim (See Appendix G).

The eight interview questions asked to the interviewees were directly related to the five research questions. The data responses were coded, using Nvivo for MAC (QSR International, 2014). From the nodes, the following nine themes were developed based on the number of responses and coverage and text reference used in the participants' interviews (See Table 14).

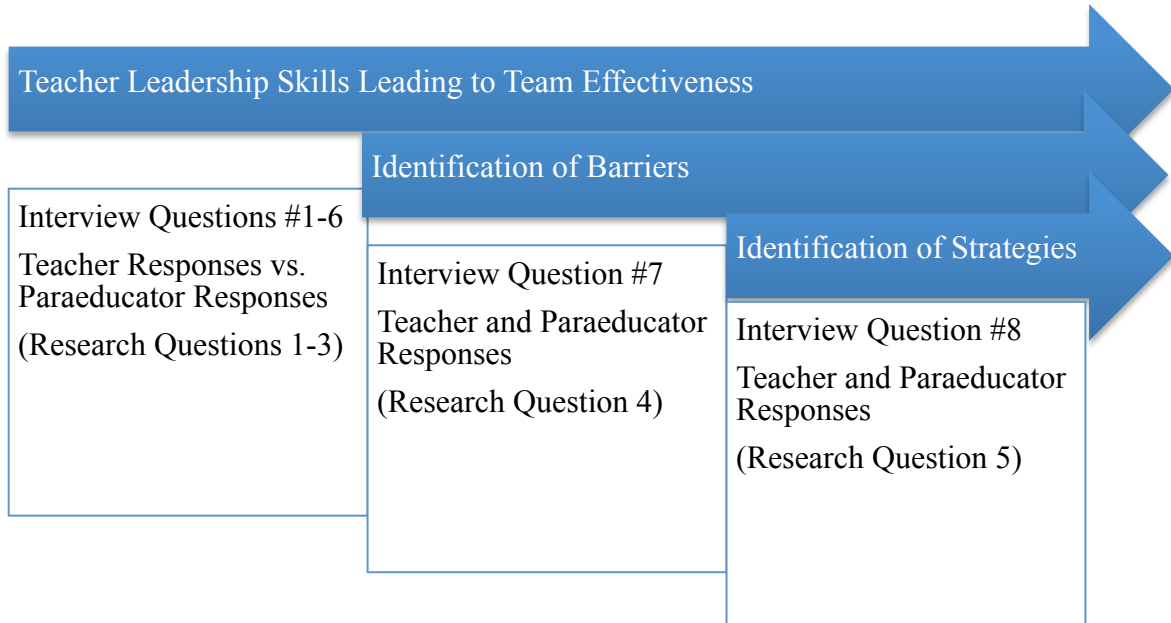
Table 14

Responses, Coverage, and Text References Per Each Developed Theme on Teacher Leadership that Impacts Team Effectiveness in the Moderate to Severe Special Day Classroom

	Visionary	Confident	Communicator	Organizer Planner	Uses People Skills	Motivator	Responsible	Maintains Integrity	Professional
Participant Responses	8 100%	4 50%	6 75%	5 62.5%	6 75%	4 50%	4 50%	8 100%	5 62.5%
Coverage in Participant Interviews	1.97%	2.89%	3.94%	1.23%	1.84%	1.16%	2.35	2.24	2.64
Text References in Participant Interviews	14x	28x	22x	14x	14x	7x	11x	14x	17x

Figure 10 below graphically illustrates how the interview questions align with the research questions proposed for this study.

Figure 10. Qualitative Interview Questions Related to Research Questions



Qualitative Interview Collection Results

The open-ended qualitative interview questions were purposefully designed to gather the SE teachers' and SE paraeducators' responses face to face. A closer examination combining the results of the quantitative survey and the results of the interview data collected produced findings stated at the end of this chapter. Specifically, the determination of whether or not a statistically significant difference existed between the perspectives of both participating groups will be analyzed. The nine themes developed from the interview question responses are presented in table 15.

Table 15

Participants’ Responses of Special Education Teacher Leadership Skills Necessary to Develop Team Effectiveness in Moderate to Severe Special Day Classrooms—Interview questions 7 and 8

Participants’ Responses of Special Education Teacher Leadership Skills Necessary to Develop Team Effectiveness in Moderate to Severe Special Day Classrooms										
Qualitative Interview Responses Related to Research Questions 1-6										
Participant Interviewees (PI) Teacher (T) Paraeducator (P)	Visionary Leader	Demonstrating Confidence	Communicator	Organizer & Planner	Posses People Skills	Motivator	Responsible	Maintains Integrity	Professionalism	
PIT 1	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		
PIT 3	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	
PIT 4	X		X		X	X		X	X	
PIT 7	X	X		X	X		X	X		
PIP 2	X	X			X			X	X	
PIP 5	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	
PIT 6	X		X	X			X	X		
PIP 8	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	
Total 8	100%	50%	75%	62.5%	75%	50%	50%	100%	62.5%	

Visionary Leader

All eight interview participants expressed the importance of the SE teacher leader having a vision. Effective leaders show purpose by focusing on the vision, and they see the big picture in their classrooms (Harvey & Drolet, 2005). Participant Interviewee (PI) 5, a paraeducator affirmed, “It’s very important. We may get there in a different way, but we all need to be on the same page”. She spoke openly about the need to understand the

vision of the classroom. Another interviewee, PI 7, a teacher, shared, “The vision starts at the top”.

Demonstrating Confidence

Half of the participants (4 of 8) expressed that a teacher must show confidence to develop team effectiveness. It was a 50% response in each participating group, 2 teachers and 2 paraeducators. One teacher, PI 3, explained, “Being the decision maker is being the leader, taking the lead when need be. I think that’s one of the keys. But you have to make the decisions. That’s the big thing”.

When referencing the confidence that her teacher shows in and out of the classroom in working with others, PI 2, a paraeducator, stated about her teacher, “She’s very rounded, not only in her education, but also in her experiences in the community. She’s very involved in the community, so she has arms that reach out to help others”.

PI 8, another paraeducator, described how a teacher shows confidence, “The teacher needs to be able to take control of any situation that arises. You may not know what may or may not arise. So you may have issues with the students, and sometimes you may have issues with the paraeducators”. PI 2 also added about her teacher.

“She trusts our judgment. That’s why I love working with my teacher. That’s why I stayed with the district. She doesn’t micromanage us. We know her vision. We know her goals for the students. She gives us a “long leash” to work with the students. She even allows us to go out and drum up our own work for the students, which a lot of teachers would feel intimidated and threatened by that.”

This was described as not only the teacher having confidence within herself, but her paraeducator also believes she maintains confidence in her staff by her actions.

Communicator

The majority of participants (3 teachers and 3 paraeducators—75% of all interview participants) cited communication skills as critical for a SE teacher leader. PI 7, a teacher, emphasized, “You have to have really, really good communication skills”. PI 5, a paraeducator, stressed,

I think it’s communication is the big key. She [the teacher] needs to express to us what she needs from us. She needs to tell us, “Hey you know can you do this, this and this. And this is how I’d like you to do it”.

Another teacher, PI 3, asserted,

I would say communication is a big piece. And it’s kinda tied to having the time to do that. But I think communication is the big piece. If I had to explain to someone else, I would say it’s communicating with the staff, and letting them know your expectations. So if they don’t meet them, they’ll understand why. It takes away a lot of confusion.

PI 5, a paraeducator, further explained,

I’ve worked with a lot of teachers, and that is probably the most important. If the teacher isn’t communicating what they expect from me, it just turns out to be very difficult in the classroom. It’s frustrating, and not only for me, but it’s unfair to the students.

Lastly, PI 6, a paraeducator, expressed about her teacher, “She communicates in detail, and I love it!”

Organizer and Planner

Of the eight participants, two teachers and three paraeducators (62.5%) responded that their SE teacher leaders are organized and plan effectively. A paraeducator, PI 6, explained the challenges the SE teacher leader may face,

We’ll have about 15 to 20 minutes of time to meet with each other. It’s really good, because we get to discuss so many concerns. Our teacher is really good about it. And if 3 staff members are on their lunch, then it makes it very difficult to make sure all of the other students are appropriately covered. It’s very difficult to keep the schedule going. A good thing is my teacher is willing to step in and take action to step in and help out.

PI 8, a paraeducator, conveyed the difficulties that can arise from a teacher failing to provide direction and clear expectations,

In some instances when I worked with previous teachers, we would just go and try to figure it out. That was in an instance in which the teacher felt she was not in charge of us. She was somewhat organized, but she just didn’t want to make us feel like she was our boss. It was kinda like... “You can do whatever you want to do.” It made it harder as a paraeducator.

Exhibits People Skills

Three teachers and three paraeducators (6 of 8 participants—75%) indicated the importance of teachers having people skills to develop team effectiveness. Wikipedia (2015) describes people skills as a British term in which people develop relationships and build trust with others. PI 2, a paraeducator, described the importance of respecting others,

It goes back to what I said earlier about respect. I think because my teacher was an aide before, it makes a difference. I hate to say it, but I've met a lot of teachers who are pretty full of themselves. You know, it's like, I've got the degree, and I'm better than you are. To me, that's disheartening because that doesn't build team effectiveness, team spirit. It's like, "I'm better than you because I have a degree." No, that's just not right.

PI 7, a SE teacher, echoed the importance of people skills as he described the relationships between himself and his paraeducators, "You have to be really compassionate and understanding".

Motivator

Only 4 out of 8 participants (50%) responded to motivational skills as influential in team effectiveness. But PI 4, a teacher, described how the lack of recognition paraeducators normally receive and the relatively low value placed on the paraeducator position might be causing a barrier for his classroom's overall team effectiveness,

It seems the purpose of the paraeducator has gotten lost. Now it seems like it's just a "job" position. In my mind, it seems like it's not enough of an important

position to the district. There's no recognition for the paraeducators. There appears to be a lack of respect. I guess that is a barrier for us.

Responsible

Four of the eight participants (50%) emphasized the duties of being responsible. Addressing conflict was one teacher leadership responsibility that both groups of participants stressed as critical, conveying how it can improve team effectiveness in the classroom.

PI 2, a paraeducator, had previously worked with another teacher with whom she had a difficult time. She stated, "He really tried to avoid addressing conflict. He wanted it his way, and that was it. There were a lot of problems". In contrast, Harvey and Drolet (2005) explained that managers should address conflict as part of their responsibility. They should accept conflict as a necessary and productive element in organizational growth (p. 86).

In addressing conflict, PI 7, a teacher, stated, "I've reviewed with them their roles, and it's clear to them". By providing her paraeducators clear expectations, she had responsibly communicated with her staff to ensure all of them understood her expectations. Furthermore, PI 8, a paraeducator, explained, "My thought as a paraeducator is whichever classroom I'm in, the teacher in charge defines the roles. It's their job to tell me what to do", demonstrating her perception of the SE teacher leader's responsibility to provide direction.

Maintains Integrity

All 8 participants related the importance of a SE teacher leader maintaining integrity. When you are known to be honest and committed to integrity, you build trust (Harvey & Drolet, 2005).

Professionalism

The majority of participants (5 out of 8—62.5%) attested the paramount nature of being professional in the SDC in order to build team effectiveness.

Additionally, PI 2, a paraeducator, shared a very humiliating experience in which the teacher did not demonstrate professionalism.

Respect for the people you work with [is really important]. I know I don't have the Master's, but I don't need someone rubbing it in my face all the time. And I actually almost quit with working with my previous teacher, because the teacher was like... "This is my classroom! I need to know everything", and he chewed me out in front of another paraprofessional and the students. And I said, "I've had it! You will not talk to me that way!" And so after that incident, I totally backed off. I usually would arrive 30 minutes ahead of my start time and would prepare for my day, but then I changed and just came in exactly when I was expected and left the minute the bell rang. This was because that teacher would verbally "whip" us. And you know what, I don't get paid enough to have to take that.

Table 16 summarizes the participants' responses related to research questions 4 and 5.

Table 16

Participants’ Responses of Special Education Teacher Leadership Skills Necessary to Develop Team Effectiveness in Moderate to Severe Special Day Classrooms. Qualitative Interview Question Responses Related to Research Questions 4 and 5

Participant Interviewees (PI) Teacher (T) Paraeducator (P)	RQ 4 – Barriers (IQ 7)	RQ 5 – Strategies (IQ 8)
PIT 1	<p>“Another barrier that I thought of is the staffing. Many times we don’t have a sub, and it makes the job of the assistants more difficult. Accidents occur, and they were filling out reports all the time.”</p> <p>“The barriers are time to meet, lack of trainings, understanding. And also the previous evaluations being too high makes it difficult when you get that person in your classroom, and you see how they need to have Ns (needs to improve). It’s hard to tell them you dropped from an E to an N because of.... That is a barrier.”</p>	<p>“Communication. I need to figure out a communication thing, because I got information. A parent calls me. Something happens to a student. Things happen here and there, and everyone should know what is going on.”</p>
PIT 3	<p>“I’m like an island. I’m the only SH class here on this campus. There are 3 others at 3 other middle schools in our district. And our district does 3 special education cohorts in which we meet with the other teachers.”</p> <p>“We have staff meetings, and we have data collaboration meetings, but not with the classified staff.”</p>	<p>“ I would say communication is a big piece. And it’s kinda tied to having the time to do that. But I think communication is the big piece. If I had to explain to someone else, it’s communicating with the staff, and letting them know your expectations. So if they don’t meet them, they’ll understand why. It takes away a lot of confusion.”</p>
PIT 4	<p>“One of the biggest barriers is the inconsistency in the staffing. Having the team members in place, whether it is due to a</p>	<p>“Communication is most important. And there are some things that we wind up talking about a lot. So like.... how we</p>

	position not being filled or aides being absent frequently. The district doesn't have enough subs to fill the vacant positions."	go out in the community, what's expected on route in the community."
PIT 7	<p>"Certain things can be annoying, but you have to let some things go. It can be frustrating, especially when they are late frequently."</p> <p>[The] "problem of 'cross talking'—talking about personal business during class time."</p>	<p>"Definitely team meetings. Staff meetings are huge. And respecting your team. Understanding that you, as the teacher, are making much more than the paraeducator, and treating them to lunch once in a while is a way of showing them you care."</p>
PIP 2	<p>"It really didn't matter what we said. He started having short five-minute meetings everyday, at the end of the day. But basically, it was he doing all the talking and telling us what we did wrong and how it needed to be. We were never given an opportunity to express our concerns to him. It was very one sided."</p>	<p>"Having the organization is important. For the other teacher I worked with, his job wasn't defined, and because he was new, it was difficult for him. He wasn't well prepared, and he didn't communicate well. He did not give clear communication to us."</p>
PIP 5	<p>"Our start time is 8:30, but we don't get kids off the bus until [8:]46. So we have those few minutes to discuss the day. We're lucky to even have that time. I've worked at another school site where I had no prep time. And I would want the teacher to communicate with me about the day. It doesn't seem fair. Another issue is the scheduling times of the aides' hours. It seems that we do our academics and goals in the morning, and we have two aides that come in the later part of the day. So at the end of the day it's more of elective type activities that require less supervision and support. And it is the morning where we need more help. It makes it difficult when the aides are scattered at different times. I guess that's a barrier to our program."</p>	<p>"I guess the thing I would think we need more of is trainings. I could not express more that we would need more trainings. I expressed to our leader that we needed more trainings, and she gave a training."</p> <p>" When you have new aides working in the district, and they don't know the policy or the procedures, then it becomes a big problem when they want to blab their mouth to the parents. I've seen in the past, when we had those meetings, a lot of light bulbs will go off. Then they realize the right from the wrong. There are just things that they needed to know that they had no clue about it."</p>
PIT 6	" We have two barriers going on	"What's happening now is on

right now, and I think our administrators are taking care of it. One is that it's hard for us to work in such a crowded space. Our classroom is extremely small for the amount of students that we have in our classroom. I know the district is working with the administration to try to resolve that problem. I know maybe taking students off our caseload might happen, but not sure."

Wednesdays we have flex days. So the aides get to stay in the classroom, and we can discuss issues that have come up. It's really good, because we get to discuss so many concerns."

"The other problem is trying to do breaks. We get a 30-minute lunch, and a 15-minute break. They cannot be taken together, and all 9 of us need to have our breaks and lunches. It's really difficult. There's a reason some of the students have one to ones. And when their one to one is on their lunch or break, we need to make sure their student is covered. It is a big challenge. Sometimes two people need to go with a student for toileting or may need to assist with one student on behavior. Sometimes kids may need their g-tube feeding or having a seizure, and they need extra attention at times. There may also be a classroom runner too. And if 3 staff members [are] on their lunch, then it makes it very difficult to make sure all of the other students are appropriately covered. It's very difficult to keep the schedule going."

PIP 8

"Frequently we won't get a sub. There's just not enough subs. 99% of the time, it's okay, and we'll just figure it out. But without the sub there, one of my students will go into another class [mainstreaming], and they can't go without me. He, the student, will suffer because he has to wait for me as I'm waiting for the sub to show up or for other aides to get off their break, because we're short staffed. It impacts the classroom schedule. I know it sounds weird, because

"I guess we all have to be on the same page how we discipline the students.

I guess I have worked in a room in which consequences were clearly defined, and we stuck to them. I think it gives mixed messages when the consequences are not clearly defined."

we have a large adult ratio, but still it does impact our program when someone is out, and there is no sub coverage.”

Findings

Finding #1 SE teachers’ and SE paraeducators’ survey and interview responses to the teacher leadership skills necessary for building effective teams in the SDC were significantly similar. Both groups expressed visionary leadership, professionalism, and maintaining integrity as key skills to accomplish this.

Finding #2 Both participating groups responded that a SE teacher’s leadership could improve team effectiveness in the moderate to severe SDC.

Finding #3 The following barriers to a SDC’s team effectiveness surfaced: (1) staffing concerns – lack of substitutes, (2) lack of respect towards the paraeducator, (3) difficult scheduling due to lunches, breaks, high absenteeism, medical procedures, and mainstreaming with students, (4) high numbers of students, and (5) lack of support from administration and colleagues.

Finding #4 The following strategies to help build a SDC’s team effectiveness surfaced: (1) having a shared vision, (2) effective planning and scheduling, (3) improved trainings, and (4) on-going communication.

Finding #5 Most of the participants conveyed the significant impact a SE teacher leader can have on the SDC’s team effectiveness. Through the qualitative interviews, participants expressed concerns regarding the lack of effective leadership skills that some SE SDC teachers serving students with moderate to severe disabilities maintain.

Summary

In chapter 4, an overview of the study was presented. Included were the purpose of the study, the five research questions, the methodology, the population, and the sample. The instruments were described as well as the data collection. All quantitative survey items and qualitative interview questions were aligned with the research questions to clearly identify the findings the data produced. The presentation and analysis of data was also described in detail.

Using a sequential exploratory design, the quantitative electronic survey yielded 26 respondents responding to nine items using a 5-point Likert scale. Once surveys were completed, the qualitative interviews were implemented face to face, and the researcher collected responses based on eight open-ended questions. Data was collected, coded, and developed into nine themes on teacher leadership skills that can impact SDC team effectiveness.

Based on the data collected, five findings were presented and will be elaborated on in Chapter 5 along with the conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The urgency to examine team effectiveness in moderate to severe special day classrooms (SDC) has become increasingly important. Unlike the general education classroom, in which one teacher is there for a classroom full of students, moderate to severe SDCs may have up to seven or eight paraeducators working with the special education (SE) teacher. Team effectiveness becomes extremely important at this point, and the skills of the teacher as a leader may positively or negatively impact the flow of their teams depending on their leadership abilities.

This study involved examining the key leadership skills necessary to impact moderate to severe SDC team effectiveness. An analysis determining if a statistically significant difference existed between SE teachers' and SE paraeducators' responses regarding the SE teacher leadership skills necessary to build team effectiveness in SDCs was conducted. The study was also used to identify SE teachers' and SE paraeducators' perceptions of the barriers and strategies needed to develop team effectiveness in the SDC classroom.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this causal-comparative research mixed methods study was to identify the SE teacher leadership skills that SE teachers and SE paraeducators perceive are most important to SDC team effectiveness in secondary SE programs that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities. Data were gathered through individual

interviews and a quantitative survey in two school districts within Riverside County, California.

Research Questions

1. What are the teacher leadership skills SE teachers perceive as most important to their role in developing an effective team?
2. What are the teacher leadership skills SE paraeducators perceive as most important to the teacher's role in developing an effective team?
3. Does a statistically significant difference exist between the responses of teachers and paraeducators?
4. What are the barriers to SDC team effectiveness as perceived by teachers and paraeducators?
5. What do teachers and paraeducators perceive as the strategies to improve team effectiveness?

Methodology

Using a causal comparative method to collect data to answer the research questions, the quantitative descriptive research survey and the qualitative interview questions involved a SE expert panel that also served as the field test panel. Prior to commencing the research, the validity and reliability of the instruments were tested. The expert panel consisted of people with SE administrative experience, and one panel member was an expert in educational technology. Brandman University's Institutional Review Board provided the approval that allowed the study to proceed.

Two school districts in Riverside County were selected for this study. The Moreno Valley Unified School District superintendent granted permission to proceed with the study in her district. In Hemet Unified School District, the Board of Education granted permission to begin research in their district. The school districts' SE directors were informed the study was being conducted and were asked to provide email addresses of 30 special educators, 15 SE teachers, and 15 SE paraeducators. Individual consents were collected from each participant via the electronic survey, and each participant received the Brandman University Participant's Bill of Rights.

A sequential, exploratory design that demonstrated emphasis on the quantitative section of the study prior to examining relationships between the findings of the qualitative data was implemented. Data collected from the anonymous surveys were analyzed before conducting the qualitative interviews. A three week period was kept open to gather as many participant responses as possible. Out of 60 surveys that were distributed, 26 were collected, 14 (58.85%) from SE teachers and 12 (44.15%) from SE paraeducators. Eight (100%) individual interviews were completed sequentially over a period of one week.

Population

The population consisted of special educators of students with moderate to severe disabilities. This study involved investigating two public school districts within Riverside County, California. Patten (2012) stated researchers infer that the characteristics of the sample probably are the characteristics of the population (p.45). For this population's characteristics, the special educators work at a public high school within the districts in Riverside County.

Sample

Due to time constraints and accessibility of the participants in this study, convenience sampling was selected. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated in convenience sampling, a group of subjects is selected on the basis of being accessible or expedient (p.137). Participants in this study represent a sample of special educators who are teachers or paraeducators in the two identified school districts in Riverside County—Moreno Valley Unified School District and Hemet Unified School District. The researcher resides within Riverside County.

In the quantitative portion of the study, surveys were collected from 26 participants (14 SE teachers and 12 SE paraprofessionals).. From those 26 who completed the survey, four participants from each district were interviewed face to face.

Major Findings

The following findings were discovered through analysis of the data collected from the quantitative electronic surveys, the qualitative face-to-face interviews, and the review of literature.

Finding #1

Finding #1 is related to research question 1: What are the teacher leadership skills SE teachers perceive as most important to their role in developing an effective team? It is also related to research question 2: What are the teacher leadership skills SE paraeducators perceive as most important to the teacher's role in developing an effective team?

SE teachers and SE paraeducators conveyed similar responses regarding the SE teacher leadership skills necessary to build effective teams in SDCs that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities. Both groups expressed visionary leadership, professionalism, and maintaining integrity as key skills SE teacher leaders need to possess to develop or improve team effectiveness in the SDC setting.

Finding #2

Finding #2 is related to research question 3: Does a statistically significant difference exist between the responses of teachers and paraeducators?

Both participating groups responded that a SE teacher's leadership could improve team effectiveness in the moderate to severe SDC setting. Amazingly, most of the participants conveyed the significant impact a SE teacher leader can have on the SDC's team effectiveness. Through the qualitative interviews, participants expressed concerns regarding the lack of effective leadership skills that some SE SDC teachers serving students with moderate to severe disabilities maintain.

Finding #3

Finding #3 is related to research question 4: What are the barriers to SDC team effectiveness as perceived by teachers and paraeducators?

The following barriers to a SDC's team effectiveness surfaced: (1) staffing concerns – lack of substitutes, (2) lack of respect towards the paraeducator, (3) difficult scheduling due to lunches, breaks, high absenteeism, medical procedures, and mainstreaming with students, (4) high numbers of students, and (5) lack of support from administration and colleagues.

Finding #4

Finding #4 is related to research question 5: What do teachers and paraeducators perceive as the strategies to improve team effectiveness?

The following strategies to help build a SDC's team effectiveness surfaced: (1) having a shared vision, (2) effective planning and scheduling, (3) improved trainings, and (4) on-going communication.

Finding #5

As stated in chapter 4, when a teacher is lacking leadership skills, classroom dysfunction usually follows. An SE teacher, especially one who must work with several paraeducators, needs to be able to provide leadership through skills that are most effective in building the team. When leadership skills are utilized daily and consistently, team effectiveness will positively impact student achievement and staff and student safety.

Unexpected Findings

Unexpected was the discovery that the SE teacher and paraeducator participants expressed that communication was not considered a high priority as a teacher leadership skill, but yet they conveyed its importance for team effectiveness. Communication was frequently mentioned in almost every interview, making it a theme during the coding process. It was discovered that often administrators and/or leaders of the SDC avoid dealing with issues that arise in the SDC classroom, showing an absence of effective communication skills. In the *Skilled Facilitator*, Schwarz (2002) clarified that an effective group deals with undiscussable issues – the important issues relevant to the

group's task—that members often believe they cannot discuss openly in the group without negative consequences (p. 25). Conversely, teacher leaders will often avoid the “elephant in the room”.

An area that should be noted was the standard deviation in all areas was less than 1.0, which was understandable to the researcher. Although this was not an unexpected finding, this finding impacts the implications for actions and elucidates what is necessary in further research. Despite the differences in their educational backgrounds, the fact that both SE teachers and SE paraeducators maintained extremely similar perspectives in what leadership skills they perceived were critical for SE teachers serving in SDCs that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities was important to this study. The importance of this finding demonstrates a need for districts to address the necessity of SDC teachers, who are working with multiple paraeducators in their classroom, to be trained as leaders.

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, improving SE teachers' leadership skills can facilitate building effective teams in many ways. Based on the review of literature, the surveys, and the interviews that were triangulated, the researcher developed the following conclusions.

1. Staffing and scheduling are the major issues in many moderate to severe SDCs, impacting team effectiveness.
2. SE teacher leaders need to be visionary, to possess organizational skills, and to maintain integrity to develop trust.

3. SE teachers must provide respect and effectively communicate to build team effectiveness in the SDC.
4. SE staff needs increased administrative support, colleague support, and training.
5. It would be beneficial to include a leadership component in moderate to severe credentialing programs for teachers, prior to entering a special day classroom.

Implications for Action

The collected data was gathered from SE teachers and paraeducators who work daily in SDCs that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities. The findings showed that teacher leadership skills need to be developed and that team effectiveness needs to be addressed to improve overall team effectiveness within a SDC that serves students with moderate to severe disabilities.

As stated in the summary of this chapter, SDCs serving students with moderate to severe disabilities often have up to seven or eight SE paraeducators. As a result, SE teacher leadership skills are critical for maintaining and developing team effectiveness. Several actions could be considered to develop teacher leadership skills.

1. School administrators must consider the importance of providing opportunities for special day class teams to collaborate on an on-going basis. Due to the hectic schedules that may occur (i.e. paraeducator break and lunch schedules, absenteeism, mainstreaming, and other factors) throughout the day, providing a set time to plan, collaborate, coordinate instructional activities, and address conflicts that may occur would be highly recommended to improve overall team effectiveness.

2. Districts need to consider providing leadership trainings specifically for SE teachers who are placed in situations with two or more paraeducators in their classrooms. This would be beneficial in improving team effectiveness. Emphasizing the need to be a leader within their own classrooms is critical to create an effective team. The following skills would be addressed:
 - a. visionary leadership
 - b. organizational and instruction planning
 - c. building trust through building relationships
 - d. addressing conflict openly
 - e. professional and ethical practice
 - f. providing guidance and direction for your paraeducator
3. Most districts rarely provide on-going training for paraeducators. Often they may say it is due to funding, but in reality, it is the lack of interest in the student population with severe to profound disabilities. In my interviews, often the special education staff shared their administrators rarely visited their classrooms, and when they did, it was usually non-related to instructional observation or for support. Frequent observations of administrators failing to take action to implement paraeducator trainings demonstrates their belief that enough funding is already being poured into special education services for the severe to profound student populations. Until attitudes and beliefs change towards this student population changes, and districts take a more valuable, proactive approach to addressing the needs of their support staff, then improvements will increase in the area of team effectiveness in the SDC classroom. As one wise Riverside County

superintendent stated, “Professional development is an investment”. Districts need to reconsider providing on-going training for SE paraeducators, focusing on the paraeducator as a professional.

As stated in the review of literature, often their training takes place on the job, during instructional time. Paraeducators must be provided training outside of the instructional day to gain feedback from them, and to provide them an opportunity to voice their concerns and/or ask pertinent questions. How can the administrator expect a paraeducator to focus on an in classroom training, when simultaneously they are expected to monitor the other students in the classroom while the training is going on.

4. School districts need to reevaluate the situation of substitutes for SE teachers and paraeducators. Throughout this study and in the review of literature, a reoccurring challenge with substitute coverage for special educators is evident.
5. University teaching credentialing and/or Master’s programs, degrees, or other credential certification geared towards working with students with moderate to severe disabilities need to add a teacher leadership component to their course work requirements. The likelihood that a SE teacher working in a moderate to severe SDC will have to manage several paraeducators is strong. Preparation for this endeavor would be advantageous for building team effectiveness.

Recommendations for Further Research

The data from the study produced the following recommendations for further research:

1. Consider a study investigating the ways in which paraeducators' attitudes impact team effectiveness in the SDC.
2. Consider a study investigating how paraeducator absenteeism impacts team effectiveness.
3. Consider a study investigating the ways in which providing teacher leadership training prior to teaching in a SDC will affect overall team effectiveness.
4. Consider a Delphi study investigating SE veteran teachers and the changes that have occurred over the years that have been detrimental or helpful to team effectiveness.
5. Consider a study of students with moderate to severe disabilities who have been positively or negatively impacted by being in a SDC that did or did not demonstrate daily team effectiveness.
6. Consider a study investigating why SE teachers who serve students with moderate to severe disabilities are unable to effectively make changes in team effectiveness with their own classroom staff.
7. Consider a study investigating school administrative support of SDCs that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

After the civil rights movement of the 1960's, change started to occur for all people, including people with disabilities. Laws such as Education for All Handicapped Children (EHC), PL94-142, the American Disabilities Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act influenced how children with disabilities were served. Organizations like the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) were established. The

CEC examined the need to establish standards for special educators. The actions by school districts to implement these standards varied from state to state and from district to district, which has affected overall team effectiveness in SDCs that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities.

As a teacher and administrator who had served in both the general and special education moderate to severe classroom setting, it became evident that having leadership skills when teaching in a moderate to severe SDC was critical for daily team effectiveness. The amount of staff varies from class to class, but effective teacher leadership skills are crucial to building team effectiveness, as this study has proven.

It was an extreme pleasure to interview the participants face to face and to hear the positive responses from many of them despite the challenges and barriers that they encounter on a daily basis. Seeing the passion that they had for the students they serve was absolutely amazing. It reinforces the idea that support for special educators as teacher leaders who are serving students with moderate to serve disabilities is critical for improving team effectiveness.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Quantitative Electronic Survey Stems

Rate the following special education (SE) teacher leadership skills most important to a special day classroom's (SDC) team effectiveness:

1. A SE teacher leader focuses on vision and the big picture.

Not Important 1 2 3 4 5 High Priority

2. A SE teacher leader demonstrates confidence by recognizing his/her own strengths and weaknesses and is able to accept criticism.

Not Important 1 2 3 4 5 High Priority

3. A SE teacher leader demonstrates people skills by being an active listener, flexible, and supportive of his/her team.

Not Important 1 2 3 4 5 High Priority

4. A SE teacher leader demonstrates motivational skills by praising individuals accordingly, encouraging team members, celebrating small wins, and displays a willingness to assist the team.

Not Important 1 2 3 4 5 High Priority

5. A SE teacher leader will demonstrate responsibility by addressing conflict with the team and leading by example.

Not Important 1 2 3 4 5 High Priority

6. A SE teacher leader maintains integrity when faced with illegal or unethical situations.

Not Important 1 2 3 4 5 High Priority

7. A SE teacher leader demonstrates professionalism by avoiding gossip, seeks the truth, and maintains confidentiality.

Not Important 1 2 3 4 5 High Priority

8. How important is the SE teacher leader's role to a special day classroom's team effectiveness?

Not Important 1 2 3 4 5 High Priority

9. To build effective teams, team members need to develop competencies in several areas. These areas include conflict resolution, problem solving, communication, organizational understanding, decision making, goal setting, performance management, and planning and task coordination (Gilley & Gilley, 2007; Spiegel & Torres, 1994; Stevens & Campion, 1999; Sundstrom et al., 1990).

Currently, the team members perceive team effectiveness in the special day classroom I work as:

Not Important 1 2 3 4 5 High Priority

Appendix B

Qualitative Interview Questions

1. What is the vision of your SDC team?
2. Do you believe all team members in the SDC classroom you work in follow the vision? If not, explain why.
3. What do you believe are the teacher leadership skills necessary to build team effectiveness among your staff?
4. How are individual and team roles defined, and by who?
5. What do you believe is the role of the teacher in building team effectiveness?
6. What team building activities are implemented in the classroom to develop interaction (e.g. developing trust, addressing conflict, active listening) between team members?
7. What do you perceive are the barriers to your special day classroom's team effectiveness?
8. What do you believe are the strategies that can improve team effectiveness in your SDC classroom?

Appendix C

Letter to the Superintendents

Brandman University

Doctoral Program in Organizational Leadership

Dissertation Research District Participation Request

Sharon Nakama, Doctoral Candidate

Dissertation Title

Dynamics Between Special Education Teachers and Paraeducators in Special Day Classroom Settings serving Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this causal-comparative research mixed methods study is to identify the special education (SE) teacher leadership skills that SE teachers and SE paraeducators perceive are most important to SDC team effectiveness in secondary special education programs that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Methodology

A causal-comparative mixed methods study will be conducted to identify the SE teacher leadership skills that SE teachers and SE paraeducators perceive are most important to SDC team effectiveness. A sequential exploratory design demonstrating the emphasis on the quantitative section of the study prior to examining relationships between the findings of the qualitative data will be implemented. A descriptive survey will be distributed among three school districts in Riverside County, and individual interviews will take place.

Request of the Superintendent

As the researcher, I am requesting your permission to conduct research within your school district. I would like permission to contact the director of special education to recommend 30 special education teachers and paraeducators to be participants in the survey and interviews on team effectiveness and teacher leadership. For the interviews, I will need 2 teachers and 2 paraeducators from the list of the 30 participants.

Your support of this research will be highly appreciated.

Approved: _____ Date: _____

Recommended Contact Person: _____

Contact Person's phone #: _____ email: _____

District: _____

Appendix D

Letter to the Directors of Special Education

January 3, 2015

Dear Special Education Director,

Currently, I am a doctoral candidate with Brandman University. Recently, I was granted permission by (name of superintendent) to commence doctoral research in (name of school district). Without a doubt, I am extremely grateful for this opportunity, and looking forward to this endeavor.

My research topic is the Dynamics Between Special Education Teachers and Paraeducators in Special Day Classroom Settings Serving Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities.

A quantitative survey of 9 stems will be implemented with 30 special educator participants. The focus of the survey is on teacher leadership and team effectiveness and will be distributed via email. Of the 30 participants, two teachers and two paraeducators will be randomly selected, or recommended by you, to participate in a qualitative interview of 8 questions on team effectiveness. Each interview should last approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Retribution of \$10 per each interview participant will be offered. **All participant information will be strictly confidential.**

For my study, I will need the following participants' email addresses:

- 15 special education teachers, serving students in moderate to severe SDC classrooms at the **secondary level.**
- 15 special education paraeducators, serving students in moderate to severe SDC classrooms at the **secondary level.**

My goal is to complete all data collection by January 31st. It will be truly appreciated if you could forward me the email addresses of the recommended participants who would be willing to participate in this study to my email at naka9102@mail.brandman.edu.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Sharon Nakama

Appendix E

Informed Consent – Brandman University
Participation and Information Request to Special Education Educators
Teacher Leadership and Team Effectiveness
January 12, 2015

Mr./Ms./Mrs. _____,

My name is Sharon Nakama. I am a doctoral candidate at Brandman University, Irvine in Organizational Leadership. I am employed with the Los Angeles County Office of Education. I am conducting a research study of the dynamics between special education teachers and paraeducators who work in special day classrooms serving students with moderate to severe disabilities. I am inviting you to participate in this study that will include the (name of school district) ,(name of school district).

If you decide to participate, you will be provided an electronic survey. It will be emailed to you during the month of November, 2014. The survey will take less than 10 minutes to complete. You will have the opportunity to respond to the survey questions at your convenience. Your name and responses will remain confidential.

You may possibly be asked to participate in a 20 minute interview with me, as recommended by your principal. Your decision to do so, or not to do so, will remain confidential from your principal. If you choose to do so, a \$10 optional gift card at the end of the interview will be provided. You may elect to accept or to reject the \$10 gift card.

If you agree to participate, please click on the link below. Review the Informed Consent, and Research Participant's Bill of Rights. Your participation will be your consent to the Informed Consent. Following will be the survey on team effectiveness. Please complete the survey and submit. Your participation will be voluntary and strictly confidential. Names, schools, districts, and county names will not be reported in the findings.

Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions. My cell phone is 951-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,
Sharon I. Nakama

Appendix F

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

- 1) To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
- 2) To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
- 3) To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
- 4) To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
- 5) To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
- 6) To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
- 7) To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
- 8) To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
- 9) To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
- 10) To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Appendix G

Brandman University

Doctoral Candidate: Sharon Nakama

Doctoral Research Study: Dynamics Between Special Education Teachers and Paraeducators in Special Day Classroom Settings serving Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities

Qualitative Interviews

Participant Interview #1 –Teacher, M/S SDC

January 24, 2015 – 8:10a.m.

1 teacher

4 paraeducators

12 students

Researcher: We'll go ahead and start the interview. Question #1 what is the mission of your special day class team?

PI1: Well... I'll say to the team, number one is to keep the kids safe. Number two, they need to be happy. They need to have a good feeling to be at school. And number three...let's teach a little bit. That's kind of the order. So the vision is to make them as independent as you can. We don't have a vision statement for our team, but for the school we do. If I asked the ladies, "What's the vision?"...

Researcher: Would they know it? Do you believe all team members, teacher and paraeducators, in the special day classroom you work in, know the vision of the classroom? (Question #2).

PI1: They would know those three things. Teaching them a little bit, and making them independent. Don't do so much for them. Watch them, shadow them. And I'm not talking about the paper and pencil stuff... getting along with their friends, playing with their friends. It's the more basic things, the more independent things. And yes... we do the things that have words that are around them. One of our students has no academic goals at all. It's all communication, because if she can't tell people her stomach is hurting so bad, what's the use if she knows 10 words, when we show her on a piece of paper. It's very individualized, but it's to get them a little further along. For some kids it's all social.

Researcher: Okay...#3 what do you believe are the teacher leadership skills necessary to build team effectiveness among your staff?

PI1: You have to have really, really good communication skills. You have to have patience, and to be able to know what's going on. You have to try to figure out what they need. Good communication, listening, responding to their needs... You have to be not afraid to tell someone, "Could you please do it this way?".

Researcher: Do you mean when you are addressing conflict?

PI1: Yes. Yes. Yes. And I think for many teachers it is hard. And we'll do it all in round about ways, like... "Okay. We're going to review the guidelines. And when you have a sub, this is what the sub has to follow. And also what you will need to follow." Well, you don't want to say to them, "You're not doing this, this and that!" It's kind of hard, and you are such a team, for seven hours a day, that if you say you're doing something wrong, then it makes a friction in the classroom.

When I had 7 assistants, I had to do a lot of planning and thinking for the day to run smoothly. And when I had a sub, I made sure each paraeducator filled out a sheet of what they did all day long. I don't micromanage them, because they all have their jobs to do. I manage them, but I don't micromanage them. So when there is a sub, I can give that paper to the sub, and it helps them to know what they are doing all day, and where they're supposed to be. When I had the 7, everyday someone, or two were out, and it would take time to figure out where everyone was, and what they're supposed to be doing. So we do that, and that helps a lot. So organization and communication are important.

Researcher: Okay.... #4 How are individual and team roles defined, and by who?

I think you just explained that. So you would have a list of their day, and their jobs to do, correct?

PI1: Yes. Yes. And I would have a schedule, above my individual student schedules.

And it's a lot, when you have all of the assistants' schedules, and then all of my students' schedules.

Researcher: And how many students do you have in your class this year?

PI1: I have 12 students.

Researcher: How many students are ambulatory?

PI1: All of mine are.

Researcher: Let me go on to question #5. What do you believe is the role of the teacher in building team effectiveness?

PI1: Communicating with the administration. As the teacher, and If I see something that is a continuing problem, and I address it, and it continues to happen, I believe it is my role to communicate with the administration what is going on, so it can be more seriously addressed. I believe if I couldn't create the team that needs to be created then I have someone not following along, then the other paraeducators start saying so and so is not pulling their weight, and they keep telling me. Then I would need to communicate it with administration. In the past, it was solely the teacher... a lot. And now we have a new administration that will address things.

Researcher: What are some of the things that are addressed?

PI1: For example, the way they dress. On the evaluation it says you should dress according to the job description. But sometimes someone will come in with flip-flops. Having the administration help back you up, after repeatedly telling the assistant to wear covered shoes, is important.

Another example is this year our district hired a slew of new assistants. Many of the teachers gave those newbies straight Es (excellent) across the board. The administration called in the teachers to inform them they can't be giving out all Es. How else would they improve if they believe they are doing excellent work, when they really were not.

Researcher: Okay.... Question #6 what team building activities are implemented in the classroom to develop interaction between team members?

PI1: What do you mean by activities?

Researcher: What is done to build trust, or address conflicts? Or how is it done? Do you have group meetings?

PI1: Yes, we have early release days, and that's when we'll have group meetings. It's hard, because not everybody stays on those days. They'll sign in, but then they'll take off, and say they are sick. They'll take the afternoon off on the early release days. They have that right to take the time off, and they'll take it off on those days, because there are no kids at that time. So then you are missing one of the links, and then it's like... yeah... what did we exactly all hear at the meetings. Notes are taken, but it's different when the person is actually there.

Addressing conflicts, in the past were done privately, not as a group. Because now depending on the situation, trying to understand each person's point of view, without talking to each other is important. So hearing each person's view is important. For example, there were two aides working with a student at different times. They started to argue over how to teach the students some vocabulary words. But understanding that one does their way differently from what the other aide does was understood in the long run. Understanding things can be done differently was addressed.

Researcher: Kind of like we have the right to agree to disagree. It sounds like a norm.

PI1: Exactly.

Researcher: On to question #7. What do you perceive are the barriers to your special day classroom's team effectiveness?

PI1: As I talked before about the group meetings. I think that it's the first year we have the collaboration time in order to meet. We're still working out the kinks, of people leaving early. It's the teachers too. We've set up meetings weeks before, and then we'll get called away from our administration to go elsewhere on those days. So then the ladies [paraeducators] sitting there with no one to lead the meeting for them. We were so excited to get the collaboration, but then the teachers are gone. So they'll get instructional materials ready, but then there's only so much you can do. So they'll end up reorganizing the closets!

Another issue is not having enough training in place. It took a student with severe autistic behaviors to finally get every ABA trained. After that, they were excited to get more training. They only had their CPR training, but wanted more trainings.

Researcher: Are there any other barriers that you see are impacting your team effectiveness? You're giving me some fantastic information. Thank you so much.

PI1: Well, aside from the collaboration days, we've also talked about showing like a 5 to 10 minute science video, so we can all meet for a brief time. But the scheduling is so difficult, because when someone is on a break, or someone has to go get the lunches, etc.... someone else has to cover for them, and trying to find the right time is a challenge.

The barriers are time to meet, lack of trainings, understanding. And also the previous evaluations being too high, makes it difficult when you get that person in your classroom, and you see how they need to have Ns (needs to improve). It's hard to tell them you dropped from an E to an N because of.... That is a barrier.

Researcher: Evaluations are a challenge. I agree with that.

PI1: Another barrier that I thought of is the staffing. Many times we don't have a sub, and it makes the job of the assistants more difficult. Accidents occur, and they were filling out reports all the time. Risk management came to visit us, because we were the highest accidents in the district. The assistant superintendent even came in. Well, we have these kids that need one to ones, and we're trying to teach, and take care of the kids, and deal with everything in this classroom. I think what it is... Is when I got scratched and bruised, I didn't turn it in. I don't turn everything in. And I think our staff turned everything in, to show everybody, we need more staffing. We're short staffed! They turned everything in, which is good. I wasn't telling them to not turn anything in.

Researcher: Question #8 what do you believe are the strategies that can improve team effectiveness in your special day classroom?

PI1: Communication. I need to figure out a communication thing. Because I got information. A parent calls me. Something happens to a student. Things happen here and there, and everyone should know what is going on.

Researcher: How do you communicate with your staff now?

PI1: I had started a confidential thing that I posted in the room. Like a communication log. The staff needs to be aware of certain things about each student, but it's hard to get a hold of them at one time, and they don't check their emails on a regular basis. But it had confidential things about the kids, and if you walked through my room, you could look at it. And then, if it's locked up, what use is it? I still feel like I need to do that still, but find a way to maintain confidentiality.

Researcher: Many times, I would get a paraeducator that says, “I never got that information.” It was frustrating as the teacher.

PI1: Yes! Yes! It is difficult because they are going in different directions during the day.

Researcher: Are there any other strategies that you can think of?

PI1: Information, communication, expectations...and everyone on the same page. For example the dress code situation. Everyone wants you to deal with them [pointing the finger], but they don't want you to deal with them. [pointing the finger at self]. We all need to be on the same page.

Researcher: I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording. Thank you so very much for giving me your time.

PI1: Your welcome. I enjoyed it.

Participant Interview #2 – Paraeducator, M/S SDC

January 29, 2015 – 7:00a.m.

1 teacher

2 paraeducators

18 students

Researcher: Question #1 is...What is the vision of your special day class team?

PI2: To make them as independent as possible, and to achieve each of their individual potential.

Researcher: Okay, #2. Do you believe all team members, teacher and paraeducators, in the special day classroom you work in know the vision of the classroom?

PI2: I do believe we are all on the same page in understanding the vision. I believe the teacher is very organized, she has good direction, and she is a strong leader.

Researcher: What about the other paraeducator that you work with?

PI2: Yes I do believe she sees and knows the vision, because it comes from the top. Our teacher is the leader, and we just do what she says for us to do. We are a good team.

Researcher: Okay, #3... What do you believe are the teacher leadership skills necessary to build team effectiveness among your staff?

PI2: She's very rounded, not only in her education, but also in her experiences in the community. She's very involved in the community, so she has arms that reach out to help others.

Researcher: And just to clarify... It doesn't have to be just the teacher you work with, but what do you believe are the teacher leadership skills necessary to build team effectiveness in special day classrooms among the staff?

PI2: Personally, in my belief, it is respect. Respect for the people you work with. I know I don't have the Master's, but I don't need someone rubbing it in my face all the time. And I actually, almost quit with working with my previous teacher, because the teacher was like... "This is my classroom! I need to know everything.", and he chewed me out in front of another paraprofessional and the students. And I said, "I've had it! You will not talk to me that way!" And so after that incident, I totally backed off. I usually would arrive 30 minutes ahead of my start time, and would prepare for my day, but then I changed and just came in exactly when I was expected, and left the minute the bell rang. This was because that teacher would verbally "whip" us. And you know what, I don't get paid enough to have to take that.

So the big one for me would be respect. Teachers have to know how to respect their staff.

Researcher: Very good. #4 How are individual and team roles defined, and by who?

PI2: She trusts our judgment. That's why I love working with my teacher. That's why I stayed with the district. She doesn't micromanage us. We know her vision. We know

her goals for the students. She gives us a “long leash” to work with the students. She even allows us to go out, and drum up our own work for the students. Which a lot of teachers would feel intimidated and threatened by that.

Researcher: I’m glad you shared about the previous teacher. How did he define your role?

PI2: I think he was out of his field. His degree was in music, which was good for him, but I think he landed in a job where he made the money, but I didn’t see him passionate about it. There were so many things that had occurred with that teacher that were unclear. We took the kids to the zoo, and he and his friend took off for an hour and a half, and we couldn’t find him. There was no communication. We couldn’t even reach him on the phone. It was very frustrating working with him. Basically, he wanted us to do the work, but then if it wasn’t done right, he would chew us out. Maybe it’s because he did not have clear expectations for us.

Researcher: Okay...Question #5 what do you believe is the role of the teacher in building team effectiveness?

PI2: I think if they let us know what they want, giving us clear expectations, and directions, and give us some faith. And there are times when sometimes we make mistakes.

Researcher: Is it like having trust in you, and the other paraeducator?

PI2: Yes, and it goes back to what I said earlier about respect. I think because my teacher was an aide before, it makes a difference. I hate to say it, but I’ve met a lot of teachers

who are pretty full of themselves. You know, it's like, I've got the degree, and I'm better than you are. To me, that's disheartening because that doesn't build team effectiveness, team spirit. It's like I'm better than you, because I have a degree. No, that's just not right.

Researcher: Let's move on to Question #6. What team building activities are implemented in the classroom to develop interaction between team members? For example, what is done to build trust, or address conflicts, etc...?

PI2: Well, maybe not activities, but we used to be in the portables. So there was some distance, and she was always accessible by phone. If I call her, most of the time she answers. If she doesn't answer, she will call me back in a very reasonable time. So we don't per se have activities, but she does communicate with us, and we can communicate back with her. But I know she is available. If I have a complaint or a beef, she's good to listen to me, and my concerns.

She's a problem solver. She has a very strong personality, but she's also comfortable with herself.

Researcher: What are some of the things the other teacher did to address conflict?

PI2: It really didn't matter what we said. He started having short five-minute meetings everyday, at the end of the day. But basically, it was he doing all the talking, and telling us what we did wrong, and how it needed to be. We were never given an opportunity to express our concerns to him. It was very one sided.

He really tried to avoid addressing conflict. He wanted it his way, and that was it. There were a lot of problems.

Researcher: Okay... Let's move on to #7. What do you perceive are the barriers to your special day classroom's team effectiveness? Nothing is perfect, but it does sound like you have a great teacher now. But what do you perceive are the barriers?

PI2: Well, we are all human. We have some good days, and we have some bad days. There can be some misunderstandings, due to a lack of communication.

Researcher: Do you find that there is not enough time to communicate, for whatever reason?

PI2: Well, it's like I said. If I don't mention it while I am at school, I can always call her after school. She keeps herself available for us.

Researcher: Okay, and then the last question is what do you believe are the strategies that can improve team effectiveness in your special day classroom? It sounds like your classroom staff works very well together, but I'm a true believer there's always room for improvement. Can you think of a strategy to improve your room's team effectiveness?

PI2: I've got the cream of the crop! Like I said, I've been with her a long time now. Having the organization is important. For the other teacher I worked with, his job wasn't defined. And because he was new, it was difficult for him. He wasn't well prepared, and he didn't communicate well. He did not give clear communication to us. And this goes back to what I said earlier about respect. He didn't give it. He threatened me to have a sit down with the principal, after he chewed me out in front of the occupational therapist!

I told him to bring it on! He was very disrespectful. I felt like I was being treated like a doormat. So I sat with my one student, everyday, and only worked with him, which I didn't think was fair to the student, or to the other students. But I felt like he subjected me to that. I am so glad I am with the teacher I'm with now.

Researcher: I am so happy for you to be in a wonderful environment. Thank you so much for allowing me to interview you.

PI2: Thank you, and good luck to you!

16 minutes, 22 seconds.

Participant Interview #3 – Teacher, M/S SDC

January 29, 2015 – 9:00a.m.

1 teacher

3 paraeducators

9 students

Researcher: Thank you for meeting with me. Let's get to question #1. What is the vision of your special day class team?

PI3: The vision of my team is... ummm... collaborating together. I want my aides to have a voice in the classroom. So I ask their input a lot. So I think remaining as a team in front of the kids, while we're in the classroom. I think it's important we're united, and we're working together. And I think a good way of doing that is to give my aides a voice. They feel like I hear them, and they know I'm in charge of the classroom, but they also know I value their opinion. So... and I ask for it. If they have a problem with what I'm doing, I ask that we do it outside of the classroom. So that, when we are in the classroom, the kids know that we're a team, and we're united.

Researcher: Okay...very good. Question #2. Do you believe all team members, teacher and paraeducators, in the special day classroom you work in know the vision of the classroom? If no, explain why?

PI3: Absolutely. Ummm I think that's part of, again going back to the first answer, is that knowing they have a voice. I think that they feel like part of it, the plans. So I feel like they have input. Where we talk about the vision of the classroom, and what we want

to get accomplished that day. They know where I'm going, and I know where they're going. And that the thing is, that we'll do it together is the key in getting it done.

Researcher: Okay. #3. What do you believe are the teacher leadership skills necessary to build team effectiveness among your staff?

PI3: There's a trick to being a leader. And again, I hate to keep eluding to it, but giving them a voice. So I think the trick is being decisive. Yet, being willing to accept input.

Researcher: Okay.... #4. How are individual and team roles defined, and by who?

PI3: I define the roles at the beginning of the year. With my aides, we kinda sit down and find that... Uhhh I tell them ultimately I'm going to make the decisions, and I'm going to be responsible for the decisions that are made in this classroom. So if the ship goes down, you can blame me. However, I want your input. I want to make the most informed decisions, and I think that comes from getting the input from them, because I can get very opinionated, and see things a certain way. But I like getting that from them, because they give me perspectives that I don't have.

Researcher: How do you communicate with them, what the roles are? Do you put it in writing? Do you verbally tell them?

PI3: It's kinda a verbal thing. Basically, I tell them, as the leader of the classroom, if you have a problem with someone or something that I'm doing, I'd like you to come to me. I want you to have that voice, and tell me the problem, but offer solutions. And that's the big thing. I ask them to give me 3 different solutions, and the one you recommend. Ultimately, I will make the decision, but I respect that.

Researcher: Okay, #5. What do you believe is the role of the teacher in building team effectiveness?

PI3: Being the decision maker, being the leader. Taking the lead when need be. I think that's one of the keys. But you have to make the decisions. That's the big thing. Everything can't be open up to debate. You have to make the decisions, and you have to earn the respect of the people that you work with. In order to make the decisions, and having buy in. I think that's really important. They trust me to make a decision. And whether they disagree or not with my decision, they're going to trust my decision. That's a difficult thing to do, and it takes time. It takes earning their trust. When you do get to that point, it works really well.

Researcher: Yes... Trust is very important. Okay... Question #6 is What team building activities are implemented in the classroom to develop interaction (e.g. developing trust, addressing conflict, active listening.) between team members?

PI3: You know...no we don't. I don't have a prep period. Basically, during the school hours, there's kids here. So we don't get much time to do stuff like that, so we just doing have time.

Researcher: Does your school have collaboration time?

PI3: No. We have staff meetings, and we have data collaboration meetings. But not with the classified staff.

Researcher: If there another SH SDC class like yours here on campus?

PI3: No, I'm like an island. I'm the only SH class here on this campus. There are 3 others, at 3 other middle schools in our district. And our district does 3 special education cohorts, in which we meet with the other teachers.

Researcher: Okay, the next question #7 is What do you perceive are the barriers to your special day classroom's team effectiveness? Nothing is perfect, and it sounds like you have a great staff. But...

PI3: Yeah... I would say we kinda hit the nail there. It is time to collaborate. That's a big one. To actually sit down, and identify things, and unfortunately it has to happen during class. Sometimes things I have to address in class, and that makes it difficult to have to address things in front of the class. And I want to make sure I appear united. And sometimes when it is a really difficult issue, you have to step out of class. But I think having really dedicated time to spend with my aides, would be very beneficial. But for the safety of my students, they cannot be left alone. I try to keep myself available during lunch time. It's tough.

Researcher: And the last question is What do you believe are the strategies that can improve team effectiveness in your special day classroom? Some of the things, you have already mentioned, but is there a strategy that you believe is really effective?

PI3: I would say communication is a big piece. And it's kinda tied to having the time to do that. But I think communication is the big piece. If I had to explain to someone else, it's communicating with the staff, and letting them know your expectations. So if they don't meet them, they'll understand why. It takes away a lot of confusion.

Researcher: That's about it. Thank you so much for taking the time to sit with me today.

PI3: Yeah, you're welcome. Thanks for taking interest in my staff.

Participant Interview #4 – Teacher, M/S SDC

February 2, 2015 – 7:40a.m.

1 teacher

4 paraeducators

9 students

Researcher: The first question I have is what is the vision of your special day class team?

PI4: To get the students involved in the community as much as possible, to whatever level they can get to. (Long pause...) Yes, that's it.

Researcher: Okay, question #2. Do you believe all team members, teacher and paraeducators, in the special day classroom you work in know the vision of the classroom? If no, explain why?

PI4: Uhhh yes.

Researcher: How do they know that?

PI4: Well, we'll talk about the need to get them out in the community. What we want to get out of them from being in the community. What benefits they will have.

Researcher: Okay, #3. What do you believe are the teacher leadership skills necessary to build team effectiveness among your staff?

PI4: Uhhh.... Communication. Patience, and the ability to get along with people. Being able to accept their words. And hopefully, they'll accept my words.

Researcher: Okay, #4. How are individual and team roles defined, and by who?

PI4: Well... We get together in the morning and talk about the day. And because the different times people come in they're doing different roles, so we talk about it in the morning.

Researcher: May I ask... Do you have a schedule that you give them or do you meet with them daily or... ??? I know once the kids come in, the day gets going, and it's difficult to communicate amongst each other. Do you have time to actually meet with them daily?

PI4: Ummm.... Usually, one of the instructional assistants is going to get here at 8. We have 45 minutes to plan. And the others get here at 8:15. So we have a half hour to talk about what we're going to do. And it's really crazy to see what they're going to do, because I have one open position, and someone came to fill the position, and then on the 3rd day, she went on maternity leave. And at the beginning of this year, we had a series of changes in the sub assistants who were there to fill the position. There were subs here and there.

Researcher: So you mean from 8:15 to 8:45, you have 30 minutes to meet with your aides EVERYDAY?! That is amazing for a moderate to severe classroom. That is wonderful that you are provided that time.

PI4: Yes it is. It gives us time to talk about what we're going to do. How we're going to do it, and get everything lined up and organized. And it's a pretty good group, because we're settled in now, of who's doing what. And they come in, and just get started in what they have to do. I don't have to say anything sometimes.

Researcher: So they will self-initiate their assignments.

PI4: Yes, exactly.

Researcher: Very good. Question #5... What do you believe is the role of the teacher in building team effectiveness? It sounds like you take the initiative to meet with them regularly, but is there anything else you feel is part of the role of the teacher leader?

PI4: This is probably the nicest group of instructional assistants that I have had. They're really easy to talk with. It's really easy to talk about let's not do it this way, but this might be a better way to do it.

Researcher: So they're open to constructive criticism?

PI4: Yeah... They're open to talking about the bigger picture of what we want out of these students for their education.

Researcher: Umm... #6 What team building activities are implemented in the classroom to develop interaction (e.g. developing trust, addressing conflict, active listening.) between team members?

PI4: No, we don't do any activities like that.

Researcher: Well, aside from the group meetings... Are there any recognition type activities, or team building activities?

PI4: Well, I do ask if this activity worked or not. I do ask for their feedback.

Researcher: Let's move on to question #7. What do you perceive are the barriers to your special day classroom's team effectiveness? It sounds like you have a great team, but you can share about past incidences.

PI4: One of the biggest barriers is the inconsistency in the staffing. Having the team members in place, whether it is due to a position not being filled, or aides being absent

frequently. The district doesn't have enough subs to fill the vacant positions.

Researcher: Yes, absenteeism, and trying to get positions filled is a huge crisis. Aside from that, are there any other barriers that you can think of?

PI4: Ohhh.... This is not happening with my current staff, but in another classroom on site right now. It's so bad, it's gone to the district administration, in which they're going

to be speaking to several aides about it. The bickering amongst each other is another major barrier. When this happens, it makes the job very difficult.

Researcher: So... I understand it's not happening in your classroom, and you had stated the district administration is handling it, but did the classroom teacher address it directly with the paraeducators?

PI4: The two teachers that are having the difficulties due to the bickering, are relatively new. So far, the response from the administration has been to move them. Which leaves that issue just dangling. The paraeducator is not wanting to work with one student, and not wanting to work with that teacher. I'd rather they tell her, "You don't get to decide that." They need to work it out. We're professionals. You need to work it out. I'd rather they have that address that first, then to just move her out of the classroom.

Researcher: Okay... Let me move on.... And the last question is What do you believe are the strategies that can improve team effectiveness in your special day classroom?

PI4: Communication is most important. And there's some things that we wind up talking about a lot. So like.... How we go out in the community. What's expected on route in the community.

Researcher: Do you mean having clear expectations?

PI4: Yeah... So also, there is a lot of good progress being made with the students. And talking about that, the positives are important.

Researcher: You mean focusing on the positives. Great. Is there anything else you want to add about strategies?

PI4: Well, it seems the purpose of the paraeducator has gotten lost. Now it seems like it's just a "job" position. In my mind, it seems like it's not enough of an important position to the district. There's no recognition for the paraeducators. There appears to be a lack of respect. I guess that is a barrier for us.

Researcher: I guess that's it. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. It's such an important topic. I appreciate your input.

PI4: My pleasure.

Participant Interview #5 - Paraeducator

February 2, 2015 – 2:45 p.m.

1 teacher

13 students

5 paraeducators

Researcher: The first question is what is the vision of your special day class team?

PI5: It's great. I work in an autism classroom. It's not per se a special day classroom, because to me a special day classroom is a severely handicapped classroom. So I work in the autism program, and it's only specific to autism. We have 9 students, with a total of 6 adults, including the teacher.

Researcher: Do you believe all team members, teacher and paraeducators, in the special day classroom you work in know the vision of the classroom? If no, explain why?

PI5: Yes. It's very important. We are constantly talking to our teacher. We may get there in a different way, but we all need to be on the same page. So in our classroom it's very important that we follow a schedule. It's important to stick with it. I mean, all of us know if we have questions in a certain way when where doing goals with the student, and if we don't know how to get there, we clarify how to do that with the student. But yeahh... it's something we might get there a different way, but we are all looking at the same big picture of what is expected.

Researcher: Very good. #3. What do you believe are the teacher leadership skills necessary to build team effectiveness among your staff?

PI5: I think it's communication is the big key. She needs to express to us what she needs from us. She needs to tell us, hey you know can you do this, this and this. And this is how I'd like you to do it. I mean we have morning meetings, before we even start our shift in the morning everyday. Yeah... We try to get together. If something is going to change for the day, then we know we need to confront a certain student because we know there is going to be a change in their schedule, and ours. But it's, I think, a teacher in general... It's just communication.

We've gotten together with all of our SPED teachers, and then we try to get all of the paraeducators in there. And we kinda had a meeting trying to see what they expected from us. And it goes down to what you do at school, what is your dress attire for work... It goes down to if you're showing up late. Please communicate to that. We all have busy lives outside of work, but coming late to work can effect our kids, because our kids are very scheduled oriented. I have the kid that is very time oriented, and it's just a panic if someone isn't there, but yes... It's something that the key word about that is communication. I've worked with a lot of teachers, and that is probably the most important. If the teacher isn't communicating what they expect from me, and it just turns out to be very difficult in the classroom. It's frustrating, and not only for me, but it's unfair to the students. I wouldn't know what to do with the student, and then all of a sudden, I need to come up with something out of my brain, and I don't know what the teacher is expecting from me.

Researcher: That goes into our next question, question #4. How are individual and team roles defined, and by who?

PI5: We have our roles in our classroom. It naturally happens I guess. Ummm... She'll give us our job requirements. And that's always good to know what your job

requirements are. And in my position you're required to lift a certain number of pounds. And also understanding lunch breaks, that goes along with it. And when your 15 minute breaks are . Those schedules are all printed up so we know. And honestly, there are days when we can't even take our 15 minute breaks because we are so busy, or someone may be absent and we don't have sub coverage for them. I mean I could be a "butthead" about it, and demand my 15 minute break, because I would have that right, but you know when you have a team you know that your responsibilities are. You don't wanna bring down your team. And you wanna for the safety of the kids.

Researcher: That's very honorable of you to be willing to do that, give up your breaks. But I'm curious, are the other paraeducators you work with willing to do that?

PI5: At least in our classroom, it's not a problem because we're a pretty good team. Even if I have to get away for a short period of time, and other staff will even come up to me and say, "You know, you look a little irritated or frustrated. Maybe you want to take a break?" They're very supportive of each other in our classroom.

Researcher: So there's a lot of flexibility in your classroom.

PI5: Ohhh yes. There is flexibility, and in all of that.

Researcher: Very good. Okay number 5. What do you believe is the role of the teacher in building team effectiveness?

PI5: Ummm.. Not afraid to jump in also. You know our teacher was a paraeducator before she was a teacher right? So she knows how to be a paraeducator. And in our field, we're not really appreciated as much. And a lot of people don't seem to appreciate

us, and they don't seem to know what we go through. But I feel when my teacher comes in and she helps, and or let's me go to do other things. Even when she comes in and works on goals with the student, so I can do other stuff to prepare for the class, I feel that also you know coming in and working with us. Not just her coming in and sitting at her desk. I know other teachers that just sit at that desk. You know I get it, because it takes a lot of time, and it takes a lot of thought. But I do notice that she does take the time after hours to do a lot of the paperwork. And when we have the kids in the classroom, it's about the kids that are there. She focuses on them.

Researcher: She sounds like a great teacher.

PI5: You know, it's the first year, where I just love coming to work everyday. She always shows her appreciation.

Researcher: The next question #6 What team building activities are implemented in the classroom to develop interaction (e.g. developing trust, addressing conflict, active listening.) between team members? There's no perfect class.

PI5: Well here's the thing. Even though it's been a great year, there's been some ups and downs. And when times are very difficult, our teacher is very quick to recognize you may be having a hard time. She will communicate with you. She may even say to take the day off, but as part of a team, it's hard to make that decision, because you know there may be no sub coverage for you. We are so short of sub aides, it makes it really difficult. And sometimes when you have a sub aide, it's just a lot. It's like having another student. It's more work.

We just went through some difficult situations, but she said to liven up the classroom someone bring like a snack to share with everyone. Because we have different cultures in our classrooms. I'm Hispanic, so I wanted to bring a Hispanic dish for everyone. Another aide is German, and she had planned to bring a German dish. It's just to bond us closer. And to just have that talk that's not work related. So we would know each other more on a personal bases. She does little things like that. She's really good about if I'm struggling with a goal or something, when working with a kid, she'll bring like an item or something to help me work with that kid better. She's good about teaching us how to teach the students.

Researcher: Okay, #7 what do you perceive are the barriers to your special day classroom's team effectiveness? You had already mentioned about scheduling, but is there something else that you can think of?

PI5: Yeah... Ummm.... Well, this is not a problem in our classroom, but attendance is a big issue. The kids don't miss a beat, but the staff in that classroom is really bad. It's just become that the paraprofessionals in that classroom are annoyed that they have to pick up the extra duties due to that one person's poor attendance. It's not fair, and it becomes a major burden on the others. It's a lot of work burdened on the others, especially, when they don't have a lot of help in the classroom to start off with. And then about trying to get a sub, or then the teacher has to come up with ways to work with the sub, or find ways to adjust her schedule for the team that's there. It makes it very difficult. It gets annoying, and you start thinking this isn't fair. It's frustrating.

Researcher: Are there any other barriers that you can think of. Like are there personality challenges that occur?

PI5: Yes, we do have someone with a very strong personality in our classroom. But I found once I got to know her, and her ways, I worked around her. Sometimes you need to be flexible with each other, and remember that not everyone is going to think the same as you. If you take the time of the day to learn that person, then it makes your job a lot easier.

When I started working with this aide, I wondered why she had the kids sitting separately from each other during lunch time. I kept thinking it wasn't fair, and why would she do that? But when I started asking questions to her, she told me because some of the students would try to grab other students' food, so to prevent this, she had them sitting in certain spots. She was just trying to prevent chaos, which had occurred before. I realized that sometimes things are done a certain way for a reason.

Researcher: Let's move on to question #8 what do you believe are the strategies that can improve team effectiveness in your special day classroom?

PI5: Ummm... I guess the thing I would think we need more of is trainings. I could not express more that we would need more trainings. I expressed to our leader that we needed more trainings, and she gave a training. It was like a generic instructional aide training handbook. And a lot of people do not realize that we have a lot of limitations. For example the amount of communication we have with parents. We're not supposed to be communicating with parents, but there are some aides, who think that's okay. In the training, they explained that. And when you have new aides working in the district, and they don't know the policy or the procedures, then it becomes a big problem when they want to blab their mouth to the parents. I've seen in the past, when we had those meetings, a lot of light bulbs will go off. Then they realize the right from the wrong. There are just things that they needed to know, that they had no clue about it.

One more thing I can think of is not enough prepping time with my teacher. The teacher has 2 prep days at the beginning of the school year, but we don't get to spend time with the teacher for that.

Researcher: You had said earlier that you get some planning time early in the day. Is that during district instructional day time, or before the start of the school day?

PI5: Yes. Our start time is 8:30, but we don't get kids off the bus until 46. So we have those few minutes to discuss the day. We're lucky to even have that time. I've worked at another school site, where I had no prep time. And I would want the teacher to communicate with me about the day. It doesn't seem fair. Another issues is the scheduling times of the aides' hours. It seems that we do our academics and goals in the morning, and we have two aides that come in the later part of the day. So at the end of the day it's more of elective type activities that require less supervision and support. And it is the morning where we need more help. It makes it difficult when the aides are scattered at different times. I guess that's a barrier to our program.

Researcher: Well that's all for our interview. Thank you so much for giving me your time.

PI5: Thank you. It was interesting to talk about it.

Participant Interview #6 – Paraeducator, M/S SDC

February 2, 2015 – 4:00 p.m.

Teacher

9 Paraeducators

19 Students

Researcher: Where going to go ahead. (question #1) What is the vision of your special day class team?

PI6: For the past six years in the classroom I'm working with severely disabled students, I would say the vision is to help these students with basic life skills, so that they can be somewhat functional in society.

Researcher: (question #2) Do you believe all team members, teacher and paraeducators, in the special day classroom you work in know the vision of the classroom? If no, explain why?

PI6: Oh, absolutely. We're all on the same page. You have to be in this class. I'm blessed with a fantastic teacher. In the past, it wasn't like that, but we all know what works, and what fits together.

Researcher: (Question #3) What do you believe are the teacher leadership skills necessary to build team effectiveness among your staff?

PI6: Well if you are specifically talking about a classroom with special needs, I think it's the experience that she needs. I believe working hands on, and the ability to take charge, because eventually, she is the one who is teaching us how to work with the students. Based on her education and experience, we haven't gone to a lot of trainings like she has, but an experienced teacher, I've seen it throughout all these years I've worked in special education, is the experience what helps with getting the students in where they need to be as far as job skills, and getting along with the team, and understanding our needs, and our frustrations. There will be times when we need help. We may not know how to go about in disciplining a student. If they have the experience, I believe it helps us to be better at our job [paraeducator]. We should be able to understand our position, and what to do, and what not to do.

Researcher: Okay... Question #4. How are individual and team roles defined, and by who?

PI6: Right now, this year, like I've said before, we've been blessed with a great teacher. And she has the experience, and comes from a background of family that has taught. And she loves her job. She'll already have a schedule that is broken down of who's doing what, and who's working with who. Each paraprofessional is assigned to a certain group, and we try to keep it at a weekly basis. And she'll have other side notes. Like I mentioned there are three other difficult students in the classroom. She'll try to pace it so she'll rotate them, so we won't be so burned out, or frustrated with that particular student. She has really good communication skills with us. She'll tell us if she has an IEP meeting, and if she has to leave the classroom. She'll assign people to take leadership roles in the classroom. She communicates in detail, and I love it.

Researcher: Okay, #5. What do you believe is the role of the teacher in building team effectiveness? I think you just mentioned that.

PI6: Yeah. Communication is prime in every level. Whether it's mild to moderate or moderate to severe. It's just communication, knowing what we need to do. It helps us, but ultimately helps the student have a better day.

Researcher: Okay #6. What team building activities are implemented in the classroom to develop interaction (e.g. developing trust, addressing conflict, active listening.) between team members?

PI6: Well... nothing is perfect in our classroom. There's a lot of women, and only one guy in the classroom. It can be very difficult working with a lot of women, but what she does is she will ask everyone's opinion, and she gives us options. She'll go with the majority of what we say. It's like with children. Do you want A or do you want B? She'll ask us. She'll discuss with us what the options are, and we'll discuss it. She is a very good leader, because we will feel our opinion is valued. And then we'll all come to an agreement. We're very fortunate there have not been a lot of disagreements this year.

Researcher: Okay, (question #7) What do you perceive are the barriers to your special day classroom's team effectiveness?

PI6: Scheduling is a big thing right now. That's a hard one to answer. We have two barriers going on right now, and I think our administrators are taking care of it. One is that it's hard for us to work in such a crowded space. Our classroom is extremely small, for the amount of students that we have in our classroom. I know the district is working with the administration to try to resolve that problem. I know maybe taking students off our caseload might happen, but not sure.

The other problem is trying to do breaks. We get a 30 minute lunch, and a 15 minute break. They cannot be taken together, and all 9 of us need to have our breaks and lunches. It's really difficult. There's a reason some of the students have one to ones. And when their one to one is on their lunch, or break, we need to make sure their student is covered. It is a big challenge. Sometimes two people need to go with a student for toileting, or may need to assist with one student on behavior. Sometimes kids may need their g-tube feeding or having a seizure, and they need extra attention at times. There may also be a classroom runner too. And if 3 staff members on their lunch, then it makes it very difficult to make sure all of the other students are appropriately covered. It's very difficult to keep the schedule going. A good thing, is my teacher is willing to step in, and take action to step in and help out.

Researcher: Okay, the last question. What do you believe are the strategies that can improve team effectiveness in your special day classroom?

PI6: What's happening now is on Wednesdays we have flex days. So the aides get to stay in the classroom, and we can discuss issues that have come up.

Researcher: So you're having on going meetings?

PI6: Yes, we'll meet every other Wednesday on flex days. I ride the bus home with a student, but I'll come back to the campus to work. We'll have about 15 to 20 minutes of time to meet with each other. It's really good, because we get to discuss so many concerns. Our teacher is really good about it.

Researcher: This ends our interview. Thank you very much for your time.

PI6: You're welcome. I'm glad I was able to help out.

Participant Interview #7 – Teacher M/S SDC

February 3, 2015 – 7:30a.m.

1 teacher

6 paraeducators

14 students

Researcher: What is the vision of your special day class team?

PI7: Ahhhh... Okay, the vision starts at the top. It's my vision, and then we share it. Fortunately we're all very on the same page. And of course it's to increase the student independence as much as possible, and to try to diminish that prompt dependency. And of course the other vision is to get the kids to be as engaged as much as possible with the life of the school. Not just staying in our classroom, but out there in the other parts of the school.

Researcher: Do you believe all team members, teacher and paraeducators, in the special day classroom you work in know the vision of the classroom? If no, explain why?

PI7: Yes, absolutely. We are on the same page.

Researcher: (question #3) What do you believe are the teacher leadership skills necessary to build team effectiveness among your staff?

PI7: We've got a big team. There's 6 paraeducators and myself. One of the major things is that you have to be really compassionate and understanding. You have to hold

the staff accountable, just like with students. You have to be there on the clock. You need to keep with a schedule. You have to look at them [paraeducators] as individuals. They have personal problems, personal lives. They have individual needs that you have to be compassionate about. But that doesn't give them excuses to not do their job really well.

Researcher: I see that you have a very strong personality with your staff. Do you address conflict with your staff right away?

PI7: Yes, I do. I do it right away. It has to be done immediately, and then you move on. I try to keep them from nit picking on each other, because they'll do that. And one of the things with a big staff is delegating individuals with specific tasks, and not allowing it to be overlapping, as they tend to become territorial over their duties. So making sure that the tasks are specific to specific individuals, their roles are it. If you have the roles overlapping, and then that really causes conflict, like I thought I was in charge of this or that. It can cause chaos. I'll have team meetings on Fridays. We'll have a staff meeting, and we'll have the kids play a game, or watch a short movie, so that we can meet. We'll have a team meeting to address any concerns. I try not to have them gossip about each other. If there is conflict, I try to handle it right away. I try not to get the administration involved. There is no training on how to manage a staff, but it's trial by error.

Researcher: Okay... question #4. How are individual and team roles defined, and by who?

PI7: Me. I assign them task. Everyone is in charge of different things. I don't have it in writing, but they know. I've reviewed with them their roles, and it's clear to them. What I have found is they want to be told what to do. They want direction. Very clear

expectations, and not micromanagement. Show me what you're doing, and I'll tell them how I want it. I feel micromanaging is insulting. Managing is different from micromanaging.

Researcher: What do you believe is the role of the teacher in building team effectiveness?

PI7: Clearly define the roles, and my expectations of what I want. We had a problem of "cross talking". Talking about personal business during class time. Turning their cell phones off is another one. These are things that I need to address clearly at the beginning of the year, and find that I have to repeat it throughout the year.

Researcher: What team building activities are implemented in the classroom to develop interaction (e.g. developing trust, addressing conflict, active listening.) between team members?

PI7: Staff meetings, and social things. We might go out to lunch. I've had them out to my house. We might have a gift exchange. Being interested in them as people. We'll do gift exchanges too. They have personal lives, and it's important to be understanding.

Researcher: What do you perceive are the barriers to your special day classroom's team effectiveness?

PI7: Nothing is perfect. Certain things can be annoying, but you have to let some things go. It can be frustrating, especially when they are late frequently. It gets frustrating for the other staff who have to pick up the slack. Also, scheduling is a big challenge in our

classroom. Trying to make sure they are given their breaks and lunch times. I try to let them go 2 at a time, so they don't have to eat alone.

Researcher: What do you believe are the strategies that can improve team effectiveness in your special day classroom?

PI7: Definitely team meetings. Staff meetings are huge. And respecting your team. Understanding that you, as the teacher, are making much more than the paraeducator, and treating them to lunch once in a while, is a way of showing them you care.

Researcher: Thank you so much for your time. It sounds like you are a strong leader in your classroom.

PI7: Thank you. I hope I helped!

Researcher: Yes, you did! Thank you.

Participant Interview #8 – Paraeducator, M/S SDC

February 3, 2015 – 9:45a.m.

1 teacher

6 paraeducators

14 students

Researcher: We'll go ahead and begin. Question # 1 is what is the vision of your special day class team?

PI8: I feel like we're trying to provide for our kids life skills. The ability to know what their income is. To get a job, and to use their money wisely. To be able at least to have functional skills, daily skills.

Researcher: Okay there's no right or wrong answer to the questions. I'm looking just to hear your perspective. Okay. Question #2 is do you believe all team members, teacher and paraeducators, in the special day classroom you work in know the vision of the classroom? If no, explain why?

PI8: In this classroom, I believe yes.

Researcher: Were there other classrooms, in which you felt they weren't on the same page, and they didn't know the vision? Why do you think they didn't know it?

PI8: Yeah, there have been classes in which I felt they didn't know we were on the same page. The staff didn't work as a team. Everything seemed disjointed, and unorganized.

Researcher: Okay, the next question, what do you believe are the teacher leadership skills necessary to build team effectiveness among your staff?

PI8: The teacher needs to be able to take control of any situation that arises. You may not know what may or may not arise. So you may have issues with the students, and sometimes you may have issues with the paraeducators. But our teacher is very good at predicting things that might happen, and stepping in before anything goes out of control. They just have to be very flexible, and take control of any situation.

Researcher: Alright, number 4. How are individual and team roles defined, and by who?

PI8: My thought as a paraeducator is whichever classroom I'm in, the teacher in charge defines the roles. It's their job to tell me what to do.

Researcher: Is it verbally communicated, or is it written out? Or does your team just kind of know what is expected of them?

PI8: In some instances when I worked with previous teachers, we would just go, and try to figure it out. That was in an instance in which the teacher felt she was not in charge of us. She was organized, but she just didn't want to make us feel like she was our boss. It was kinda like... "You can do whatever you want to do." It made it harder as a paraeducator for me.

Researcher: Was it that you felt clear expectations were not provided to you?

PI8: Yes, exactly. But that's not the case now. The teacher I work with now, is very direct and gives us clear directions of what to do with different students. It's very clear, and if you were not doing what she expected you to do, she would let you know not in a mean way, but like, "I really need you to do this, and that...", so you would understand what is expected of you.

Researcher: Very good. Okay number 5. What do you believe is the role of the teacher in building team effectiveness?

PI8: Well, I believe the teacher is the main coordinator of this. Without good leadership, it would be very difficult to handle a classroom.

Researcher: (Question #6) What team building activities are implemented in the classroom to develop interaction (e.g. developing trust, addressing conflict, active listening.) between team members?

PI8: When there are no student days, we'll do like a potluck, and just chat with each other to get to know each other better. If there is ever something that occurs, the teacher will always let us know, so we are on the same page. We'll have a short meeting, even if we all have to go into the kitchen, and leave the door open, or have the kids watch a video, while we meet. She'll communicate what's going on, especially when it's serious issues that we should be aware of. That way no one is left out of the loop.

Researcher: Okay, let's move on to number 7. What do you perceive are the barriers to your special day classroom's team effectiveness? There's never a perfect classroom.

PI8: So for example, frequently we won't get a sub. There's just not enough subs. 99% of the time, it's okay, and we'll just figure it out. But without the sub there, one of my students will go into another class [mainstreaming], and they can't go with out me. He, the student, will suffer, because he has to wait for me, as I'm waiting for the sub to show up, or for other aides to get off their break, because we're short staffed.

It impacts the classroom schedule. I know it sounds weird, because we have a large adult ratio, but still it does impact our program when someone is out, and there is no sub coverage.

Researcher: Great information. You are not the first to talk about this issue. Okay #8. What do you believe are the strategies that can improve team effectiveness in your special day classroom?

PI8: I guess if there were clear.... Well, for example, if my student doesn't finish their work. My consequence for them would be, "Well you'll have to do it by Friday." And then someone else might say, "Maybe you should do your work, and then you can have a candy." Then that student works to finish their work, and gets the candy. I guess, yeah, the end goal is met, but I guess we all have to be on the same page how we discipline the students.

Researcher: Are you saying how to work with each student? What is expected?

PI8: Yes, I guess I have worked in a room, in which consequences were clearly defined, and we stuck to them. I think it gives mixed messages when the consequences are not clearly defined.

Researcher: Thank you so much for sitting down with me. Have a great day!

PI8: Thank you for letting me be a part of it.