Challenging Behaviors: Perceived Training Needs of Special Education Paraprofessionals

A Dissertation by

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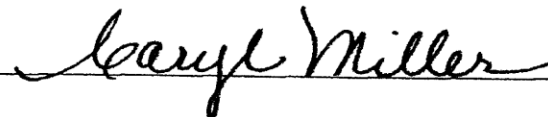Doctor in Organizational Leadership

The dissertation of Zhanna Preston is approved.

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favorite novel over and over again. He opened the door into the world of research and showed me how to bring along my favorite classical authors.

Lastly, I am grateful to work in the Murrieta Valley Unified School District under the leadership of our supportive and inspiring superintendent Patrick Kelley. Patrick Kelley and Assistant Superintendent Pamela Wilson have created an environment in which transformational change is not only possible but expected. I thank them for their confidence in me and for creating an inspirational work place. Although some people refer to their work as the "salt mines," I have always thought of it as "salted caramel".

ABSTRACT

Challenging Behaviors: Perceived Training Needs of Special Education Paraprofessionals

by Zhanna B. Preston

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to identify the most challenging and frequently occurring types of student behavioral problems that paraprofessionals in the K-12 public school setting encounter. In addition, the purpose of the study included identifying the most effective ways to prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the most challenging and frequently occurring student behaviors through effective professional development practices.

Methodology: The mixed methods study primarily involved collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data through on-line surveys of paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and school principals. Phenomenology and grounded theory elements served as the descriptive study's theoretical foundations. A policy Delphi method used an expert panel that represented a diverse group of public school districts in Riverside County, California.

Findings: Analysis of data revealed the 12 most challenging student behavior types, including eight most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting. Key topics and effective professional development delivery methods for special education paraprofessionals in the area of managing challenging behaviors were identified.

Conclusions: As a result of the study and review of prior research, an outline of suggested professional development activities was developed. Effective training delivery methods involving the principles of andragogy were also identified.

Recommendations: Schools and districts must (1) include paraprofessionals', teachers', and principals' input when developing professional development activities for special education paraprofessionals; (2) focus the behavioral training for paraprofessionals on the most challenging

and frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting; (3) apply principles of andragogy when providing professional development to paraprofessionals; (4) make a shift from one-day training events to on-going, systematic, research-based, consistent, relevant training that involves practice time, meaningful feedback, modeling, and activities aiming at the higher level thinking skills identified in Bloom's taxonomy.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, who give their love and support daily. My brother and I are eternally grateful for having the best childhood filled with enchanting memories, book discussions, trips to the Kazakh and Russian country-side, and delicious food.

They surround me with love and still make me feel like a princess to this day. They have encouraged me to work on my doctoral degree since high school and have never passed up an opportunity to remind me about it and to ask me if I needed any help with "that project." My brother and I could not wish for better parents.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my wonderful husband Jonathan and to my two sweet peas, Shannon Aisha and Hannah Naira, whom I love unconditionally. Thank you for your love that made it impossible to miss out on family events despite the painful price of sleepless laptop nights.

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CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

"If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts he shall end in certainties." Francis Bacon

Introduction

Public education today faces a number of challenges, each requiring a great degree of expertise and research-based practices to guide its initiatives to keep advancing forward. Closing the achievement gap and providing access to all students despite their individual differences or limited opportunities has long been a national goal. Providing quality education to pupils with disabilities, constituting 13% of all U.S. students (Levenson, 2012), typifies one challenge American public schools face (Levenson, 2012; Osborne & Russo, 2007). Special education has become one of the most complex and highly litigated areas of public education.

Special education, an integral part of general education, is the process of providing eligible students with disabilities between the ages of three through twenty two years with specialized instruction and services tailored to their exceptional needs (Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen, 2009). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal law governing special education, defines special education as

> specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including- (i) instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and (ii) instruction in physical education.
>
> (34 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 300.39 (a) (1)).

The IDEA defined eligible students as children having one of the thirteen qualifying handicapping conditions: (1) autism; (2) deaf-blindness; (3) deafness; (4) emotional disturbance; (5) hearing impairment; (6) mental retardation; (7) multiple disabilities; (8) orthopedic impairment, (9) other health impairment, (10) specific learning disability; (11) speech or language impairment; (l2) traumatic brain injury, (13) visual impairment (34 CFR, 300.8 (c)).

Hallahan, Kauffman, and Pullen (2009) referenced Huefner (2006) and described specialized instruction as "specially designed instruction that meets the unusual needs of an exceptional student" (p. 13), and which may require "special materials, teaching techniques, or equipment and/or facilities" (p. 13). Specialized instruction may include providing regular education curriculum with accommodations and modifications using instructional delivery methods tailored to the individual needs of students with disabilities. Special education related services comprise a non-exhaustive list of "related services which means transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as required to assist a child with a disability to benefit special education" (34, CFR, 300.34 (a)). Local Education Agencies (LEAs) may provide special education students with other related services including "speech-language pathology and audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, including rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes" (34 CFR, 300.34 (a)). Either as a related special education service or a support provided per the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) LEAs may assign a personal paraprofessional or a "one-to-one aide" (OAH Case No. 2013120111, 2014, p. 2; OAH Case No. 2011110416., 2012, p. 5;) to an eligible child with a disability.

Driven to meet a number of compliance standards mandated by federal/state laws and required to utilize highly qualified and trained personnel to provide "special materials, teaching techniques, or equipment and/or facilities" (Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen, 2009, p. 12), special education has become the "most expensive way to help struggling students" (Levenson, 2012, p. 119).

Background

While being one of the "major challenges facing educators today" (Osborne & Russo, 2007, p. 1), special education has not been always incorporated into the American education system. In the United States, specialized instruction and services began emerging in the second half of the 19th century by serving children with visual and hearing impairments (Osborne & Russo, 2007). After a century-long battle lead by "advocates of the disabled to gain equal rights" (Osborne & Russo, 2007, p. 7) and as a "direct result of the civil rights movement" (Osborne & Russo, 2007, p. 7), the federal government enacted a legal mandate to provide students with disabilities the right to education (Yell, 2012) by passing the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. In 1990, the statute was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and was later reauthorized in 1997 and 2004. Legislative actions and subsequent case law turned special education into the most highly litigated area of education governed by an "elaborate and extensive body of statues, regulations, and court decisions" (Yell, 2012, p. 12), caused its expansion, and complicated the duties its providers performed. Sparked by the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) requirement of the 1991 federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act and mandated increased accountability imposed by IDEA 2004, special education case law further emphasized the obligation for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to supply adequately trained personnel to provide special education services. Adequate training of staff

providing special education services has been brought as an issue for due process hearings (OAH Case No. N 2007020786, 2007; OAH Case No. N 2005120400, 2006; OAH Case No. 2010020281, 2010).

The NCLB pressure to increase all subgroups' student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002) and the IDEA mandate to furnish a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with a wide variety of medical, behavioral, social-emotional, and learning disorders (U.S. Department of Education, 2014) require a cadre of well trained teachers, paraprofessionals, nurses, therapists, administrators and other staff. Special education in the United States today demands that LEAs provide education access to students with special needs through a continuum of placement options, including (a) general education classes at the child's home school, (b) specialized schools, (c) residential treatment facilities, (d) hospitals, and (e) the home setting (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009). Although the specialization of the placement varies depending on where the student receives the special education services, the requirement that all children receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) applies to all individualized education programs (IEPs). Figure 1 below, adapted from Hallahan and Kauffman's (2006, p. 17) visual representation of special education placements, illustrates the variety of placements children with special needs may experience while receiving specialized instruction and/or services.

Figure 1. Special education program options.

| Residential school |
| Hospital setting |
| Homebound instruction |
| Special day class |
| Resource room/Pull-out services |
| Regular classroom with consultation/push-in services |
| Regular Classroom |
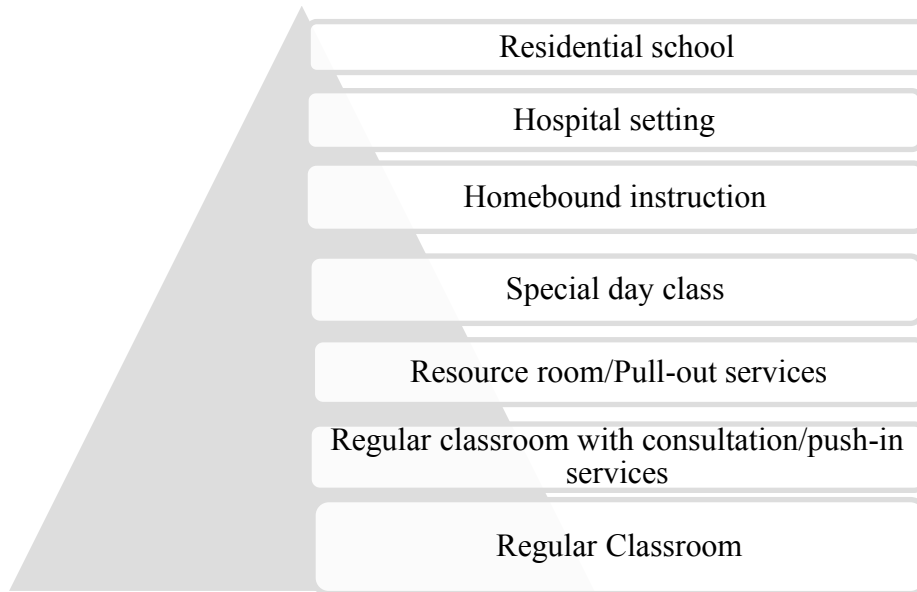
The figure provides a visual representation of the seven special education placement options available for students with disabilities.

Paraprofessionals in Special Education

A variety of credentialed and non-credentialed staff consisting of teachers, paraprofessionals, and speech, occupational, physical, mental health, behavioral and other therapists afford specialized instruction and services to special education students. The number of special education staff has escalated to serve the increasing population of special education students, but paraprofessionals specifically experienced remarkable growth from 525,000 employees in 2003 (Likins, 2003) to over 700,000 in 2006, (Levenson, 2012) and 830,000 in 2014 (Finkel, 2014).

Many special education placement options on the continuum of services are being staffed by special education paraprofessionals assisting teachers in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Some paraprofessionals are assigned to groups of students who attend general

education classes, resource specialist programs (RSPs), and/or special day classes (SDCs), and some provide one-to-one services to individual students. Special education paraprofessionals are not restricted to specific placements and may be assigned to students in the regular education environment, resource rooms, and specialized classes. They may work in specialized schools and provide services to pupils in hospitals, residential treatment centers, and students' homes. The Code of Federal Regulations (Code of Federal Regulations § 300.156 (iii), 2014) allows paraprofessionals to deliver special education related services in accordance with the requirements set out in state laws:

(iii) Allow paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with State law, regulation, or written policy, in meeting the requirements of this part to be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services under this part to children with disabilities. (Code of Federal Regulations § 300.156 (iii)),

The Term Paraprofessional

The term "paraprofessional," coined by Anna Lou Picket (Ashbacker & Morgan, 2001), is not used consistently and is often substituted with "teacher's aide", "teacher's assistant", "interventionist", "paraeducator", "behavioral aide", "health aide", "intensive behavior intervention (IBI) aide", "applied behavior analysis (ABA) aide", "designated instruction service (DIS) aide," "related service (RS) aide," "instructional aide," "aide," or "para." Giles (2010) posited that the term "paraprofessional," more commonly used in the past ten years, reflected "a position with increased professional expectations" (p. 9) and has supplanted the popular title of "paraeducator". The National Education Association (NEA) defined the term paraeducator as "a school employee who works alongside and under the supervision of a licensed or certificated educator to support and assist in providing instructional and other services to children, youth, and

their families" (National Association of Education/NEA, 2014). The term "paraprofessional" is referenced in NCLB (2001) and has prevalently surfaced in more recent literature (Giangreco et al., 2004; Causton-Theoharis et al., 2007; Cobb, 2007; Lane, Carter, & Sisco, 2012; Wenger et al., 2004). The inconsistency of the paraprofessional's title is ubiquitous across districts, states, and even foreign countries. The current study primarily employed the terms "paraprofessional" and "paraeducator." However, other terms describing paraprofessionals appeared in the study and are used interchangeably due the inconsistent use of various titles applied to this group of school district employees throughout literature.

The Growing Number of Paraprofessionals

While the number of paraprofessionals has grown significantly in the past five to fifteen years (Giangreco et al., 2004; Hawkins, 2004; Levenson, 2012; Ashbacker & Morgan, 2001), the prevailing gender of this employee group (90%) remains to be female (Ashbacker & Morgan, 2001). School districts continue adding paraprofessionals to their staffs to accommodate the increase of students who exhibit severe behaviors, to maintain safety, and to reduce disruptions in their classrooms, playgrounds, buses, and bus loops (Crone & Horner, 2003; Levenson, 2012). Levenson (2012) found the process of hiring "an ever-expanding army of paraprofessionals" (p. 89), an attempt to include students with behavioral needs in their least restrictive environments, to be a Band-Aid fix achieved through a low cost employee. Notwithstanding the employees' low cost, the sheer numbers of this employee group greatly affects local education agencies' (LEAs) budgets.

Cost of Utilizing Paraprofessionals for Behavior Support

Staffing costs are one of the highest public school districts' expenditures that can be spiraled by an increase of paraprofessionals. The growth is explained by the legal mandate of instructing the growing number of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms, or the least restrictive environment (LRE), which often requires additional supports and services, some of which include the adding of paraprofessionals as classroom support (Salisbury & Chambers, 1994; Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 1999; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). Harris (2012) referenced the 2011 National Education Association, highlighting the

> …continual increase in enrollment of students in special education programs throughout the United States with three out of every four students with an identified educational disability spending part or all of their school day in a general education classroom outside of the special education setting, allowing students with disabilities to access their least restrictive learning environment. (Harris, p. 2)

Levenson (2012), after analyzing paraprofessionals' roles in posing challenges for school budgets, recommended strategies to cut expenditures through focusing special educators on cost effective practices, strengthening general education interventions as preventative measures, defining clear criteria for special education eligibility, and creating cross departmental teams to increase collaboration and accountability within organizations. He estimated the number of paraprofessionals assigned to address behavioral needs to compose "one third to one-half of all aides" (p. 90), costing a midsize district 1.5 million dollars and causing an urban district to spend "10 million on aides for behavioral support" (p. 90) annually. Giangreco et al. (2004) suggested alternative strategies to using paraprofessionals and recommended a "three component administrative model for effective utilization of paraprofessionals" (p. 83) that includes

supporting the paraprofessionals through clarifying their roles and providing orientation,

training, and supervision. Escalating numbers of paraprofessionals and costs associated with

their growth prompts the consideration of alternative solutions to employing paraprofessionals

(Giangreco et al., 2004; Levenson, 2012) or investing in efforts to maximize their effectiveness

(Giangreco et al., 2004).

The Role of the Paraprofessional

The traditional role of special education paraeducators is usually viewed as supporting

general and special education teachers in delivering instruction by working with students in

individual or small group settings, collecting data, and assisting with daily living skills (Villareal,

2010). Levenson (2011) suggested rethinking the role of paraprofessionals. The recent

nationwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) also referred to as the School-

-wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (SWPBIS) movement in education and

team-centered approach to implementing individual behavioral supports (Positive Environments,

Networks of Trainers/PENT, 2014) stressed the importance of utilizing a variety of school staff

to support students with social, emotional, and behavioral needs (Crone & Horner, 2003).

Districts are beginning to value special education paraprofessionals' roles in effectuating PBIS

and are starting to include them in their PBIS training.

Paraprofessionals, whose roles and responsibilities are "related to academic achievement

and school safety" (NEA, 2014) are often required to implement complex individual behavior

supports, such as positive behavior intervention plans (PBIPs), some of which involve

redirecting students to use specific behavioral strategies, teaching children social skills, and

utilizing physical restraints designed to manage dangerous behaviors. Figure 2 below visually

displays the sources of increased expectations for paraprofessionals, expectations that

increasingly complicate their roles and engender the need for effective staff development.

Figure 2. Summary of Factors Leading to the Need for a Comprehensive, Systematic, Relevant, and Evidence-based Staff Development for Special Education Paraprofessionals.

Reauthorized IDEA (1997, 2004)	→	Clarification of rights of students with disabilities and LEA responsibilities	→		
NCLB (2001)	→	Increased accountability	→	Increased expectations for paraprofessionals require a higher level skill set	Need for systematic, comprehensive, relevant, and evidence-based staff development
		Need for highly qualified special staff	→		
Special education case law	→	Districts need to supply trained paraprofessionals	→		
Focus on non-academic supports (LCAP, PBIS)	→	All staff, including paraprofessionals, provides social and behavioral supports to students	→		

Figure 2 illustrates the need for paraprofessional training dictated by their increasingly

complicated job duties.

It is important to understand the recently evolved role of the special education paraprofessional and be prepared to offer a comprehensive, relevant, evidence-based, and systematic professional development for this group of public school professionals. The study explored training needs of paraprofessionals in the area of addressing student behavior as perceived by paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals.

Statement of the Research Problem

Special education paraprofessionals constitute a large human resource that helps deliver special education. Levenson (2012) estimated that special education paraprofessionals compose $1/4^{th}$ to $1/3^{rd}$ of all district employed staff, and play "increasingly prominent roles in the education of students with disabilities" (Giangreco et el., 1997, p. 7). Ashbacker and Morgan (2001) observed growth in the numbers of special education programs in response to the increasing enrollment of students with disabilities. It is understandable that the number of paraprofessionals has grown with the increase of special education students whose prevalence has risen from 10% (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006) to 13% of all students (Levenson, 2012). Hawkins (2004) attributed the ballooning numbers of special education paraprofessionals to the "enactment of the sweeping legislations that impacted the field of special education since 1994" (p. 1) and emphasized the urgent need to train people who work closely with students with special needs.

Likins (2003) emphasized the role IDEA played in turning "appropriate training, skill development, and supervision of paraprofessionals who work with students with disabilities" (p. 10) into a "necessity, not an option" (p. 10). Special education paraprofessionals are not the only group that requires more training to provide special education services. Giangreco (2003) discovered that many educators feel unprepared to address the needs of students with disabilities.

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Special education paraprofessional training plays a critical role in improving student achievement (Marzano, 2001), increasing positive interactions between students, and providing a high quality of life for students with disabilities (Binham, Spooner, & Browder, 2007). DuFour and Eaker (1998) believed paraprofessional training would assist in closing educational gaps between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. Smerker-Bass (2010) linked the "implementation of a systematic program for human capital development, such as training"

(p. 207) to "a well-designed process" (p. 207), differentiating it from "random acts of dispensing knowledge" (p. 207). Smerker-Bass (2010) equated investing in quality professional development of paraeducators to the "value and strengths they bring to the system" (p. 210) and further argued that a "skilled and educated workforce empowers school districts and state education systems to meet their objectives" (p. 210). Villareal (2010) found the understanding of paraprofessionals' training needs to be a required component of designing, implementing, and evaluating their staff development.

Researchers recognized the need for special education paraprofessional training (Giangreco et al., 2004; Causton-Theoharis et al., 2007; Cobb, 2007) and found it "doubtful" Brown et al., 1999, p. 251) for them to receive the required training. In many cases, special education paraprofessionals do not receive training prior to working with special education students. Local education agencies (LEAs) struggle to provide staff development to paraeducators due to budgetary concerns and lack of comprehensive and evidence-based training programs. Many paraprofessionals acknowledge "moderate levels of understanding across core knowledge standards" (Carter, 2009, p. 344) but at the same time recognize "additional training needs" (p. 344). Carter et al. (2009) recognized the "widespread and expanding use of paraprofessionals within special education" (p. 355) and believed "the need for effective training

and supervision models" (p. 355) to be "pressing" (p.355). Giangreco, Broer and Edelman (1999) referenced paraprofessionals as the "least trained adults with students who have the most complex learning challenges" (p. 282).

The content and delivery of special education paraprofessionals' training must be carefully analyzed. Professional development, critical to paraeducators' performance, must be evaluated as a critical component of a successful learning process. Kirk-Martinez (2011) proposed rethinking "the manner in which districts provide professional development" (p. 26) to offer teachers and paraeducators "new learning and practice within the classrooms" (p. 26).

Students with disabilities have a variety of needs, including behavioral, resulting from their disabilities. The exposure of paraprofessionals' to complex student behavior, such as "tantrums, self-injury, aggression toward others, and property destruction" (Binham, Spooner, & Browder, 2007, p. 339) require behavior management training.

While a plethora of literature exists on the topic of special education paraprofessionals (Pickett et al, 2003), there is a gap in current research investigating the scope and method of providing paraprofessionals with essential training on managing student behavior. The study analyzed paraprofessionals' training needs and offer LEAs a roadmap to develop comprehensive, strategic, systematic, and relevant staff development for this underutilized and undertrained group of front line employees.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study was to identify the most challenging and most frequently occurring types of behavioral problems encountered by paraprofessionals in the K-12 public school setting.

In addition, the purpose of the study included the identification of most effective ways of preparing special education paraprofessionals to manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors through effective staff development practices.

Research Questions

The Quality of Research Questions

The quality of research questions, which can be grouped into three categories: (a) descriptive, (b) relationship, and (c) difference (McMilllan & Schumacher, 2006) determines the impact the research may have on the state of knowledge. Research questions must be feasible, clear, and researchable (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). They may be used to "fill a gap in research in prior knowledge, to seek new knowledge, to identify the causes of some phenomenon, or to formally test a hypothesis" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 7). The study investigated three research questions to fill the gap in current research for the purpose of identifying training needs of paraeducators as perceived by special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals/administrators.

Research Questions

The study investigated the following research questions:

1. What student behaviors managed by special education paraprofessionals in the k-12 setting are the most challenging and most frequently occurring?

2. What training content will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting?

3. What effective training delivery methods will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting?

Survey Questions Posed in Three Rounds

The three study participant groups, including special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals, were offered the same electronic survey questions. For the purposes of data aggregation and analysis each group received separate links to the survey rounds. The following three rounds of questions were presented to the study population:

Special education paraprofessionals.

Round 1:

RQ1: Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 setting. (A challenging behavior is "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers or adults (Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5)).

Round 2:

RQ2: Of the challenging behavioral types identified in Round One, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one being the least challenging and 5 being the most challenging), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.

RQ3: Of the behavior types identified in Round One, using a Likert scale (with one being the least frequent and 5 being the most frequent), please rate the level of frequency of each behavior type.

Round 3:

RQ4: Please share KEY CONCEPTS, BIG IDEAS, TOPICS you believe must be included in professional development activities that would best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the types of behaviors identified through Rounds One & Two. The behavior types identified in Rounds One & Two are included below with examples provided by participants.

RQ5: Please list training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3. Please share training delivery components, such as lecture/presentation formats, on-the-job training, modeling, providing on going feedback, coaching, or any other ideas you may have that will make the training effective.

Special education teachers

Round 1:

RQ1: RQ 1. Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 setting. (A challenging behavior is "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers or adults (Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5)).

Round 2:

RQ2: Of the challenging behavioral types identified in Round One, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one being the least challenging and 5 being the most challenging), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.

RQ3: Of the behavior types identified in Round One, using a Likert scale (with one being the least frequent and 5 being the most frequent), please rate the level of frequency of each behavior type.

Round 3:

RQ4: Please share KEY CONCEPTS, BIG IDEAS, TOPICS you believe must be included in professional development activities that would best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the types of behaviors identified through Rounds One & Two. The behavior types identified in Rounds One & Two are included below with examples provided by participants.

RQ5: Please list training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3. Please share training delivery components, such as lecture/presentation formats, on-the-job training, modeling, providing on going feedback, coaching, or any other ideas you may have that will make the training effective.

Principals

Round 1:

RQ1: RQ 1. Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 setting. (A challenging behavior is "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers or adults (Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5)).

Round 2:

RQ2: Of the challenging behavioral types identified in Round One, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one being the least challenging and 5 being the most challenging), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.

RQ3: Of the behavior types identified in Round One, using a Likert scale (with one being the least frequent and 5 being the most frequent), please rate the level of frequency of each behavior type.

Round 3:

RQ4: Please share KEY CONCEPTS, BIG IDEAS, TOPICS you believe must be included in professional development activities that would best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the types of behaviors identified through Rounds One & Two. The behavior types identified in Rounds One & Two are included below with examples provided by participants.

RQ5: Please list training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3. Please share training delivery components, such as lecture/presentation formats, on-the-job training, modeling, providing on going feedback, coaching, or any other ideas you may have that will make the training effective.

Evolution of Research Questions

It is not uncommon for research questions to evolve throughout the research, allowing emergent themes to probe the collection of additional data. Research questions are "continuously formulated throughout the data collection and analysis processes" (Rumrill & Cook, 2001, p.

167), allowing the researcher to "follow the lead of research participants rather than impose his or her perspectives" (p. 167) and obtain "information relevant to the participants' own experiences" (p. 167). The study used data from the first round of the electronic survey for formulating questions posed for study participants in Rounds 1 and 2.

Significance of the Problem

The study's significance lies in its ability to contribute to and advance educational practices in the field of special education. McMillan And Schumacher (2001) measured a study's significance by its contribution to theory, practice, policy, social issues, and action. The significance of the study is based on its contribution to the existing practice of training paraprofessionals and in propounding recommendations for developing comprehensive effective training modules derived from conducted research.

Crone and Horner (2003) defined student disruption and aggression as a national problem of U.S. education that leads students to harm themselves and poses "multiple challenges to their administrators, teachers, and fellow classmates" (p. 3), taking valuable time away from administrators and interrupting instruction of other students. Buffum, Mattos, and Webber (2009) found behavior and academic achievement to be "inextricably linked" (p. 111) and a student's success "directly related to the student's attention, engagement, and behavior" (p. 111). Sugai and Horner (2003) estimated that 15% of all students require a moderate level of behavior remediation and 5% need specialized behavior approaches dictated by their individualized behavior plans. Sugai and Horner (2003) identified the "incidence and severity of serious behavior" (p. 11) as a threat to effective education and found that disruptive and dangerous behaviors compromise "the fundamental ability of our schools to educate children" (p.11). Human behaviors are complex and highly individualized, leading to some behavioral strategies

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working for some children and being ineffective with others, and require high level skills to address them effectively (Crone & Horner, 2003). Effectiveness in managing student behavior can be achieved through effective training. The current study focused on paraprofessionals' training needs in the area of student behavior.

American schools highly depend on paraprofessionals to manage disruptive student behavior. The growing work force is expected to directly work with students, is often assigned to work with the most challenging students, and is expected to manage their disruptive behaviors (Levenson, 2012; Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Giles (2010) spotlighted the "steady increase of paraprofessional service in the field of special education" (p. 11) and further referenced the United States Department of Education (2007), Devlin (2005), and National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education/NCPSE (2005) to show the dependence of at least one third of teachers on the assistance of paraprofessionals, 70% to 90% of whom are untrained. Researchers (Gonzalez-Lopez, 2007; Giangreco et al., 2004) emphasized the need for paraprofessionals to have specialized knowledge to adequately serve students with a variety of special needs resulting from a "full range of disabilities" (Giangreco et al., 2004, p. 82).

A plethora of literature and resources demonstrates problems related to undertrained paraeducators and emphasizes the need for quality training for paraprofessionals (Carter, 2009; Likins, 2003). Carter et al. (2009) found the "need for rigorous research directed toward understanding what information and strategies should be conveyed to paraprofessionals and the most effective approaches for delivering that content to maximize educational outcomes for students with disabilities" (p.357) to remain pressing." Likins (2003) established a link between systematic, on-going competency-based training for paraeducators and increased efficiency. It is clear that well trained and efficient paraprofessionals have the potential to offer crucial support

to students, teachers, and administrators, yet the lack of skilled paraprofessionals remains a problem today.

Apprehending teachers', administrators', and paraprofessionals' views about training needs supports the development of a comprehensive list of training topics and identifying effective staff development delivery methods. A detailed analysis of the three population groups' perceptions through quantitative and qualitative methods offered an in-depth evaluation of the specific paraprofessional training issues pertaining to student behavior.

Definitions

Special education is notorious for using acronyms and specialized jargon. Some special education terms do not have consistent meanings throughout literature and practice. It was necessary to clarify the terms used throughout the study. Definitions of key terms commonly used in special education are provided below.

Autism

> One of the five autism spectrum disorders; characterized by extreme withdrawal and impairment in communication; other common characteristics are stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences; usually evident before age of 3 years; a pervasive developmental disability characterized by extreme withdrawal, cognitive deficits, language disorders, self-stimulation, and onset before the age of 30 months. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 566)

Behavior management

Strategies and techniques used to increase desirable behavior and decrease undesirable behavior. May be applied in the classroom, home, or other environment. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 566)

Behavior modification

Systematic control of environmental events, especially of consequences, to produce specific changes in observable responses. May include reinforcement, punishment, modeling, self-instruction, desensitization, guided practice, or any other technique for strengthening or eliminating a particular response. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 566)

Continuum of alternative placements (CAP) or the Continuum of program options.

The full range of alternative placements, from those assumed to be least restrictive to those considered most restrictive; the continuum ranges from general education classrooms in neighborhood schools to resource rooms, self-contained classes, special day schools, residential schools, hospital schools, and home instruction. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 567)

Challenging behavior

A challenging behavior is "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers or adults (Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5)).

Daily living skills

Skills required for living independently, such as dressing, toileting, bathing, cooking, and other typical daily activities of nondisabled adults. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 568)

Developmental delay

A term often used to encompass a variety of disabilities of infants or young children indicating that they are significantly behind the norm for development in one or more areas such as motor development, cognitive development, or language. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 568)

Differentiated instruction

Instruction varied to meet the needs of all students. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 566)

Disability rights movement

Patterned after the civil rights movement of the 1960s, this is a loosely organized effort to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities through lobbying legislators and other activities.

Executive functioning

The ability to regulate one's behavior through working memory, inner speech, control of emotions and arousal levels, and analysis of problem and communication of problem

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solutions to others; delayed or impaired in people with ADHD. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 569)

Externalizing

Acting out behavior; aggressive or disruptive behavior that is observable as behavior directed toward others. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 569)

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

The primary intent of federal special education law, that the education of all children with disabilities will in all cases be free of cost to parents (i.e. at public expense) and appropriate for the particular student. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 569)

Full inclusion

All students with disabilities are placed in their neighborhood schools in general education classrooms for the entire day; general education teachers have the primary responsibility for students with disabilities. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 569)

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)

Evaluation that consists of finding out the consequences (what purpose the behavior serves), antecedents (what triggers the behavior), and setting events (contextual factors) that maintain inappropriate behavior. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 569)

Hidden curriculum/Prosocial skills

The dos and don'ts of social interactions that most people learn incidentally or with little instruction but that remain hidden for those with Asperger syndrome. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 570)

Home-based program

A program delivered primarily in a student's home rather than in a school or center. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 570)

Individualized Education Program (IEP*)*

IDEA requires an IEP to be drawn up by the educational team for each exceptional child; the IEP must include a statement of present educational performance, instructional goals, educational services to be provided, and criteria and procedures for determining that the instructional objectives are being met. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 570)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was enacted in 1990 and reauthorized in 1997, and 2004; it replaced PL 94-142, enacted in 1975. This federal law requires that to receive funds under the act, every school system in the nation must provide a free, appropriate public education for every child between the ages of three and twenty-one, regardless of how or how seriously he or she may be disabled. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p.570)

Internalizing (internalized behaviors)

Acting-in behavior; anxiety, fearfulness, withdrawal, and other indications of an

individual's mood or internal state. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 570)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

A legal term referring to the fact that exceptional children must be educated in as normal

an environment as possible. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 571)

Positive Behavior Intervention Plans (PBIPs)

A plan for changing behavior with an emphasis on positive reinforcement (rewarding)

procedures. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 573)

Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS*)*

Positive reinforcement (rewarding) procedures intended to support a student's

appropriate or desirable behavior. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 573)

Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) or School-wide Positive Behavioral

Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)

Systematic use of the science of behavior to find ways of supporting desirable behavior

rather than punishing the undesirable behavior; positive reinforcement (rewarding)

procedures that are intended to support a student's appropriate or desirable behavior.

(Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 573)

Resource specialist program

The resource specialist program provides students with disabilities pursuant to California Education Code §56362 specialized instruction, consultation, and training to students and staff working with children with special needs. The specialized instruction may be provided inside and outside the general education classroom.

Response-to-Intervention (RtI)

A way of determining whether a student has a learning disability; increasingly intensive levels of instructional intervention are delivered, and if the student does not achieve, at some point, he or she is determined to have a learning disability or is referred for special education evaluation. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 574)

Self-injurious behavior (SIB)

Behavior causing injury or mutilation of oneself, such as self-biting or head-banging; usually seen in individuals with severe and multiple disabilities. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 574)

Self-monitoring

A type of cognitive training technique that requires individuals to keep track of their own behavior. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 574)

Self-regulation

Refers generally to a person's ability to regulate his or her own behavior (e.g. to employ strategies to help in a problem-solving situation); an area of difficulty for persons who are intellectually disabled. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 574)

Self-stimulatory behavior

Any repetitive, stereotyped activity that seems only to provide sensory feedback. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 574)

Special day class (SDC)

§56364.2 (a) Special classes that serve pupils with similar and more intensive educational needs shall be available. The special classes may enroll pupils only when the nature or severity of the disability of the individual with exceptional needs is such that education in the regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services, including curriculum modification and behavioral support, cannot be achieved satisfactorily. These requirements also apply to separate schooling, or other removal of individuals with exceptional needs from the regular educational environment. (California Education Code §56364.2.(a))

Delimitations

This study was delimited to special education teachers, principals, and special education paraprofessionals employed by 23 school districts in Riverside County CA.

Organization of the Study

The research used a mixed methods inquiry approach that was conducted by surveying a Delphi-style expert panel of study participants. The mixed methods of inquiry involved the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. The study involved three stages: (a) population and sample selection, (b) carrying out research, and (c) data analysis. The research utilized a three round anonymous electronic survey focused on training special education (SE) paraprofessionals to manage student behavior. Permissions from LEAs to conduct research in their organizations and permissions from individuals to participating in the study were obtained. A field test of the survey questions was conducted using a field test expert panel for the purpose of increasing the validity and reliability of the survey questions. After the field test completed, the study participants were selected from Riverside County districts agreeing to participate in the study. SE administrators from districts participating in the study were requested to identify SE teachers, principals, and paraprofessionals who met the delimitating criteria for study participation. Each SE administrator selected two teachers, two principals, and two paraprofessionals. After the selected study participants agreed to participate in the research, the data collection process began by inviting the individuals to take part in an anonymous electronic survey.

Chapter 2 includes a review of literature that addresses the research topic, analyzes previous research, and shows its connection to the current study. Chapter 3 provides an overview of research in education, discusses qualitative and quantitative paradigms, reviews theoretical foundations for the study, explains the study's credibility and data collection procedures, and presents the study's limitations. Chapter 4 analyzes the data collected through

research and presents its findings. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings, discusses their implications, and proposes directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"Beware of the person of one book." Thomas Aquinas

Introduction

Similar to many researchers commencing their investigations with a review of existing literature (Rumrill & Cook, 2001), the current research began with the review of available literature on the topic of professional development for special education paraprofessionals. Creswell (2008) defined a literature review as summarizing articles, books, and documents to describe the past and current state of research, organizing sources into topics, and developing a need for the study. Review of literature serves several purposes, including making the researcher an expert in his or her area (Roberts, 2010), sharpening the thinking process (Cone, Foster, 2006), finding connections to the current study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003), and developing the research hypothesis (Creswell, 2008; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Although positing that thorough research is a "vital part of the research process providing basis for a well-designed study" (Roberts, 2010, p. 86), Roberts cautioned researchers to resist the temptation of analyzing all available literature on the topic and advised researchers to be selective about the documents they choose. Roberts (2010) identified the following main purposes when reviewing literature: (a) developing cutting edge expertise on the topic, (b) establishing a precise focus of the study, (c) identifying its key variables, (d) providing a historical background, and (e) determining relationships between the findings of the study and those discovered through prior research and other documents. Following these aims guided this literature review, the purpose of which was to analyze available documents devoted to training special education paraprofessionals on student behavior management.

The literature reviewed for the study involved a purposeful selection process determined largely by its topic, research questions, scope, and purpose. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) extended the meaning of analyzing literature to evaluating the work "in terms of its relevance to the research question of interest" (p. 71). The literature review was not a static element of the study; it evolved and expanded throughout the period of developing the research. A portion of the literature review was conducted simultaneously with the data collection process due to new information obtained through surveying the experts, which dictated additional probes into available literature sources on newly emerged themes. Patton (2002) cautioned qualitative researchers against developing a bias from the literature review and reducing the "openness to whatever emerges in the field" (p. 226). Patton (2002) referenced Marshall and Grossman (1989) by describing the simultaneous process of conducting the literature review with collecting data as "permitting a creative interplay among the processes" (p. 226).

Selecting the literature sources started with deconstructing the research topic and involved identifying the following four key related areas: (a) special education overview, (b) overview of paraprofessionals in special education, (c) behavior management in schools and (d) training needs of paraprofessionals. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) suggested "formulating search terms (key words and phrases) pertinent to the problem or question of interest" (p. 71), and referred to as descriptors, or "the most important words in the problem statement" (p. 75). Although an abundance of resources and research was found in the literature review in the areas of special education, behavior management, and public school professional development, a gap was identified in the area of training special education paraprofessionals to manage student behavior. Information obtained through the literature review was grouped into several thematic categories represented in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Literature review emerging themes

- Historical Background
- Legal Mandates
- Current State

a) Special Education Overview

b) Overview of Paraprofessionals in Special Education

- The Paraprofessional Title
- Paraprofessional's Duties
- Evolution of Duties
- Need for Paraprofessional Training

BEHAVIORAL TRAINING NEEDS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAPROFESSIONALS

d) Training Needs of Paraprofessionals

c) Behavior Management in Schools

- Current State
- Positive and Negative impact
- Principles of Adult Learning
- Growth Mindset
- Types ofChallenging Behaviors

- Nation-wide Problem
- Impact on School Accountability
- Individual Behavioral Supports
- School-wide behavioral supports

Figure 3 serves as a visual representation of the four thematic categories pertaining to SE

paraprofessional development found through the review of literature.

Special Education Overview

Students with disabilities have the same right to access education as their peers without

disabilities. In 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren proclaimed it is "doubtful that any child may

reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education" (*Brown

v. Board of Education*, 1954, p. 493), and stressed the need for this right to be provided to all

students on equal terms, meaning an opportunity for all students to access public education in the

same manner. Though being "viewed as a birthright" (Yell, 2012, p. 45) throughout the history of the United States, the opportunity to access education has not always been available to students with disabilities. The continuous and "tireless efforts of parents and advocacy groups" (Yell, 2012, p. 53) led to major changes in special education legislation and regulatory practices.

Quality education is afforded to students with disabilities by federal legislation, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), No Child Left Behind (NCLB), *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Brown v. Board of Education 347 U.S. 483 (1954)), and other case law. The civil rights movement and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Brown v. Board of Education 347 U.S. 483 (1954) p. 60) especially formed the foundation for changes in legislation, ensuring that students with disabilities received "quality programming" (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, p. 60).

Legal Mandates

Special education is governed by federal laws and applicable state laws. Due to the study being conducted in Riverside County, California, a review of federal laws and California state laws were included in the literature review.

Federal laws governing special education, such as IDEA (reauthorized in 2004), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and NCLB of 2001 entitled individuals with exceptional needs (IWENs) to access education (U.S. Department of Education, 2014; United States Department of Justice, 2014) and participate in statewide assessments (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002) in the same manner as their general education peers. Keller, Bucholz, and Brady (2007) found that implementing IDEA and NCLB resulted in student–centered and individualized instruction, a vehicle for special education students to receive standards-based general education curriculum.

In 1997, Congress passed significant amendments to IDEA, requiring that ~~districts~~ educational agencies provide students with special needs a "quality public education through emphasizing the improvement of student performance" (Yell, 2012, p. 56). The purposes of IDEA are intended:

"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; (B) to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected; (C) to assist States, localities, educational service agencies, and Federal agencies to provide for the education of all children with disabilities." (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 [d] [1] [A-C])

The IDEA defines eligible students as children having one of the thirteen qualifying handicapping conditions, including (1) autism; (2) deaf-blindness; (3) deafness; (4) emotional disturbance; (5) hearing impairment; (6) mental retardation; (7) multiple disabilities; (8) orthopedic impairment; (9) other health impairment; (10) specific learning disability; (11) speech or language impairment; (12) traumatic brain injury; (13) visual impairment. (34 CFR, 300.8(c)) In October 2010, congress passed Rosa's Law changing "mental retardation" to "intellectual disability."

Special education and related services are provided to all eligible students with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21 (IDEA Regulations, 34 C.F.R. §300.101). One of the cornerstone principles of IDEA is the provision of FAPE, or a free appropriate public education, which requires extensive procedural protections for students with disabilities and their parents. The 35th annual report to Congress (2013), prepared by the Office of Special Education

Programs (OSEP), outlined four primary purposes of implementing legal mandates governing special education, including (a) the availability of FAPE to all children who receive special education, (b) protecting the rights of children and their parents, (c) assisting in the provision of education for all children with disabilities, and (d) assessing the effectiveness of efforts to educate special education students.

NCLB (2001) focused on students with disabilities among other underrepresented groups, establishing the goal of improving their academic achievement through imposing higher accountability standards for public educators. It laid the foundation for closing the achievement gap based on race, ethnicity, language, and disability. The main purpose of NCLB is to "ensure that students in every public school achieve important learning goals while being educated in safe classrooms by well-prepared teachers" (Yell, Drasgow & Lowrey, 2005, p. 131).

Both IDEA and NCLB made reference to paraprofessionals. The 1997 reauthorization of the IDEA required "appropriate training, skill development, and supervision of paraprofessionals who work with students with disabilities" (Likins, 2003, p. 10). The NCLB (2001) raised the bar for paraprofessionals' qualifications (Likins, 2003).

In summary, over the past decade laws related to the provision of education within the school system have shown an increased focus on providing students with disabilities the same opportunities to access quality education as their peers without disabilities.

The Current State of Special Education

Education for students with disabilities may be provided in various instructional settings, including but not limited to (a) regular education program, (b) resource specialist program, (c) special day class, (d) nonpublic, nonsectarian, and other specialized schools, and (e) hospital and

home environments (California Education Code §56361). Special education means specially designed instruction tailored to the students' individual needs resulting from their disabilities (California Education Code §56031 [a]). Specialized instruction and related services may be provided by teachers and aides (California Education Code §56362).

Special education today faces an array of issues, including escalating litigation, budgetary challenges, an increased focus on accountability, and student achievement for pupils with special needs. Levenson (2012) listed special education costs as one of the major challenges American education faces today along with "true cuts to total funding, compounded by escalating health pension" (p. 2) costs.

The challenges posed before special education in America are not only financial. Yell (2012) criticized special education for its "low expectations for students with disabilities, an insufficient focus on translating research into practice, and too great an emphasis on paperwork and legal requirements at the cost of teaching and learning" (p. 56). The President's commission on excellence in special education (2002) recommended reforming special education by (a) increasing academic achievement for students with disabilities, (b) using instructional strategies based on evidence, and (c) closing the achievement gap between special education students and their general education peers. The commission underscored the need to focus on "results rather than process and be judged by outcomes...embrac[ing] a model of prevention…[and using] scientifically based instruction and strategies" (Yell, 2012, p. 58). Concentrating on evidence-based practices emphasizes the need identified by the current study to provide research-based training for special education paraprofessionals. IDEA (2004) requires educational agencies to base their professional development activities on research-based practices (IDEA, [34 C.F.R. § 300.226[b][1]).

Summary of Literature Related to Special Education Overview

The literature reviewed revealed the need for today's special educators to employ evidenced-based practices. There is currently an increased focus on accountability, the need to provide a quality education, and the importance of utilizing evidence based-practices with special education students. The latter emphasizes the need for the current study as it will provide a scientific foundation for training a growing group of special education providers--special education paraprofessionals who work directly with students with disabilities.

Overview of Paraprofessionals in Special Education

Paraprofessionals' Title

The term "special education paraprofessional" is not consistently used throughout literature. Other synonyms, including paraeducator, aide, special education aide, assistant, education technician, instructional assistant, intervener, milieu worker, direct care provider, and transition trainer are used interchangeably throughout literature (Giles, 2010; Henson, 2008; Likins, 2003; Morgan & Ashbacker, 2001). Picket (1994) and French (1998) included other synonymous terms, such as teacher's assistant, instructional assistant, or job coach.

The above-mentioned terms lack a uniform definition, and notwithstanding paraprofessionals' ubiquitous employment in public school districts to work with special education students, the term paraeducator has not been clearly defined. Pickett (1994), after declaring there was no "universally accepted definition for the term paraprofessional" (p. 7), defined a paraeducator as an employee whose position

> is either instructional in nature or [involves] delivering other direct and indirect services
> to children, youth, and their parents; and who works under the supervision of teachers or

other professional personnel who have ultimate responsibility for a) the design and implementation of education and related services programs, and b) the assessment of the impact on student progress and other education outcomes. (p. 8)

In the study, the term special education "paraprofessional" or "paraeducator" is used interchangeably with the synonyms found in cited and referenced documents.

The Evolution of the Paraprofessionals' Role in Special Education

The role of the special education paraeducator has evolved over the years due to IDEA's and NCLB's increased emphasis on accountability in special education. Giles (2010) believed that the-replacement of the term paraprofessional for the term instructional aide reflects the position's "increased professional expectations" (p. 8) and found the need for "appropriate training to enhance quality job performance" (p. 8) to be vital. Giles attributed the intensified reliance on special education paraeducators to the increasing number of students with disabilities and summarized changes to the job title, qualifications, role, responsibilities, and accountability as the "paraprofessional transformation" (p. 93). Giles further quoted Bugach (2002), French (2001), and Giangreco and Broer (2005) to assert insufficient competencies and standardized training for paraeducators.

The evolution of paraprofessionals' duties has been dictated by the variety of needs resulting from the manifold disabilities of the students requiring as well as increased focus on accessing general education curriculum and providing special education services in the LRE (Giles, 2010; Likins, 2003). Paraprofessionals' current duties include (a) modifying curriculum, (b) supervising students on the playground, buses, bus loops, and in the cafeteria, (c) job coaching in the community, (d) providing health services, (e) collecting data and documenting

progress toward IEP goals, (f) managing behavior, (g) maintaining safety, and (h) motivating

students (Giles, 2010; Likins, 2003). Traditionally, paraprofessionals were mostly employed to

support students with severe disabilities in their daily living activities (Pickett & Gerlach, 2003).

However, many schools are beginning to utilize them to work with multiple students with a wide

range of disabilities and needs in the general education classroom. (Giangreco, Broer, &

Edelman, 2002). Doyle (2002) described paraprofessionals' responsibilities as initially including

(a) clerical tasks, (b) copying, (c) taking attendance, and (d) monitoring students during

unstructured times. Maag (2004) attested to the high number of paraprofessionals helping to

meet children's needs in the school setting. Keller et al. (2007) spotlighted paraprofessionals'

increased responsibilities associated with supporting students with disabilities in various content

areas in general education classes. Hiring paraprofessionals to support students with behavioral

challenging behaviors (Levenson, 2012) and severe disabilities is "one of the most commonly

selected solutions" (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman,1999, p. 282) utilized by today's American

schools.

Currently paraprofessionals assist students in general education classrooms and

specialized programs. In addition to working with small groups of children paraprofessionals

may be assigned to provide individual students with one-to-one assistance as a form of a "highly

restrictive support" (Giangreco, 2010, p. 8) and "if the assignment of a one-to-one

paraprofessional is determined by the IEP team" (Giangreco, 2010, p. 8). When working with

special education students placed in the regular education setting paraprofessionals often help

general education children (French & Chopra, 1999). In summary, paraprofessionals provide

academic and behavioral support to groups of students with and without disabilities and provide

one-to-one support to special education children if prescribed by the IEP team.

Need for Paraprofessional Training

Although the use of paraprofessionals is "an important and growing segment of the personnel support used in American schools" (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 1999, p. 281) research demonstrates inadequate training for special education paraprofessionals (Downing, Ryndack, & Clark, 2000; French, 2001; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002). The benefit of hiring trained paraprofessionals is recognized (Doyle, 2008), but Bugach (2002) asserted the rarity that paraprofessionals receive training prior to becoming employed and identified interactions with teachers on the job as one of the main sources of training. Giles (2010) referenced many researchers (Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Forester & Hollbrook, 2005; Pickett & Gerlach, 2004) to spotlight an "overwhelming agreement" (p. 9) regarding the need for informed special education paraeducator training and standards and emphasized the minimal literature available that investigates the nature and degree of special education paraeducator training.

In addition to the increased need for training dictated by the evolving role of the paraeducator, the growing number of special education paraeducators highlights the urgency to develop strategies to train them. The National Association of Education emphasized the role trained paraeducators play in the delivery of the "quality education the community demands" (National Education Association/NEA, 2014). The Connecticut State Department of Education (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2012) named the position of paraprofessionals as one of the fastest growing occupations in public schools. The National Resource Center for Paraeducators (2014) presented an OSERS report that approximately 250,000 teacher aides are currently providing services to children and other youth with disabilities or other special needs between the ages of 3 and 21.

Walker et al. (2005), though recognizing that the majority of students who require behavioral interventions are special education, estimated that 10-15% of all students need some kind of "targeted behavioral interventions students, such as social skills groups, school counseling programs, peer tutoring, and after-school homework clubs" (p. 194). Paraprofessionals may be required to implement a behavior management program for a general or special education classroom and apply its principles to all children enrolled in the class or in the whole school, or they may be assigned to address a single student's behaviors. They may be assigned to work with general and special education students.

Implementing behavioral interventions requires an understanding of behavior management principles (Crone & Horner, 2003; Maag, 2004). Paraprofessionals must also be able to read behavioral cues, apprehend behavior function, provide an appropriate reinforcement, teach appropriate replacement behaviors, and observe and record behavioral data. IEPs, 504 plans, and behavior intervention plans (BIPs) developed for individual students may prescribe specific steps to be followed. Carrying out these assignments mandates specialized training to effectuate the IEP, BIP, or 504 plan in addition to the aforementioned required understanding of behavioral management principles.

Special education paraprofessionals must be trained to perform the job duties that have evolved over the years and broadened their requirements (Finkel, 2014). McKenzie (2011) emphasized that delivering the continuum of services demands well-trained paraprofessionals and service providers. Federal regulations rely on special education paraprofessionals who are

> appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with state law, regulation, or written
>
> policy, in meeting the requirements of this part to be used to assist in the provision of

special education and related services under this part to children with disabilities. (34

C.F.R. Section 300.156[b][2][iii])

Special education paraprofessionals are responsible for addressing students' academic

and behavioral needs. Along with other special education providers, paraprofessionals may also

become responsible for implementing IEPs and behavior plans. Giles (2010) believed that

paraprofessionals constitute an essential part of the team that effectuates the instructional and

behavioral components of the IEPs. Appropriate training for all staff working with special

education students is required by law (Giles, 2010; Likins, 2003; Yell, 2012). The

reauthorization of the IDEA emphasizes appropriate training, making staff development for

paraprofessionals a "necessity, not an option" (Likins, 2003, p. 10). Referencing legal

requirements to train paraprofessionals, case law has outlined the mandate to provide well-

trained educators skilled in implementing behavioral interventions as part of a FAPE for students

with disabilities. Several court cases raised the issue of the- educational agency's failure to

provide paraprofessionals who were trained to address students' unique needs and demanded

compensatory education and reimbursement of legal fees (OAH, 2006; OAH, 2008; OAH,

2011). In a due process a parent claimed that the district failed to provide a paraeducator trained

to work with students with autism (OAH, 2006). A judge ordered the district to provide a one to

one aide trained in positive behavior supports (OAH, 2008). In another due process hearing the

educational agency contended it had provided a student with "a self-contained, highly structured

classroom operated by qualified teachers and aides skilled in addressing behavioral disabilities"

(OAH, 2011).

Summary of the Overview of Paraprofessionals in Special Education

The numerous titles used for paraprofessionals over the years show the evolution of their duties--increasing in complexity and requiring a higher-level skill set to address the diverse and unique needs of special education students. However, research clearly indicates that paraprofessionals are inadequately prepared for these emerging demands. Many special education students exhibit challenging behaviors, demanding skilled and well-trained individuals to provide them a quality education.

Behavior Management in Schools

Nation-wide Problem

Academic achievement has always been prioritized over meeting students' behavioral needs. For decades, schools have focused on academic achievement while not devoting enough effort to improving behavior (Norton, 2009) and neglecting students who lack social skills and as a result are ready to drop out of school. Disruptive, violent, maladaptive behaviors interrupting the academic environment are not new to American education and are a nationwide problem (Crone & Horner, 2003; Thompson & Webber, 2010).

Schools have experienced increased violence and aggression demonstrated by students who are socially isolated (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1997). About 5 to 10 % of students do not exhibit challenging behaviors turning the management of their non-compliance into a "formidable task" (Maag, 2004, p. xiv) characterized by failure of traditional approaches. Addressing disruptive student behavior has long been a focus of educators, politicians, and researchers across the United States. Crone and Horner (2003) called it a "growing crisis" (p. 3), a nationwide problem along with academic failure. Marzano, Pickering & Pollack (2001) described students entering classrooms with an array of serious issues. prepaeducators have to

address behavioral infractions including external behaviors such as fighting, teasing, walking around the classroom, and internal behaviors associated with alienation and rejection, (Maag, 2004). Inappropriate student behavior disrupts the learning process of other students (Maag, 2004; Crone & Horner, 2003) causing administrators to spend "significant amounts of time responding to teacher, parent, and student needs that accompany problem behavior: (Crone & Horner, p. 3). Furthermore, Reichle (1990) reported that problem behaviors are a major cause of exclusion from class and school for students with severe disabilities and Crone & Horner (2003) found problem behaviors associated with school dropout and crime rates.

Schools have dealt with problem behaviors through zero tolerance and removing disruptive students from school, resulting in lower student achievement, higher dropout rates, and environments in which teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn (Skiba, 2004; Crone & Horner, 2003). Most schools are safe, but no school is immune from violence and disruption (Sprague & Horner, in press). Crone and Horner (2003) emphasized the serious challenge that schools face in dealing with severe and serious student behaviors that "threaten effective education" (p. xi).

Levenson (2012) uncovered that educational agencies insufficiently invest in behavior management and rely on "lower-skilled paraprofessionals" (p. 89) due to a significant rise in the number of students with significant behavior needs. Levenson (2012) expounded on the significant increase of students with severe needs compared to the moderate increase of students with special needs in general as follows,

> From 2000 to 2009, the total number of children with special needs grew by less than 3 percent, but during the same period, students with more challenging disabilities like autism (up over 300 percent), developmental delay (up 73 percent) and other health

impairments (up 18 percent) – which are often a surrogate for complex behavior issues –
became a greater share of the children served in special education. (p. 108)

Impact on School Accountability

Behaviors that cause teachers the most concern, including "fighting, teasing, leaving
seats, and talking out of turn" (Maag, 2004, p. xiv), negatively impact other students and are
"persistently irritating to authority figures" (Maag, 2004, p. xiv). Disruptive student behaviors
negatively influence school safety, culture, and climate, affect student achievement, take away
time from administrators, and increase tension between parents and staff. Student behavior is a
critical element of the quality of education students receive in American schools.

The quality and effectiveness of schools in the United States have been measured
primarily by academic student achievement. A link between student behavior and student
achievement has been established in numerous studies (Norton, 2009; Angus, 2011) and is
officially recognized by including indicators heavily affected by student behavior into schools'
accountability systems. In addition to the link between academic and social behaviors, both also
share more common traits than differences. Academic behaviors are governed by the same
learning principles and must be taught in a similar manner as academic skills (McGinnis &
Godlstein, 1997).

Accountability measures for schools are being redefined to encompass a variety of
success indicators in lieu of zeroing in on academic achievement only. The state of Mississippi
introduced a requirement for its districts to report and explain suspension and expulsion incidents
(Norton, 2009). The newly adopted Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in California
requires districts to collaborate with parents and develop Local Control Accountability Plans

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(LCAPs) consisting of eight priority areas to be used to measure the LEA's success. The LCAP priority areas include (a) providing credentialed teachers, (b) implementing state adopted Common Core standards, (c) parent involvement, (d) pupil achievement, (e) pupil engagement, (f) positive school climate, (g) access to a broad course of study, and (h) pupil outcomes (California Department of Education/CDE, 2014; California Parent Teacher Association/PTA, 2014). Two LCAP areas are directly affected by the staff's ability to manage behavior and motivate students. These include (1) pupil engagement, measured by attendance rates, (2) school climate, measured by suspension and expulsion rates. Pupil achievement and engagement are also dependent on student behavior (Angus 2011). Improving student behavior (a) requires attending to individual students' behaviors, (b) demands building school-wide supports, (c) can improve the school's overall climate, (d) can prevent inappropriate behaviors, and (e) can keep students motivated to learn and engaged in learning.

Individual Behavioral Supports

Disruptive student behaviors may be addressed through the provision of individual behavioral supports. Children may "exhibit characteristics of behavior with varying degrees of intensity or severity" (Hallahan & Kaufman, 2006, p. 253). The degrees of intensity may range from mild to moderate and severe (Positive Environments, Networks of Trainers/PENT, 2013). Kauffman (2005) estimated that at least 6-10% of school age students exhibited serious behavioral problems and Sugai et al. (2000) posited that 5% of the students are responsible for the majority of a school's disciplinary referrals. About 1% of children in the United States are identified as emotionally disturbed for special education purposes (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006) Maag (2004) identified between 5% and 10% of students with challenging as not responding to traditional behavioral approaches. Effectively dealing with individual student behavior requires

an understanding of general principles of behavior management and belief that behavior is measurable and changeable (Crone & Horner, 2003; Maag, 2004).

Comprehending individual student behavior requires a paradigm shift in staff's view of human behavior and its ability to be modified and managed. The change includes adopting three key principles of human behavior: (a) understanding that behavior is functional (driven by a specific need or a function), (b) adopting the notion that behavior is predictable (triggered and maintained by its environment), and (c) apprehending the most important trait of the behavior--its ability to change and be changeable (Crone & Horner, 2003). One of the traditional approaches in treating individual behavior is based on the belief that behavior stems from a pathology within a child (Crone & Horner, 2003; Maag, 2004), which prevents staff from seeing behavior as heavily affected by the environment, which can be changed, as opposed to a pathology within a person that requires a medical model of treatment and relieves educators of their duties to manage, teach, and change their students' behaviors. The focus on the function-based approach away from the medical model has laid the foundation for building a new mindset among staff when addressing student behavior. This represents a shift from blaming the child and using the medical model to viewing behavior through its function and necessary environmental changes (Browning-Wright et al. 2007; Maag, 2004; Crone & Horner, 2003).

In the 2004 IDEA reauthorization new requirements were introduced related to disciplinary behavioral infractions for students with disabilities, including the functional behavior assessment (FBA) and implementation of a behavior intervention plan (BIP). The BIP is a written document, often attached to the student's IEP, that describes the student's maladaptive behavior and prescribes strategies for staff to use to prevent the behavior from occurring, address it while it is happening, and teach the student appropriate replacement

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behaviors (Positive Environments, Networks of Trainers/PENT, 2014). The BIP is also referred to as behavior support plan (BSP), positive behavior support plan (PBSP), or the positive behavior intervention plan (PBIP).

More challenging student behaviors require an individualized approach prescribed by the BIP which becomes part of the pupil's IEP. Principles of a quality approach to addressing individual student behavior with the help of a BIP include training staff to (a) properly interpret the function of individual student behavior, (b) recognize environmental factors triggering and maintaining the behavior, c) measure and describe behavior in measurable terms, (d) provide effective reinforcement, (e) create a reactionary plan, (f) develop effective communication plans among team members, (g) teach replacement behaviors, and (h) document behavioral progress (Positive Environments, Networks of Trainers/PENT, 2014). Not all students enroll in schools prepared to demonstrate appropriate social skills and, thus, require the skills to be taught to them directly (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1997; Fenning & Rose, 2007). Elements of the BIP provide a structure to developing effective interventions to address a student's individual behavior through a team approach, which helps ensure consistency among all implementers and also helps overseers ensure that the BIPs are faithfully administered (Cook et al, 2012).

School-wide Behavioral Supports

Student behavior must also be addressed through school-wide behavioral supports. The implementation of individual behavioral supports is not sufficient to address student behavior. In addition to these supports, a school needs a positive climate and a safe learning environment to effectively address student behavior. Sugai et al. (2000) attributed successful improvement of student behavior to teachers, administrators, and other staff members working as partners in guiding students to make appropriate behavioral choices. Escalating school violence and

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recognizing the correlation between student behavior and academic achievement prompted a national movement of building school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS).

The SWPBIS, also referred to as the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) movement, starting in special education, is now available for all students (Thompson & Webber, 2010). The SWPBIS was defined as "application of positive behavioral intervention and systems to achieve socially important behavior change" (Sugai et al. 2000 p. 133). The SWPBIS focuses on teaching students individual social skills and trains staff to change their school environments (Sugai et al., 2000). The SWPBIS's multi-tiered system of behavioral interventions involves (a) general interventions for all students at the primary tier, (b) managing the needs students with disabilities who may exhibit maladaptive behaviors as part of the second tier, and (c) providing intensive preventions and interventions for students with high-risk of displaying destructive behaviors in the third tier (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005). With SWPBIS being implemented in more schools, administrators rely on utilizing all staff members, including paraprofessionals, working as a team to provide behavioral supports. Although teachers are regarded as the staff who directly work with students and spend the most time with them, Hauerwas and Goessling (2008) emphasized the need for paraeducators to receive training in collaboration and spotlighted the uniqueness of their roles in managing student behavior due to their ability to form relationships with students and provide teachers with "specific information about each student's day to day successes and challenges, student preferences and interests and a student's frustration level" (p. 6).

Some researchers focused on identifying specific problem behaviors. A study conducted by Alter, Walker, and Landers (2013, p. 57) identified the following challenging behaviors:

1)   Off-task

2)   Verbal disruption

3)   Verbal aggression

4)   Noncompliance

5)   Out of seat

6)   Physical disruption

7)   Physical aggression

8)   Isolation/ No social interaction

9)   Self-stimulatory

Challenging behaviors are not unique to schools located in the United States. A study conducted in Northern Italy (Pepe and Addimando (2013) also focused on the identification of specific challenging behaviors encountered by educators in schools. The following list of challenging behaviors were identified: Against the grain (AG)(breaking classroom rules, seeking conflict with adults and undermining the role of the teacher); Full of activity/Easily distractible (FA)(unable to sit still or leaves his/her seat very often); Needs a lot of attention/Weak student (WS)(learning difficulties or has trouble following class instructions) Easily upset (EU)(being overly sensitive to mood, crying very often, or being difficult to reassure when upset); Failure syndrome/Excessively perfectionist (EP) (compulsiveness in work habits. never seem to do things well enough); Aggressive/Hostile (AH) (verbal and physical aggression, being rude, arguing, sarcasm and teasing, kicking, hitting, fighting, spitting, throwing objects and biting).

Pepe and Addimando (2013) believed the behavior type characterized as "full of activity/easily distractible behaviours" (p.23) as the most challenging. Both studies (Pepe & Addimando, 2013; Alter, Walker, & Landers , 2013) yielded similar behavior types as their most challenging behavior. Alter, Walker, and Landers (2013) agreed with Pepe and Addimando (2013) pointing out that the "off -task" behavior presented the most challenge for educators.

Summary of the Behavior Management in Schools

Disruptive behaviors are a world-wide problem. Studies conducted in the United States and in Italy developed a list of the most challenging student behaviors. Behaviors disrupt student learning, take administrators away from their leadership duties, and negatively impact student achievement, school culture, and climate. In order for schools to provide quality education, they must focus on providing individual behavioral supports to their students with severe behavioral issues through implementing BIPs and creating SWPBIS with tiered preventions and interventions. Individual BIPs and SWPBIS require highly-trained individuals to be effective for students. Paraprofessionals are often hired to manage the most challenging student behaviors. Paraprofessionals need training to assist in implementing both individual and school-wide behavioral supports at their schools.

<div align="center">Training Needs of Paraprofessionals</div>

Current State

Paraprofessionals' roles in education are becoming more prominent as they represent a growing group of employees assisting special education students (Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 1999). Giangreco et al., (1999) asserted paraprofessional involvement to be a "crucial support that allows a student with intensive support needs to be educated in the general education classroom" (Giangreco et al., 1999, p. 281). Indeed, the growth of paraprofessionals and their

valuable work has led them to be recognized as "respectable members of the school community" (Giangreco et al., 2004). Although the number of paraprofessionals continues to soar (Giangreco, et al., 2004; Levenson, 2012; Liston, Nevin & Malian, 2009), these paraeducators remain the "least trained adults" (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 1999, p. 281) who sometimes "have primary or extensive responsibilities for teaching students with the most complex learning characteristics" (Giangreco et al., 2004, p. 82). Researchers attribute the increasing role that paraprofessionals play in schools to the growing numbers of special education students (Levenson, 2012) and a shift of responsibilities from teachers to paraprofessionals (Giangreco et al., 1999). The National Association of Education (2014) identifies the role a "behavior interventionist" as the first responsibility on the list of paraeducator duties.

The Positive and Negative Impact of Paraprofessionals

Researchers have recognized that the presence of paraprofessionals in schools positively and negatively impacts special education students (Giangreco et al., 2001; Giangreco et al., 1997; Hemmingson, Borell, & Gustavsson, 2003; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006; Marks et al., 1999), causing "inadvertent detrimental effects" (Giangreco et al. 1999, p. 282). The positive impact is associated with paraprofessionals providing crucial supports to students with severe disabilities in the general education classroom, preventing their placement in a more restrictive setting (Giangreco et al., 1999). The inadvertent negative impacts are associated with the inappropriate use of paraprofessionals and include (a) masking other drawbacks of the student's placement without addressing the root of the problem, (b) assigning too much responsibility to untrained paraprofessionals, and (c) hindering the student from developing independence. The assignment of more duties to paraprofessionals may "temporarily relieve certain types of pressures" (Giangreco et al., 2004, p. 83), but if used inappropriately, may harm

students' ability to make progress (Giangreco et al., 1999, p. 282). Inappropriate proximity to students hinders their ability to receive a quality education and creates an excessive dependence on the paraprofessional (Giangreco, Edelman, & Luiselli, 1997). The assignment of a one-to-one paraprofessional to a special education student may deprive the pupil from receiving quality instruction. It may also create a "double standard whereby students without disabilities are taught by certified educators and students with significant disabilities are taught by paraprofessionals" (Giangreco et al., 1999, p. 283). Giangreco, Broer and Sutter (2011) referenced other researchers (Downing, Ryndack & Clark, 2000; French, 2001; Giangreco et al., 2001; Mark, Schrader, & Levine, 1999; Riggs & Mueller, 2001) and postulated that paraprofessionals "make pedagogical decisions while remaining inadequately trained and supervised" (p. 22), depriving students with disabilities from receiving instruction from a teacher.

The presence of paraprofessionals may interfere with special education students' opportunities to interact with their non-disabled peers. Causton-Theoharis and Malmgren (2005) pointed out the potential obstruction of interactions that would naturally occur between children with special needs and their non-disabled peers as one of the detrimental outcomes of paraprofessionals working with students with disabilities. They further recommended training on facilitating "rich social environments" (p. 21) and providing natural "behavioral supports that are social" (p. 23) through interdependence on general education peers and instructing non-disabled students to engage in appropriate interactions with special education students. Giangreco et al. (1999) agreed with Causton-Theoharis and Malmgren (2005) regarding the value of natural supports. They recommended finding a balance between specialized and natural supports and avoiding "the risk of over professionalizing and over therapizing" (p. 283) the lives of people with disabilities.

Research evidences the importance of training paraprofessionals to effectively work with special education students. Causton-Theoharis (2007) emphasized the need to train paraprofessionals and found a lack of confidence "in the type and amount of training" (p. 59) paraprofessionals received to address challenging behaviors. Giangreco's (2010) called the pursuit of training for paraprofessionals one of the "typical responses by schools to the plethora of paraprofessional issues" (p. 3) along with role clarification and supervision that "fail to acknowledge a potentially more fundamental concern" (p. 3), the assignment of the paraprofessional. Notwithstanding Giangreco's (2010) view that training for aides is a "training trap" (p. 3) that will exasperate their proliferation and acquisition of more responsibilities, a plethora of research emphasizes the need to train paraprofessionals (Birnham, Spooner & Browder, 2007; Causton-Theoharis et al., 2007; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Giangreco et al; 2004; Giles, 2010; Marzano, 2001; Morgan & Ashbacker, 2001; Smerker-Bass, 2010; Villareal, 2010; Cobb, 2007). Parents expressed concerns regarding paraprofessionals' lack of training (French & Chopra, 1999). Inadequate training, along with role clarification, orientation, and supervision often compromise "the scope and nature of paraprofessional work" (Giangreco & Broer, 2005, p.10).

Adult Learners

The learning needs of paraprofessionals are different from those of students. Morgan and Ashbacker (2001) recommended treating paraprofessionals as adult learners and considering the following factors when training this employee group: (a) they have experience and expertise, (b) they are used to being independent, (c) they learn by solving problems, (d) they require effective instructional practices, (e) they need the content to be relevant to their duties, (f) they require an environment in which asking questions is encouraged, (g) they require encouragement

and recognition of their efforts, (h) they need to be given clear job expectations, (i) they benefit from skills being modeled to them, and (j) they need continuous feedback. Causton-Theoharis et al. (2007) agreed with the benefit of providing continuous feedback to paraprofessionals and added the need to offer written directions on dealing with challenging student behavior in the form of an individual behavior plan.

Knowles (1980) compared the way adults engage in a learning experience to how children learn and found differences between the two processes. He found the application of principles of pedagogy, teaching methods for children, to adults problematic and ineffective. He posited that "adults enter into education with a different time perspective from children, which in turn produces a difference in the way they view learning" (Knowles, 1980, p. 53). Knowles (1980) found adults view education as a tool to improve "their ability to cope with life problems" (p. 53) and "enter an educational activity in a problem-centered or performance-centered frame of mind" (p.53). Cross (1981) agreed with Knowles and supported the notion of adults voluntarily undertaking a learning project "in the hope of solving a problem" (p. 189). Knowles used the concept of "andragogy," explaining its origin from "the Greek word aner (with the stem andr-), meaning "man, not boy" or adult" (Knowles, 1980, p. 42) and crediting European educators with coining the term. He further developed an andragogical process for adult learners consisting of the following phases:

1) The establishment of a climate conducive to adult learning;

2) The creation of an organizational structure for participative planning;

3) The diagnosis of needs for learning;

4) The formulation of directions of learning (objectives);

5) The development of a design of activities;

6) The operation of the activities;

7) The rediagnosis of needs for learning (evaluation) (Knowles, 1980, p. 59).

Knowles (1980) pointed out that learning is an internal process controlled by the learner and posited that involving the "individual most deeply in self-directed inquiry will produce the greatest learning" (p. 56). He further emphasized engaging adult learners in self-diagnosing "their own needs for continued learning" (p. 56) and called this principle of adult learning "ego-evolvement" p. 56). His concept of "ego-involvement" (p. 56) supports the Delphi study methodology chosen for this research due to the utilization of paraeducators' expertise and input for designing their professional development.

Knowles (1980) recommended to employing andragogical strategies when teaching adults and asserted that "adults can learn" (p. 55). It is important for instructors teaching adults to believe that adults can learn. It is equally important for paraprofessionals to believe that students can learn, which leads to the next concept, the growth mindset.

Growth Mindset

When asked to share perceptions about their work in a study conducted by Liston, Nevin and Malian (2009), paraprofessionals expressed the need for the members of their profession to believe that all children can learn. Dweck (2006) coined the term "growth mindset" (p.64), describing the belief that all children can learn. She found a positive correlation between a growth mindset and a student's success. She also emphasized the importance of teachers taking a firm stand in believing that all children can learn skills taught to them and convince students of the same position. The growth mindset is a shift from "biophysical model" (Maag, 2004, p. 39)

of believing that the cause of disruptive behaviors lies in the "within person pathologies" (Crone & Horner, 2003, p. 11) or a result of a child's disability, upbringing, and other factors educators cannot control. Maag (2004) found that if teachers believed that social behaviors could be learned and taught "in the same way as academic behaviors, then they will be more likely to accept responsibility for helping students to acquire appropriate social skills" (p. 27).

Since paraprofessionals are an extension of teachers in the classroom, (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2007) believed that they much like teachers need to develop a growth mindset about the students with whom they work to ensure progress. This requires understanding how the brain works (Dweck, 2006) and growth mindset language when talking to students to develop a growth mindset about their learning. Paraprofessionals need to be trained on strategies that can transfer their growth mindsets to their students.

Summary of the Training Needs of Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals are a growing work force that needs training to effectively manage student behavior. The training must be comprehensive, meaningful, and effective and should take into consideration principles of andragogy. Believing every student can learn is an important aspect of paraprofessional training. The literature reviewed in this section supported the need to train paraprofessionals using adult learning principles.

Overall Summary of the Literature Review

Paraprofessionals are the least trained individuals working with the most challenging children. In addition to needing a high skillset to work with special education pupils, paraprofessionals are often expected to provide behavioral supports to both, special and general education students. The literature review revealed gaps in research that investigate the

development of paraprofessional training on managing student behavior. It also identified the

need to apply andragogical principles to paraeducators' professional development in order to

enhance their learning experience by considering their expert opinions. Basic principles of

behavior management and the growth mindset play critical roles in understanding that student

behavior, similar to an academic skill, can be assessed, taught, and improved. The rest of the

study will concentrate on identifying links between the main themes derived from the literature

review and key data points obtained through the Delphi study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

"You will find something more in woods than in books. Trees and stones will teach you that which you can never learn from masters." Saint Bernard (1091-1115, Epistle 106).

Introduction

A detailed discussion of the research methods included in this study is presented in Chapter 3. The following elements are incorporated: (a) overview of research in education; (b) provision of information on qualitative and quantitative paradigms; (c) discussion of the study's theoretical foundations; (d) information on the study's credibility; and, (e) explanation of the data collection procedures.

Twenty first century education focuses on results, data-based decision making, and evidence-based strategies, requiring educational research to play an increasingly important role in influencing districts' "decisions, programs, and policy" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. xix). Research has become a valuable source of information that allows policy makers and practitioners to develop significant advancements in the field and allows the community to raise accountability standards. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) described the function of research as advancing knowledge and improving practice to better understand the educational process, make better decisions, and implement mandated changes in education. Research is valued higher than a person's "experiences, beliefs, traditions, or intuition" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 5) due to its systematic description and measurement of a phenomenon and impact on "our ideas about education and the practices we use to achieve our objectives in education" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 3).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study was to identify the most challenging and most frequently occurring types of behavioral problems encountered by paraprofessionals in the K-12 public school setting.

In addition, the purpose of the study included the identification of most effective ways of preparing special education paraprofessionals to manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors through effective professional development practices.

Research Questions

The research was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What student behaviors managed by special education paraprofessionals in the k-12 setting are the most challenging and most frequently occurring?

2. What training content will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting?

3. What effective training delivery methods will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting?

To answer the three research questions an anonymous electronic survey was offered to the study participants. The survey questions offered to study participants were formulated in a slightly different manner than the research questions. The three research questions were broken down into five survey questions and were presented to study participants in a three-round Delphi study electronic survey. The first round of survey question included a definition of challenging

behaviors. The second round included examples of behaviors collected from Round 1 survey responses. All three groups of participants, including special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals, received the same survey questions. The following survey questions were posed to study participants:

Special education paraprofessionals

Round 1:

RQ1: RQ 1. Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 setting. (A challenging behavior is "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers or adults (Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5)).

Round 2:

RQ2: Of the challenging behavioral types identified in Round 1, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with 1 being *the least challenging* and 5 *being the most challenging*), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.

RQ3: Of the behavior types identified in Round 1, using a Likert scale (with 1 being *the least frequent* and 5 being *the most frequent*), please rate the level of frequency of each behavior type.

Round 3:

RQ4: Please share KEY CONCEPTS, BIG IDEAS, TOPICS you believe must be included in professional development activities that would best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the types of behaviors identified through Rounds 1 and 2. The

behavior types identified in Rounds 1 and 2 are included below with examples provided by participants.

RQ5: Please list training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3. Please share training delivery components, such as lecture/presentation formats, on-the-job training, modeling, providing on going feedback, coaching, or any other ideas you may have that will make the training effective.

Special Education Teachers

Round 1:

RQ1: RQ 1. Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 setting. (A challenging behavior is "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers or adults (Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5)).

Round 2:

RQ2: Of the challenging behavioral types identified in Round One, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one being the least challenging and 5 being the most challenging), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.

RQ3: Of the behavior types identified in Round One, using a Likert scale (with one being the least frequent and 5 being the most frequent), please rate the level of frequency of each behavior type.

Round 3:

RQ4: Please share KEY CONCEPTS, BIG IDEAS, TOPICS you believe must be included in professional development activities that would best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the types of behaviors identified through Rounds 1 and 2. The behavior types identified in Rounds 1 and 2 are included below with examples provided by participants.

RQ5: Please list training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3. Please share training delivery components, such as lecture/presentation formats, on-the-job training, modeling, providing on-going feedback, coaching, or any other ideas you may have that will make the training effective.

Principals

Round 1:

RQ1: RQ 1. Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 setting. (A challenging behavior is "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers or adults (Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5)).

Round 2:

RQ2: Of the challenging behavioral types identified in Round One, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one being the least challenging and 5 being the most challenging), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.

RQ3: Of the behavior types identified in Round One, using a Likert scale (with one being the least frequent and 5 being the most frequent), please rate the level of frequency of each behavior type.

Round 3:

RQ4: Please share KEY CONCEPTS, BIG IDEAS, TOPICS you believe must be included in professional development activities that would best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the types of behaviors identified through Rounds One & Two. The behavior types identified in Rounds One & Two are included below with examples provided by participants.

RQ5: Please list training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3. Please share training delivery components, such as lecture/presentation formats, on-the-job training, modeling, providing on going feedback, coaching, or any other ideas you may have that will make the training effective.

Methodology

The study utilized the Delphi study method. The Delphi method uses an expert panel to provide data to answer the research questions. Themes from literature review were analyzed and correlated with the data provided by an expert panel, a team of experienced and knowledgeable educators directly involved in the process of receiving, providing, or evaluating behavior management training. The Delphi study used an electronic survey to collect data. The data was analyzed to identify emerging themes which were later correlated with themes identified through

literature review. The electronic survey used questions requiring qualitative and quantitative information.

McMillan and Schumacher (2001) differentiated between quantitative and qualitative methods by analyzing the ways in which the two types of scientific inquiry present data. They compared qualitative research focused on "*understanding* the social phenomenon from the participants' perspectives" (p. 15-16) and "narration with words" (p. 15) with quantitative studies which concentrate on statistical information and numbers.

Qualitative researchers are "more interested in the quality of a particular activity than in how often it occurs" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 430) and data gathered from "(1) in-depth open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents" (Patton, 2002, p. 4). Patton described qualitative findings as having "simple yet elegant and insightful character" (Patton, 2002, p. 9) that add "flesh to the bones" (p. 193) of quantitative data. Qualitative and quantitative methods are not "mutually exclusive" (Patton, 2002, p. 14) and can both be used in the same study. For the purposes of the study, information was collected from participants using on-line surveys comprised of questions to generate narrative and numerical data, therefore qualifying the research as a mixed method study.

The research was a descriptive study. Rumrill and Cook (2001) defined descriptive research as "collecting data to test hypotheses or answer questions regarding the past or current status of selected variables" (p. 143) and examine phenomena, such as "achievement, attitudes, opinions, behaviors, and professional literature that are collected or observed from individuals or groups of participants' (p. 143). They further differentiated between seven types of descriptive research: "surveys, case studies, program evaluations, historical/archival research, longitudinal

studies, empirical literature reviews, and meta-analyses" (Rumrill & Cook, 2001, p. 143) and emphasized the speculative nature of descriptive research.

Phenomenology and grounded theory elements served as the descriptive study's theoretical foundations. Phenomenology associates the participants' experience with a phenomenon (Roberts, 2010). McMillan and Schumacher defined phenomenology as studies that develop the "meanings of a lived experience" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 26). Grounded theory "goes beyond the description to develop dense (detailed) concepts or conditional propositional statements that relate to a particular phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 27). Rumrill and Cook (2001) described grounded theory as a study in which a researcher does not start with a theory that needs to be proven. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define grounded theory as a study that selects an area of interest, collects and analyzes data related to it, and develops a theory that can be put into practice and action. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) described grounded theory as an "analytic story with description kept secondary to the theoretical scheme or concept density ("elaboration") (p.491).

Delphi Method

The research design focused on identifying the perceptions of experts in the field (paraprofessionals', teachers', and principals') regarding paraeducators' training needs in behavior management and will attempt to "explore, explain, or describe phenomena from the perspective of research participants" (Rumrill & Cook, 2001, p. 179). The study employed a Delphi (Murray & Hammons, 1995) method due to the availability of the field experts who possess extensive knowledge and experience pertaining to the topic of behavior management training needs for paraprofessionals. The experts' perceptions of these identified training needs were cross-referenced with training needs found through the literature review.

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Through the Delphi study, conclusions were drawn after gathering opinions from a community of individuals who possessed extensive experience with and knowledge on the topic. Osborne et al. (2003) underscored the following four advantages of the Delphi study: (a) ensuring a higher level of validity by using experts in the field as study participants, (b) anonymity of participants eliminates impact of other opinions associated with group interviews, (c) logical reasoning is forced upon participants for the study to reach consensus, and (d) geographical separation is not an obstacle, and a group of experts can be easily gathered.

The literature review conducted for the study provided a foundation for selecting its methodology. Roberts (2010) found that the methodology selection rests "primarily on (1) the problem being investigated, (2) purpose of the study, (3) theory base, and (4) nature of the data" (p. 141). Research evidenced a growing workforce of paraprofessionals who needed training to effectively address disruptive student behavior. The training needs of special education paraprofessionals became the focus of the study. As cited earlier, the purpose of the study involved informing district leaders on paraprofessionals' training needs perceived by the paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals, and guiding LEAs in their professional development practices. Collecting data that would best offer solutions to the existing research problem and fulfill the purpose of the study required a mixed methods study involving both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Acquiring such data is best captured by having experts in the field share their knowledge of and experiences in the study topic. Thus, the Delphi method was selected for the study.

The study involved a Delphi process to acquire perceptions from the population sample. The Delphi method includes interviewing "key knowledgeables in a field to solicit the latest and best thinking about a proposal; sometimes feedback back the findings for a second round of

interviews" (Patton, 2002, p. 200). The goal of employing the Delphi technique is to pool

opinions to obtain consensus (Dixon & Harding, 1990). Patton (2002) identified three types of

Delphi studies: (a) the classical Delphi method, (b) the decision-making study, and (c) the policy

Delphi study. The policy Delphi study best suits this research, with a dual purpose to (a) inform

policies on recommended professional development procedures, and (b) advise ways to

effectively train paraprofessionals by using data collected from the research population sample.

Population

A population constitutes the entire group of individuals having the "characteristic or

characteristics that interest the researcher" (Rumrill & Cook, 2001, p. 29) and to whom the

findings will be generalized. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) described a research population

as a "group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects or events, that conforms to specific

criteria" (p. 169). The general population for this study included special education

paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and school site administrators or principals from

the State of California. The target population of the study included special education

paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and school site administrators or principals in

Riverside County, California. Rumrill and Cook (2001) asserted that ideally the entire population

would be studied, but they recognized that the necessary time and resources to carry out this task

would make the "research infeasible" (p. 29) and accordingly advised researchers to "content

themselves with studying a sample of people who presumably represent the population of

interest" (p. 29).

Sample

A sample is a subgroup of the overall population selected to participate in the study

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Patten (2007) also believed that it is sufficient for researchers

to use a few individuals from a population instead of studying every member of the population or "conducting a census" (p. 45). The sufficiency of a sample to judge the whole piece was recognized in the 17th century novel Don Quixote, "even if no larger than a grain of wheat; for a single thread one has the entire skein" (Cervantes, 2003, p. 40). To solve the problem of feasibility, researchers use a "sample subset of the population" (Rumrill & Cook, 2001, p. 29) or a "sampling frame" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 169).

Delimiting factors or delimitations, or specific criteria that describe the population, were used to determine the sampling frame. The delimitations for the paraprofessionals who participated in the study, included employment in a public school district, at least two years of work experience in special education, and previous participation in special education behavior management training. The delimitations for special education teachers included employment in a public school district, at least two years of experience working in special education, and at least one year experience of working directly with at least one paraprofessional. The delimitations for principals included current employment in a public school district, experience of working in special education for at least two years, participation in at least one special education behavior management training, and experience of supervising at least one paraprofessional for at least one year. After analyzing the specific features defining the sample that would best answer the research questions, it appeared that purposeful sampling or judgment sampling was the best sampling method. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) described purposeful sampling as selecting "particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest" (p. 175) and are "information rich" (p. 176). However, the weaknesses of this type of sampling include (a) difficulty in generalizing to other subjects, (b) smaller representation of the population, (c) dependence of results on unique characteristics of the

sample, and (d) greater likelihood of error due to bias, the strengths of purposeful sampling offer

less costly and time-consuming procedures, ease of administration, high participation rate,

assurance of receipt of needed information, and possibility to generalize (McMillan &

Schumacher, 2001, p. 178).

To maximize the validity of purposeful sampling, before selecting the sample, the

population was determined utilizing Fraenkel and Wallen's (2003) guiding questions: (a) which

group is of interest to the researcher?; and (b) to which group will the results of the study apply?

The research focused on United States districts located in Riverside County, California, and

requested permissions from superintendents or their designees to agree to participate in the study.

The study focused on researching the perceived training needs of paraprofessionals.

Paraprofessionals are directly involved with the training as its recipients. Teachers work with

paraprofessionals and guide them in the implementation of their duties, which involve managing

student behavior. While both, special and general education teachers greatly benefit from well-

trained paraprofessionals as they assist teachers in meeting the academic, behavior, social, and

individual IEP needs of students (Bergeson, 2002), the study concentrated exclusively on

surveying special education teachers and excluded general education teachers. Although general

education teachers work closely with paraprofessionals who support special education students

in their classrooms, they highly depend on paraprofessionals, who are viewed as "sous-chefs"

(Causton-Theoharis et al., 2007, p. 56) and are expected to "keep the kitchen environment

running smoothly without incident or injury" (p. 59). Special education teachers receive

training as part of their schooling and are expected to address student behavior. School site

administrators, such as principals, deal with student behavior that is brought to their attention by

other staff, oversee paraprofessionals, and coordinate their schedules (Cobb, 2007). Paraprofessionals are often assigned to work with students who exhibit difficult behaviors (Levenson, 2011). School principals are involved in disciplining students and deal with student behaviors to maintain a safe and positive environment on campus. Principals may be directly involved in designing, coordinating, or sending paraprofessionals to training. They, similar to teachers, greatly benefit from well-trained paraprofessionals, whose effectiveness contributes to their school's success. All three categories inclusive of paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals, were of interest to the research and served as subjects to which the research results would apply. In addition, the groups possessed expertise in the topic of the research, and, therefore, were selected to form the expert panel serving as population sample of the study.

Two expert panels were used for the study. The first expert panel participated in a pilot study, forming the field test expert panel. The second group, referred to as the study expert panel, participated in the study after the field test expert panel established the study's validity, reliability, reduced potential biases embedded in the research questions, and provided input into the participant selection criteria.

The process of identification of special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals began with presenting the delimitating factors, also referred to as "delimiting variables" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 119), to the special education district level administrators from Riverside County districts agreeing to participate in the study. Delimiting variables provided a more "specific definition" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 119) of the population which is "described in conceptually or in broad terms" (p. 119). The RC SELPA, a consortium of LEAs, comprises fourteen unified school districts (USD), four

elementary school districts (SD), one high school district (HSD), Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) programs, and one independent charter school. In addition to the RC SELPA LEAs there are four additional LEAs located in Riverside County that operate as separate SELPAs. The four additional LEAs include the Corona-Norco Unified School District (CVUSD), Moreno Valley Unified School District (MVUSD), Temecula Valley Unified School District (TVUSD), and the Riverside Unified School District (RUSD). RCOE and charter schools were excluded from the study due the drastic difference between the numbers of special education students they serve compared to other school districts. RCOE primarily serves special education students. Charter schools serve much fewer students with special needs. Superintendents or their designees of districts located in Riverside County were requested to grant permission to conduct a study in their districts and authorize the contact to be made with their respective special education administrators. Each Local Education Agency (LEA) special education administrator was requested to identify two special education teachers, two paraprofessionals, and two principals who met the delimitating criteria for study participation and provide names and contact information of the study participants they would select based on the provided criteria. Table 1 below provides the list of the school districts and LEAs located in Riverside County and the number of participants that could potentially participate in the study.

Table 1

Population Sample: Riverside County Districts

District	Study Participants		
	Paraprofessionals (120)	Teachers (120)	Principals (120)
Alvord USD	2	2	2

Banning USD	2	2	2
Beaumont USD	2	2	2
Coachella Valley USD	2	2	2
Corona-Norco USD	2	2	2
Desert Center USD	2	2	2
Desert Sands USD	2	2	2
Hemet USD	2	2	2
Jurupa USD	2	2	2
Lake Elsinore USD	2	2	2
Menifee Union SD	2	2	2
Moreno Valley USD	2	2	2
Murrieta Valley USD	2	2	2
Nuview Union SD	2	2	2
Palm Springs USD	2	2	2
Palo Verde USD	2	2	2
Perris Elementary SD	2	2	2
Perris Union HSD	2	2	2
Riverside USD	2	2	2
Romoland SD	2	2	2

San Jacinto USD	2	2	2
Temecula Valley USD	2	2	2
Val Verde USD	2	2	2

Total Number of Potential Participants: 138

Figure 4 below summarizes the participant selection process.

Figure 4. Sample selection.

Riverside County is selected by the researcher to provide participants for the study

Riverside County superintendents/designees are requested to grant permission to participate in the study

The special education administrator of each district authorized to participate in the study selects study participants based on the participant selection criteria

Study participants consisting of SE paraprofessionals, SE teachers, and principals selected by the SE administrators are requested to provide individual consent to participate in the study

Figure 4 visually represents the population selection.

Instrumentation

The Delphi Study Method

An electronic format was deployed to collect the Delphi study expert panel's responses.

Since 2003, when Fraenkel and Wallen identified three ways of collecting data through a survey:

(a) mail, (b) live face to face interactions, and (c) by telephone (p. 399), the on line method has emerged and become preeminent. Anonymous electronic surveys posed questions in three rounds to study participants. Rumrill and Cook (2001) described surveys as recording answers from respondents by means of questionnaires and recognized their prevalence in "virtually every aspect of life in contemporary American society" (p. 145). The surveys were designed to obtain perceptions of the population sample, or the Delphi study panel of experts, regarding the training needs of SE paraprofessionals.

The limitations of survey questions along with the strengths of the Delphi study were reviewed when the surveys were being designed. Heavy reliance on subjects' memory and honesty, the respondents' desire to provide socially appropriate responses, and the ability to understand the questions (Passmore et al., 2002) were carefully considered. The surveys were devised to maximize the biggest strength of a Delphi study, its experts.

The Field Test Expert Panel and the Study Expert Panel

The Delphi study used two expert panels. The first expert panel, referred to as the field test panel served as consultants to the study and was used to review the questions prior to beginning the study for two purposes to: (a) increase validity and reliability of the surveys used in the study, and (b) reduce the researcher's bias. In addition, the field test panel made recommendations in developing selection criteria for the study participants. The second expert panel, referred to as the study expert panel, comprised the study participants. The study expert panel participated in a three-round electronic survey and provided the study's data.

Field Test Expert Panel

A field test expert panel was used as part of the Delphi study. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) viewed the purpose of the pilot study as a "small scale trial" (p. 609) that would "detect any problems so that they can be remedied before the study proper is carried out" (p. 609).   Prior to conducting the study, a field test expert panel was consulted to increase the validity and reliability of the survey questions. The field test expert panel consisted of one special education paraprofessional, one special education teacher, and one principal I selected. The field test expert panel was requested to review the survey questions prepared for the study participants. The consultation with the field test expert panel took place via emails and face-to-face conversations. They were given a brief overview of the study, the purpose of the research, the data collection methods, and the potential impact of the research outcomes on educational practices. The field test expert panel members were requested to review the three rounds of questions and provide their feedback. The questions were revised as necessary. The field test expert panel members' provided input regarding the development of the study participant selection criteria.

Study Expert Panel

 While the purpose of the field test expert panel was to check the validity and reliability of the research instrument, the purpose of the study expert panel was to participate in the study and provide research data. Special education administrators of districts agreeing to participate in the study were requested to select participants to form the study expert panel. They were provided with the delimitations to guide them in their selection of the study expert panel members.

I requested permission to conduct the study from the Riverside County LEAs. After the field test panel reviewed the questions and provided feedback, the study expert panel was

assembled. I contacted the LEA special education directors/administrators who agreed to conduct the study and asked them to select the study expert panel using the provided delimitations. In cases of LEAs whose directors/administrators do not find participants meeting the delimitating criteria, such an LEA did not participate in the study.

Ethical Considerations and Risks for Participants

It is critical that the study be ethical and be protective of its participants' rights. Roberts (2010) listed "informed consent, protection from harm, and confidentiality" (p. 32) among ethical issues and further referenced Madsen (1992) who cautioned researchers about causing "stress, discomfort, embarrassment, invasion of privacy or potential threat to reputation" (p. 80) to participants. The study involved considering "ethical standards" (Roberts, 2010, p. 33) to avoid any impact on the human subjects, respecting participants' confidentiality, and ensuring that their participation in the research was voluntary. The request to participate emphasized the voluntary aspect of taking part in the study and also emphasized the participants' abilities to withdraw from research at any time. The anonymity of the on-line survey prevented me from tracking the participants. The study entailed implementing the "basic elements of informed consent" (Roberts, 2010, p. 33) and informing its participants of the following: (a) overview of the research purpose, benefits, procedures, and expected duration for participants (b) any foreseeable risks or discomforts; (c) subjects' confidentiality; (d) contact information to access the researcher for any questions or concerns; (e) the voluntary aspect of participation; f) no penalty resulting from the refusal to participate. The participants' informed consent was obtained before they participated in the study. Due to the anonymity of the on-line surveys, the study caused minimal risk to its participants.

Validity and Reliability

Validity

Validity and reliability are important to both quantitative and qualitative research. Validity refers to the appropriateness of the inferences, their meaningfulness, correctness, and usefulness (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) and the "degree to which the description of the phenomena match the realities of the world" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 407). The quality and meaningfulness of the data collected throughout the study rest on the quality of its instruments and their validity (Patton, 2002; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Cone & Foster, 2006). The researcher serves as the instrument in qualitative studies, making the credibility of the study depend on the researcher's "skill, competence, and rigor" (Patton, 2002, p. 14). The researcher and the participants must have "mutual meanings" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 407).

To establish the validity of the surveys used for the Delphi study, McMillan and Schumacher's (2001) ten enhancing validity strategies were analyzed. The first strategy recommended "prolonged and persistent field work" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 324). This strategy was employed by providing intervals between survey rounds, allowing the researcher to conduct interim analysis, course correct if needed, and use data collected for the following round of questions. The second strategy to enhance validity utilized in the study involved the mixed method study. The study used qualitative and quantitative methods. In addition, the survey results were triangulated with prior research. The third strategy entails reproducing the participants' language verbatim. The online surveys were not altered by the written responses, and therefore the respondents' language was reproduced verbatim in most cases. A few responses were slightly altered to correct spelling and make the responses

understandable. The fourth strategy, a precise description of the participants, does not apply because no observations were conducted during the study. However, the participants had to meet specific criteria to participate in the study. The description of the participants was limited to the delimitations of the population. The fifth strategy involves multiple researchers. This strategy was not employed because using online surveys rendered utilizing additional researchers unnecessary. The sixth strategy recommends the mechanical recording of data. This strategy was used during the field test. The data from the expert panel were collected and processed using "Google Surveys." The seventh strategy involves member checking, which was utilized.

I offered assistance to any respondents in case they had questions about the survey instructions. No questions were posed. The eighth strategy recommends using participants' recorded perceptions, notes, or diary entries. I did not employ this strategy. The survey requested participants share their opinions in writing. The ninth strategy advises that participants review the synthesis of interviews and submit written comments. This strategy was not used due to time constraints associated with research and the slightly declining rate of respondents in the second and third rounds. The data were collected from the first two rounds of surveys to develop the third round of questioning. The tenth strategy, "actively search for, record, analyze and report negative or discrepant data that are an exception to patterns" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 324), was used in reporting the standard deviations for each round. The responses to survey questions were analyzed for unusual patterns and themes.

The Delphi process entails drawing conclusions from data gathered from a panel of experts. Although experts bring value to research grounded in their expertise and experience, they also impose limitations on potential knowledge that can be gained from the study. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) recognized the limitations of only using expert opinions to generate

knowledge and the importance of considering other ways to gather information. Therefore the themes and patterns obtained from the literature review were cross-referenced with the data obtained through the Delphi process of surveying experts in the field. An independent person with appropriate knowledge in the field read and analyzed the data separately to serve as an inter-rater reliability check.   In addition, the dissertation committee members, who have established expertise in the field, reviewed and advised me on the analysis of the data as an inter-rater reliability check. Various sources were used to enhance the study's validity. The process of using a variety of data sources is referred to as triangulation, a validity enhancement tool commonly used in research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

Reliability

Reliability refers to the "consistency of the measurement- the extent to which the results are similar over different forms of the same instrument or occasions of data collection" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 244). McMillan and Schumacher listed several conditions that could affect the reliability of a test, including "reactions to certain items, health motivation, mood, fatigue, luck, fluctuation in memory or attention, attitudes, test-taking skills (wiseness), ability to comprehend instruction, anxiety" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 244). To ensure reliability, a field test was conducted prior to constructing the survey and involved a sample of three participants, one representing each group: one paraprofessional, one special education teacher, and one principal. Revisions were made to the survey questions based on the recommendations of the field test participants. In addition to deploying the field test, I continuously reviewed data obtained from each round of interviews and analyzed them for unusual patterns. When such patterns were identified, I continued to offer additional clarification for questions to ensure all participants understood them. Due to the anonymity of the surveys, I

was not able to follow up with individual participants. I included examples generated by the study participants in the first round to explain categories of behavior used in the following rounds. The listing of examples allowed study participants develop a similar understanding of the different behavior types used in the survey questions.

Data Collection

The Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) reviewed the study proposal and approved it before the research began and data were collected. In addition to the authorizations from each organization, each participant was asked to give written informed consent to include them in the study. Finally, participants were given assurance that I would confidentially store and maintain all information and data from the study and that no individual information or responses would be identified by participant. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

I contacted the selected study participants via email and sent invitations to participate in the study. The invitations included a brief overview of the study, provided timelines and directions on completing the survey questions, reviewed the time required to fill out the surveys, offered an individual consent form, and presented my contact information. The study consisted of three rounds of anonymous electronic surveys.

Round 1

Round One included one question emailed to the participants with the directions and timeline for returning the survey. The first round of survey questions included the following question:

Special education paraprofessionals

RQ1: Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 school setting.

Special Education Teachers

RQ1: Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 school setting.

Special Education Administrators

RQ1: Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 school setting.

Round 2

The second round included the following questions:

Special education paraeducators

RQ2: Of the behavioral problems identified in RQ1, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one being the least challenging and five being the most challenging), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.

RQ3: Of the behavioral problems identified in RQ2, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one being the least frequent and five being the most frequent), please rate the frequency of each behavior type.

Special Education Teachers

RQ2: Of the behavioral problems identified in RQ1, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one being the least challenging and five being the most challenging), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.

RQ3: Of the behavioral problems identified in RQ2, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one being the least frequent and five being the most frequent), please rate the frequency of each behavior type.

Principals

RQ2: Of the behavioral problems identified in RQ1, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one being the least challenging and five being the most challenging), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.

RQ3: Of the behavioral problems identified in RQ2, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one being the least frequent and five being the most frequent), please rate the frequency of each behavior type.

Round 3

The third round was the last round and included the following questions:

Special education paraprofessionals

RQ4: Please list training topics that need to be included into staff development designed to best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3.

RQ5: Please list training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3. Please share training delivery components, such as lecture/presentation formats, on-the-job training, modeling, providing on-going feedback, coaching, or any other ideas you may have that will make the training effective.

Special Education Teachers

RQ4: Please list training topics that need to be included into staff development designed to best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3.

RQ5: Please list training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3. Please share training delivery components, such as lecture/presentation formats, on-the-job training, modeling, providing on-going feedback, coaching, or any other ideas you may have that will make the training effective.

Special Education Administrators

RQ4: Please list training topics that need to be included into staff development designed to best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3.

RQ5: Please list training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3. Please share training delivery components, such as

lecture/presentation formats, on-the-job training, modeling, providing on-going feedback, coaching, or any other ideas you may have that will make the training effective.

Research Pace

The three rounds of surveys must be presented at a pace that keeps the respondents motivated to answer questions and allows them to rely on their memory when transitioning from one survey round to the next. The formulation of questions of Rounds 2 and 3 depended on the data collected in the previous round of questions. The pace of the study was critical to the quality of the responses. The respondents needed to be given sufficient time to answer survey questions. However, too long of a break between rounds might have affected the quality of the responses. The respondents were provided a five day response timeframe to reduce the survey limitations related to the response rate, which could (a) "limit the survey's usefulness" (Passmore et al., 2002, p. 281), (b) make the "characteristics of respondents differ from those of nonrespondents" (Passmore et al., 2002, p. 281), and (c) keep the dialogue's pace. Conducting three parallel Delphi studies using surveys administered to paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals and comparing their results made the study unique.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

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Patton (2002) posited that qualitative data analysis "involves creativity, intellectual discipline, analytical rigor, and a great deal of hard work" (p. 442). McMillan and Schumacher (2003) compared different ways of knowing, such as (a) deriving information from sensory experiences, (b) agreement with others, (c) expert opinion, and (d) logic with the scientific

method and found the latter to be "the most likely way to produce reliable and accurate information" (p. 21). Data collection and analysis make the scientific way of knowing stand out among others.

The data obtained through the online surveys were analyzed throughout the data collection process. Each round of the Delphi study was analyzed separately and immediately upon the completion of the surveys. The survey questions were drafted before the study began and were finalized simultaneously with the data analysis. This method of constructing surveys takes advantage of the Delphi method's ability to use the expertise and experience of the study participants not only to provide data in response to the questions posed in the study but also to allow the experts to participate in formulating the actual questions that generate the data.

Round 1

Following the field test survey data collection, the surveys for Round 1 were finalized. The participants were asked to identify behaviors that paraprofessionals manage in the school setting. The data were analyzed by using the coding process. Creswell (2003) described the coding process as organizing data into chunks, segmenting information into categories, and labeling them. The coding process was used to identify common themes and allowed for the creation of a list of behavior types the study expert panel identified in Round 1. The list was added to the questions in Round 2. Duplicate responses were merged. All behaviors identified were categorized into a list of behavior types used in Round 2.

Round 2

In Round 2, the study expert panel was asked to rate the difficulty and frequency of the behaviors identified in Round 1 and compiled on the Round 1 list of behaviors. The participants

used a five- point Likert scale to rate the challenging level in one question and the frequency

level in another question. The five-point Likert scale included number 1 corresponding to,

depending on the survey question, "not challenging," or " not frequent," number 2

corresponding with "somewhat challenging," or "somewhat frequent;" number 3 corresponding

to "challenging," or "frequent;" the number 4 corresponding to "very challenging," or "very

frequent;" and number 5 corresponding to "most challenging," and "most frequent." The data

analysis involved grouping behaviors from different respondents by the rating they received on

the surveys. The data obtained from Round 2 were used as a foundation to form questions in

Round 3.

Round 3

In Round 3, the study expert panel was requested to identify the best training topics and

the most effective ways to deliver staff development for SE paraprofessionals. I placed the

responses to Round 3 into a data matrix to identify the best training topics and the most effective

ways to deliver staff development for special education paraprofessionals. To facilitate drawing

conclusions from the obtained data the results were displayed in a format that placed them in

order, most frequently mentioned to least frequently mentioned,.

Limitations

Limitations of a study stem from two sources: (a) decisions made about the study, and (b)

problems that arise throughout the process of conducting the study (Cone & Foster, 2006). Cone

and Foster (2006, p. 277) recommended analyzing limitations from the four following

perspectives:

1)	Internal validity or the design of the study

2)	External validity: generalizing the results to other populations

3)	Validity, reliability, and scope of measures

4)	Statistical analysis selected

One of the limitations in the study is associated with the selection of the participants. The participants are recommended by the SE administrators of each LEA, and as a result of the random selection, the study may have a disproportionate representation of elementary, middle, and high school study participants. Furthermore, the study is limited to being conducted in Riverside County, California, USA. While the Riverside County represents a diverse number of LEAs ranging from low to high performing and low to high socio-economic communities, the generalization of the results may be arguably restricted to the county or counties of a similar socio-economic make-up.

Another limitation of the study may be associated with the different demographics of the respondents that may affect their responses (alter, Walker & Landis, 2013). For example, an elementary SE paraprofessional may view challenging behaviors differently from a high school SE paraprofessional. A person's age, culture, background, education may influence the data he or she offers. To avoid this limitation, the study would have to select participants with similar demographics. However, selection of similar participants may, in its turn, have an impact on the generalizability of the results.

Despite the presence of specific limitations in the study, it is important to recognize and analyze them along with the investigation results. The advantages of limitations lie in recommendations for future research. Discrepant opinions are of great importance to the study

and must be analyzed for validity and reliability. After all, Patton (2002) warned the researcher about the imperfections of the "phenomenologically messy and methodologically imperfect world" (p. 93).

Significance of the Study

The significance is related to its ability to contribute "to theory, practice, policy, and social issues and action" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, xix) and "to knowledge for the sake of knowledge" (Patton, 2002, p. 10). Patton (2002) found "substantive significance" (p. 467) in qualitative studies to serve as an equivalent to the statistical significance in quantitative studies and linked it to the "solid, coherent, and consistent" (p.467) support it provided to the findings and deepened knowledge. The significance of the study is rooted in the following three factors associated with behavior management by SE paraprofessionals:

1) Effective behavior supports, such as the implementation of School-wide Positive Behavioral Supports (SWPBIS), improve student behaviors, create a better school climate, raise student achievement, and require all staff to be trained in behavioral interventions (Bradshaw et al., 20910; Metzler et al., 2005; Sugai & Horner, 2006).

2) Most districts underinvest in the area of behavior management and address the "growing challenge with an ever-expanding army of paraprofessionals" (Levenson, 2012, p. 89).

3) Lack of training among paraprofessionals is a nation-wide problem that leads to unsound educational practices (Giles, 2010).

The study was designed to advance knowledge in the area of professional development of SE paraprofessionals for the purpose of improving school climate and raising student achievement.

It also aimed at informing school leaders on raising the quality of a growing task force of SE paraprofessionals through effective professional development.

Chapter 3 described the research design in detail, providing in depth information on the population selection methods, so the study could be easily replicated in the future. Ten strategies to ensure validity offered by existing literature were discussed. Specific strategies to increase validity of the study were listed. A field test designed to increase the study's reliability was reviewed. The draft survey questions were finalized simultaneously with the data collection process. The step-by-step process of data analysis was also detailed. The significance of the study was evidenced by the gap identified by literature review and strengthened by the study's conclusions.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

"When a truth is necessary, the reason for it can be found by analysis, that is, by resolving it into simpler ideas and truths until the primary ones are reached." Gottfried Leibniz

Introduction

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 of the study contained a discussion of the challenges of the current education system in American public schools and an introduction of the concept of special education. The terms paraprofessional and paraeducator, interchangeably used in the study, were reviewed along with this valuable public education workforce's training needs. Chapter 2 offered a review of literature sources discussing legal mandates of special education, its current state, paraprofessionals' roles in managing student behavior, issues associated with adult learners, and paraprofessionals' staff development needs in the area of managing student behavior. Chapter 3 contained a description of the study methodology, a re-introduction of the research questions, and an explanation of the data collection process using the research population and sample. Chapter 4 of the study offers a brief summary of the study purpose, research questions, and study methodology; presents the data; and offers its analysis. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by summarizing the study's findings and by making recommendations for implementation and for future research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study was to identify the most challenging and most frequently occurring types of behavioral problems that paraprofessionals in the K-12 public school setting encounter.

In addition, the purpose of the study included identifying the most effective ways of preparing special education paraprofessionals to manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors through effective professional development practices.

Research Questions

Research Questions

The study investigated the following research questions:

1. What student behaviors managed by special education paraprofessionals in the k-12 setting are the most challenging and most frequently occurring?

2. What training content will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting?

3. What effective training delivery methods will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting?

Electronic Survey Questions

An anonymous electronic survey was designed to collect data to answer the three research questions. The research questions were presented to study participants in a three-round Delphi study electronic survey consisting of five survey questions. The electronic survey questions were formulated in a slightly different manner than the research questions were. The survey was developed to clarify the research questions and contained definitions and examples. Examples were generated by participants throughout the research. All three groups of

participants—special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals—received the same survey questions. The following survey questions were posed to study participants:

Special education paraprofessionals

Round 1

RQ1. Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 setting (A challenging behavior is "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers or adults" [Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5]).

Round 2

RQ2. Of the challenging behavioral types identified in Round 1/Research Question 1, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with 1 being *the least challenging* and 5 being *the most challenging*), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.

RQ3. Of the behavior types identified in Round 1, using a Likert scale (with 1 being *the least frequent* and 5 being *the most frequent*), please rate the level of frequency of each behavior type.

Round 3

RQ4. Please share KEY CONCEPTS, BIG IDEAS, or TOPICS you believe must be included in professional development activities that would best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the types of behaviors identified through Rounds 1 and 2. The behavior types identified in Rounds 1 and 2 are included below with examples participants provided.

RQ5. Please list training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3. Please share training delivery components, such as lecture/presentation formats, on-the-job training, modeling, providing ongoing feedback, coaching, or any other ideas you may have that will make the training effective.

Special education teachers

Round 1

RQ1. Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 setting (A challenging behavior is "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers or adults" [Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5]).

Round 2

RQ2. Of the challenging behavioral types identified in Round 1/Research Question 1, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with 1 being *the least challenging* and 5 being *the most challenging*), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.

RQ3. Of the behavior types identified in Round 1, using a Likert scale (with 1 being *the least frequent* and 5 being *the most frequent*), please rate the level of frequency of each behavior type.

Round 3

RQ4. Please share KEY CONCEPTS, BIG IDEAS, or TOPICS you believe must be included in professional development activities that would best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the types of behaviors identified through Rounds 1 and 2. The

behavior types identified in Rounds 1 and 2 are included below with examples participants provided.

RQ5. Please list training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3. Please share training delivery components, such as lecture/presentation formats, on-the-job training, modeling, providing ongoing feedback, coaching, or any other ideas you may have that will make the training effective.

Principals

Round 1

RQ1. Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 setting (A challenging behavior is "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers or adults" [Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5]).

Round 2

RQ2. Of the challenging behavioral types identified in Round 1/Research Question 1, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with 1 being *the least challenging* and 5 being *the most challenging*), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.

RQ3. Of the behavior types identified in Round 1, using a Likert scale (with 1 being *the least frequent* and 5 being *the most frequent*), please rate the level of frequency of each behavior type.

Round 3

RQ4. Please share KEY CONCEPTS, BIG IDEAS, or TOPICS you believe must be included in professional development activities that would best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the types of behaviors identified through Rounds 1 and 2. The behavior types identified in Rounds 1 and 2 are included below with examples participants provided.

RQ5. Please list training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors identified in RQ3. Please share training delivery components, such as lecture/presentation formats, on-the-job training, modeling, providing ongoing feedback, coaching, or any other ideas you may have that will make the training effective.

Methodology

The study involved using the Delphi method to collect data to answer the research questions. The Delphi study involved two expert panels. The first expert panel, referred to as the field test panel, served as consultants to the study and was designed to test the research instruments' validity and reliability prior to the beginning of the research. The second expert panel consisted of special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals. Special education administrators of districts agreeing to participate in the study selected the members of the second expert panel. The study involved using an anonymous electronic survey presented to participants in three rounds. Data collected in Round 1 was used as a foundation for questions presented in Rounds 2 and 3. The study involved two types of consents to participate in the study. First, superintendents or their designees were requested to grant permission to conduct the study. Second, individual consents from each participant were obtained.

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Population and Sample

The population of the study included all special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals who have knowledge in the field of education regarding the ways in which special education paraprofessionals in the k-12 setting of American public schools manage student behavior. The research used a purposeful sampling method that constricted the population to participants from districts located in Riverside County.

At the time of the study, Riverside County, California, included 23 districts. Superintendents of 11 districts agreed to participate in the study. A copy of the form used to obtain the superintendents' permissions is provided as Appendix A. Special education administrators of the 11 districts agreeing to participate in the study were contacted via email. A copy of the email sent to the special education administrators is provided as Appendix B. The Special education administrators were provided with copies of the following documents:

1) Doctoral Program in Organizational Leadership/Dissertation Research. A copy of this document is available as Appendix A. The document provided the special education administrators with the copy of the approval for research that their district's superintendent or designee signed.

2) Study Overview for Research Participants. A copy of this document is available as Appendix C. The document provided a visual representing an overview of the study.

3) Letter of Invitation to Study Participants. A copy of this document is available as Appendix D.

4) Participant selection criteria. A copy of this document is displayed below as Figure 5.

Figure 5. Participant selection criteria for special education administrators.

Special education paraprofessionals	Special education teachers	Principals
•Is currently employed by a public school district •Has at least two years of experience working as a special education paraprofessional •Has participated in at least one behavior management training or has taken coursework in the area of student behavior	•Is currently employed by a public school district •Has at least two years of experience working as a special education teacher •Has at least two years of experience working with special education parprofessionals •Has participated in at least one behavior management training or has taken coursework in the area of student behavior	•Is currently employed by a public school district •Has at least two years of experience working as a school principal •Has at least two years of experience supervising special education paraprofessionals •Has participated in at least one behavior management training or has taken courseowork in the area of student behavior

Figure 5 serves as a visual of the participant selection criteria presented to special education administrators when they were contacted to nominate study participants.

Although 11 superintendents or their designees granted permission to participate in the research, only nine special education administrators provided names and contact information for participants they selected for the study. One special education administrator provided names of participants who did not meet the participant selection criteria due to not being employed as special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, or principals. Additionally,

although special education administrators were requested to provide two special education

paraprofessionals, two special education teachers, and two principals, not all districts provided

the six requested participants. Some special education directors expressed inability to find six

participants who met the participant selection criteria. In summary, eight of the eleven districts

agreeing to participate in the study were able to select 38 participants who met the selection

criteria. After the 38 potential participants were identified, the process of obtaining individual

consents from each participant began in November 2014. The 38 study participants that the

special education administrators selected were contacted via email and were requested to

participate in the study. Each of the 38 potential study participants received the following

documents:

1) A letter of Invitation to Study Participants.

   A copy of this document is available as Appendix D.

2) Study Overview for Research Participants.

   A copy of this document is available as Appendix C.

3) Informed Consent form.

   A copy of this document is available as Appendix E.

4) Research Participant's Bill of Rights.

   A copy of this document is available as Appendix F.

Out of the 38 participants, 30 (78.9%) provided their individual consents to take part in

the research. The study expert panel was formed out of the 30 participants and comprised nine

special education paraprofessionals, 12 special education teachers, and nine principals. The

participants comprising the expert panel of the Delphi study consisted of 30% special education

paraprofessionals, 40% special education teachers, and 30% principals. Figure 6 below depicts the make-up of the study expert panel.

Figure 6. Study expert panel make-up.

Expert Panel Make-up

0%

Principals
30%

Paraprofessionals
30%
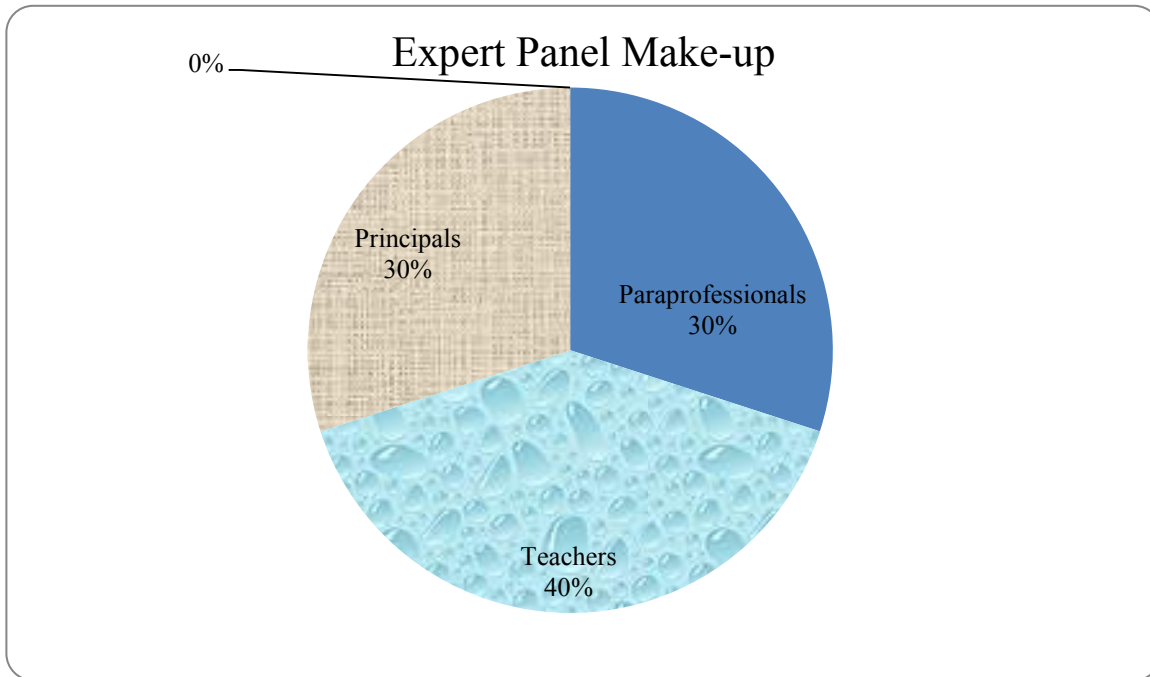
Teachers
40%

Figure 6 displays the constitution of the study expert panel—30% principals, 30% paraprofessionals, and 40% teachers.

In addition, Table 2 below provides a breakdown of the participants by participant type and actions related to their participation in the study.

Table 2

Study Participants: Participation Overview

Action	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals	Total Participants
Selected by Sp. Ed. Admin	11	14	13	38

Consented to study	9	12	9	30
Responded to Round 1	9	7	7	23
Responded to Round 2	6	10	7	23
Responded to Round 3	4	6	7	17

All three rounds of the electronic anonymous survey were emailed to all participants who consented to partake in the study, but the response rate varied by round and by participant type. Round 1 was emailed to participants on December 1, 2014, and yielded the highest number of responses. Round 2 was emailed on December 9, 2014, and yielded the second highest number of responses. Round 3 was emailed on December 16, 2014, and yielded the lowest number of responses. Table 3 summarizes the overall response rate for the study (represented by percentage) and provides the response rates (represented by percentage) for each round by participant type.

Table 3

Participation Response Rate by Round and Participant Type

Participant Type	Round One	Round Two	Round Three
Special Education Paraprofessionals	100%	67%	44%
Special Education Teachers	75%	83%	50%
Principals	77%	50%	58%
All Participants	83%	76%	56%

Note. Percentages are out of 30 participants.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data were collected through a Delphi study using a three-round electronic survey. Each round of questions generated responses from the study expert panel consisting of special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals and provided data to answer the study's research questions. The study focused on the following three research questions:

Research Question One

1. What student behaviors that special education paraprofessionals in the k-12 school setting manage are the most challenging and most frequently occurring?

Research Question Two

2. What training content will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting?

Research Question Three

3. What effective training delivery methods will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and the most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting?

The data in this chapter is presented and analyzed by research question. Figure 7 below depicts the alignment of the electronic survey questions with the study's research questions.

Figure *7*. Alignment of survey questions with study research questions.
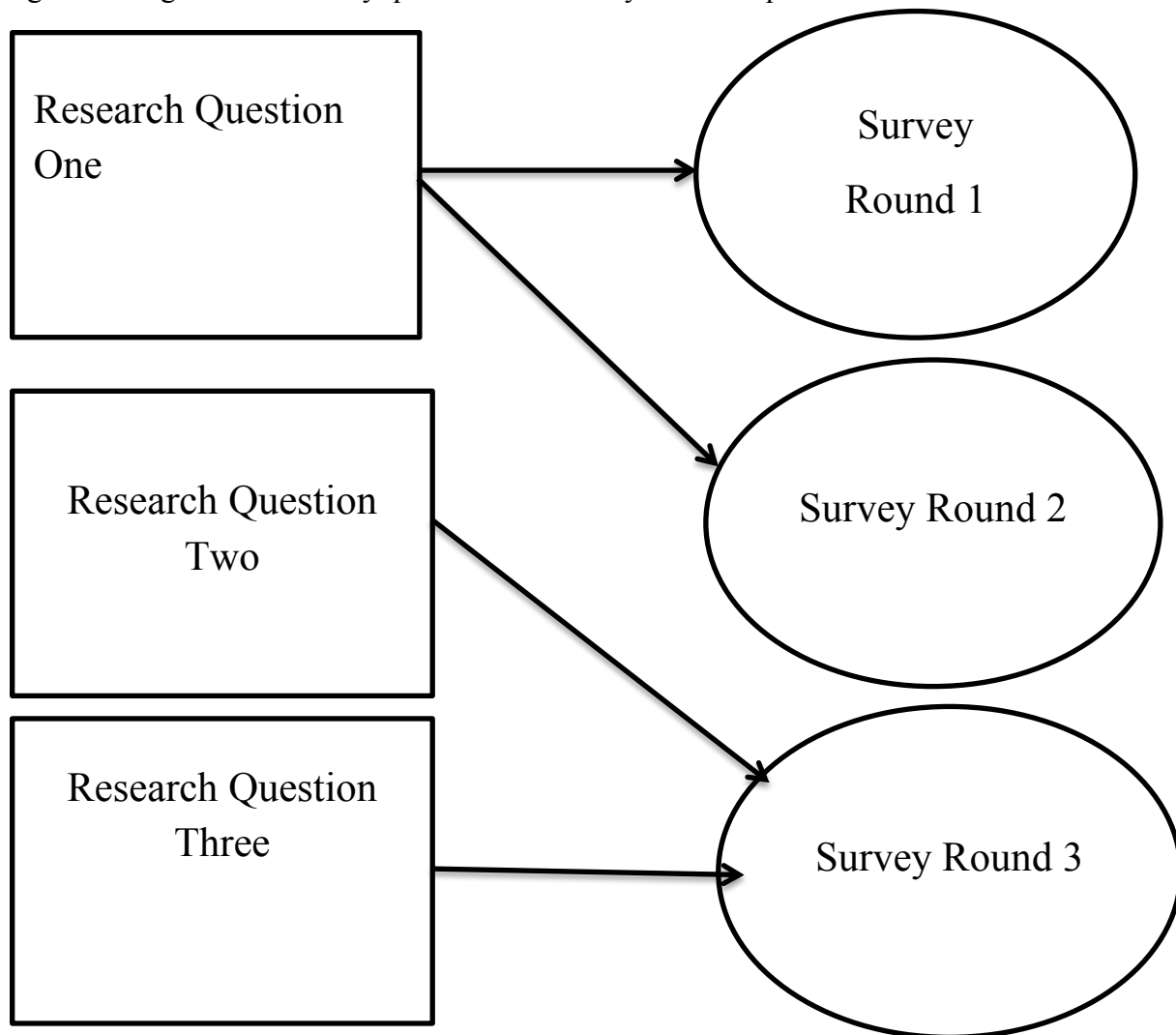
Figure 7 illustrates that the study's research questions align with the electronic survey questions presented to the study participants.

Research Question One

Rounds 1 and 2 of the electronic survey were designed to gather data to answer Research Question One:

What student behaviors that special education paraprofessionals in the k-12

setting manage are the most challenging and most frequently occurring?

Analysis of Round 1

In Round 1, the participants were asked to "identify the types of challenging behaviors

special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 setting". Challenging behavior was

defined for the participants as "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that

interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social

interactions with peers or adults" (Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5). A copy of the electronic survey

form is available as Appendix G. Nine paraprofessionals, seven special education teachers, and

seven principals responded to Round 1. Twenty-three participants responded to Round 1

questions, constituting a 76.7% response rate.

The qualitative data generated from Round 1 were coded for analysis. The coded behaviors

were organized and grouped into categories, forming twelve behavior types. Each behavior type

was given a title representing the behaviors that fell under the category. As a result of the coding

process, 12 behavior types were formed to represent challenging behaviors that special education

paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals participating in Round 1 identified.

Descriptions of behaviors that participants listed as challenging were used to provide examples

for each of the behavior types in the following rounds.

Responses including the following descriptions of challenging behaviors: (a) being off task,

(b) showing lack of focus, (c) daydreaming, (d) surfing the internet, (e) not getting back on task,

(f) playing, (g) staying out of seat, (h) being unmotivated, and (i) being withdrawn and

disengaged, were coded as On Task Behavior/Student Engagement.

Responses describing behaviors including forgetting to turn in assignments, forgetting to bring necessary materials/equipment to school, not turning in homework, and not following through were grouped together and coded as the Executive Functioning behavior type.

Responses describing behaviors that involved (a) refusing to accept help, (b) blurting out, (c) making off topic/inappropriate comments, (d) not accepting "No" for an answer, (e) not following social cues, (f) making loud verbal responses, (g) not waiting for one's turn, (h) not accepting feedback appropriately, (i) not raising hand in class, (j) not observing personal space or touching things/others, (k) not working well with others, and (l) not resolving conflicts or expressing disagreement appropriately were grouped together and coded as Prosocial Behaviors.

Responses describing behaviors that included crying, whining, feeling embarrassed, and inappropriately dealing with the feeling of hunger were grouped together and coded as Emotion/Stress Management.

Behaviors described as lack of independence and overly relying on adult help were grouped together and coded as Excessive Reliance on Adult Help.

Behaviors including protesting verbally, protesting physically, dropping things onto the floor, not following directions, refusing to bring necessary materials/equipment to school, and avoiding or refusing a task were grouped together into a category coded as Defiance.

Behaviors described as outbursts, throwing oneself on the floor, yelling, screaming, and hysterically crying were grouped together and coded as Tantrums.

Responses describing behaviors including cursing, yelling, screaming, making verbal threats, engaging in verbal confrontations, and name-calling were grouped together and coded as Verbal Aggression.

Behaviors described as hitting, scratching, biting, slapping, head-butting, throwing objects, pinching, punching, kicking, spitting, using a common object as a stabbing tool, grabbing, charging at someone, pulling hair, and self-injurious behaviors such as head banging, biting, pinching, and hitting oneself were grouped together and coded as Physical Aggression to Self or Others.

One respondent identified flipping furniture as a challenging behavior. Although other participants did not list this behavior or describe any other behavior that would fall under the same category, the challenging behavior of flipping furniture was listed by itself and coded as Property Destruction.

Responses describing wandering and running away as challenging behaviors were grouped together and coded as Elopement.

Behaviors described as hand-flapping, echolalia, lining up objects, making repetitive noises, and repeating phrases were grouped together and coded as Self-Stimulatory Behavior. One participant listed "autism" and "emotionally disturbed" as challenging behaviors. Since the terms refer to a disability and do not describe specific behaviors, this data was not coded or added to one of the behavior types.

As a result of the coding process, 12 categories or behavior types were identified. Each category was then given a title of a behavior type to best represent the behaviors grouped under

the category. Table 4 provides the list of all the behavior types identified through Round 1 and

displays examples of descriptions of specific behaviors that the participants identified.

Table 4

Behavior Types Identified Through Round 1

#	Behavior Type	Examples of behaviors participants identified
1.	On task/behavior/ Student engagement	Being off task, showing lack of focus, day dreaming, surfing the internet, not getting back on task, playing, staying out of seat, being unmotivated, being withdrawn; being disengaged
2.	Executive functioning	Forgetting to turn in assignments, forgetting to bring necessary materials/equipment to school, not turning in homework, not following through
3.	Prosocial behaviors	Refusing to accept help, blurting out, making off topic/inappropriate comments, not accepting "No" for an answer, not following social cues, making loud verbal responses, not waiting for one's turn, not accepting feedback appropriately, not raising hand in class, not observing personal

		space or touching things/others, not working well with others, not resolving conflicts or expressing disagreement appropriately
4.	Emotion/stress management	Crying, whining, feeling embarrassed, inappropriately dealing with the feeling of hunger
5.	Excessive reliance on adult help	Lack of independence, overly relying on adult help
6.	Defiance	Protesting verbally, protesting physically, dropping things onto the floor; not following directions, refusing to bring necessary materials/equipment to school, avoiding or refusing a task
7.	Tantrums	Outbursts, throwing oneself on the floor, yelling, screaming, hysterically crying
8.	Verbal aggression	Cursing, yelling, screaming, making verbal threats, engaging in verbal confrontations, name-calling
9.	Physical aggression to self or others	Hitting, scratching, biting, slapping, head-butting, throwing objects, pinching, punching, kicking, spitting, using a common object as a stabbing tool, grabbing, charging at someone, pulling hair, and self-injurious

	behaviors such as head banging, biting, pinching, and hitting oneself
10. Property destruction	Flipping furniture
11. Elopement	Wandering, running away
12. Self-stimulatory behavior	Hand-flapping, echolalia, lining up objects, making repetitive noises, repeating phrases

Analysis of Round 2

The data from Round 1 served as a foundation for forming the survey questions in Round 2. A list of 12 behavior types with examples (shown in Table 4) was presented to participants. In Round 2, the participants were asked to rate the challenging level and the frequency of each behavior type. Participants were provided a five-point Likert scale. Twenty three respondents, encompassing six paraprofessionals, 10 teachers, and seven principals, participated in Round 2. The response rate for Round 2 equaled 76.7%.

A copy of the electronic survey sent to the participants is available as Appendix H. The data were analyzed by behavior type. Twelve behavior types were presented to respondents. The following survey questions were posed to participants in Round 2:

> *Of the challenging behavioral types identified in Round 1/Research Question 1, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with 1 being* the least challenging *and 5 being* the most challenging*), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type.*

Of the behavior types identified in Round 1, using a Likert scale (with 1 being the least frequent *and 5 being* the most frequent*), please rate the level of frequency of each behavior type.*

The participants' responses rating the challenging level of each behavior type are presented by behavior type and by participant group.

On Task/Student Engagement

The first behavior type to be rated on its challenging level was the On Task Behavior/Student Engagement behavior type. Out of six paraprofessionals, two paraprofessionals rated this behavior type as *most challenging*, three rated this behavior type as *very challenging*, and one rated this behavior type as *challenging*. No paraprofessionals rated the behavior type as *least challenging* or *somewhat challenging*. Out of 10 teachers, no teachers rated this behavior type as the most challenging. Three teachers rated it as very challenging, one teacher rated it as challenging, and six teachers rated it as somewhat challenging. No teachers rated this behavior type as least challenging. Finally, out of seven principals, one found this behavior type to be most challenging, one rated it as very challenging, one principal rated it as challenging, and four rated it as somewhat challenging. No principals rated this behavior type as the least challenging. Table 5 displays the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of the responses pertaining to the On task/Student Engagement behavior type.

Table 5

Round 2 analysis of the challenging level of the On Task/Student Engagement behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	4.17	2.7	2.86
Median	4	2	2
Mode	4	2	2
Standard Deviation	0.75	0.95	1.21

Note. n=23.

Executive Functioning

Respondents were also asked to rate the challenging level of the Executive Functioning behavior type. Out of six paraprofessionals, two rated this behavior type as most challenging, two rated it as very challenging, none rated it as challenging, one rated it as somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging. Out of 10 teachers participating in Round 2, no teachers rated the behavior type as most challenging or very challenging, six teachers rated the behavior type as challenging, one rated it as somewhat challenging, and three rated it as least challenging. And out of seven principals, no respondents rated this behavior type as most challenging or very challenging, three rated it challenging, no respondents rated it as somewhat challenging, and four rated it as least challenging. Table 6 below displays the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation for Round 2 responses pertaining to the challenging level of the Executive functioning behavior type.

Table 6

Round Two analysis of the challenging level of the Executive Functioning behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	3.5	2.3	1.86
Median	4	3	1
Mode	5	3	1
Standard Deviation	1.64	0.95	1.07

Note. n=23.

Prosocial Behaviors

Respondents were also asked to rate the challenging level of the Prosocial Behaviors behavior type. Out of six paraprofessionals, two rated the behavior type as most challenging, none rated it as very challenging, three rated it as challenging, and one rated it as somewhat challenging. No paraprofessionals rated this behavior type as least challenging. Out of 10 teachers, four teachers rated the behavior type as most challenging, three rated it as very challenging, one rated it as challenging, one rated it as somewhat challenging, and one teacher did not rate the behavior. Out of seven principals, no principals rated the behavior type to be most challenging, one principal rated it as very challenging, four rated it as challenging, and two rated the behavior type as somewhat challenging. No principals rated it as least challenging. Table 7 provides the central tendencies for the Prosocial Behaviors as related to the ratings in Round 2.

Table 7

Round 2 analysis of the challenging level of the Prosocial Behaviors behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	3.5	3.7	2.86
Median	3	4	3
Mode	3	5	3
Standard Deviation	1.22	1.64	0.69

Note. n=23.

Emotion/stress management

The fourth behavior rated on its challenging level was the Emotion/Stress Management behavior type. Out of six paraprofessionals, none rated the behavior type as most challenging, one rated it as very challenging, three rated it as challenging, two rated it as somewhat challenging, and none rated it as least challenging. Out of 10 teachers, none rated the behavior as most challenging, four rated it as very challenging, three rated it as challenging, three teachers rated it as somewhat challenging, and none rated it as least challenging. Out of seven principals, none rated it as most challenging, one rated it as very challenging, one rated it as challenging, two rated it as somewhat challenging, and three rated the behavior type as least challenging. Table 8 below displays the central tendency data for the Emotion/stress management ratings.

Table 8

Round 2 analysis of the challenging level of the Emotion/Stress Management behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	2.83	3.1	2
Median	3	3	2
Mode	3	4	1
Standard Deviation	0.75	0.88	1.15

Note. n=23.

Excessive reliance on adult help

The fifth behavior type rated on its challenging level was Excessive Reliance on Adult Help. Out of six paraprofessionals, none rated the behavior type as most challenging or very challenging, five rated the behavior type as challenging, one rated it as somewhat challenging, and none rated it as least challenging. Out of 10 teachers, one rated the behavior type as most challenging, five rated it as very challenging, two rated it as challenging, two rated the behavior type as somewhat challenging, and no teachers rated it as least challenging. Finally, out of seven principals, none rated the behavior type as most challenging, none rated it as very challenging, two rated it as challenging, five rated the behavior type as somewhat challenging, and none rated it as least challenging. Table 9 displays the central tendency data for the Excessive Reliance on Adult Help behavior type.

Table 9

Round 2 analysis of the challenging level of the Excessive Reliance on Adult Help behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	2.83	3.5	2.29
Median	3	4	2
Mode	3	4	2
Standard Deviation	0.41	0.97	0.49

Note. n=23.

Defiance

Defiance represented the sixth behavior type rated on its challenging level. Out of six paraprofessionals, one rated the behavior type as most challenging, none rated it as very challenging, five rated it as challenging, and none rated it as somewhat challenging or least challenging. Out of 10 teachers, four rated the behavior type as most challenging, three rated the behavior type as very challenging, two rated it as challenging, one rated it as somewhat challenging, and none rated it as least challenging. And out of seven principals, two rated the behavior as the most challenging, one rated it as very challenging, two rated it as challenging, two rated it as somewhat challenging, and none rated it as least challenging. Table 10 shows the central tendency data for the Defiance behavior type.

Table 10

Round 2 analysis of the challenging level of the Defiance behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	3.33	4	3.43
Median	3	4	3
Mode	3	5	2
Standard Deviation	0.82	1.05	1.27

Note. n=23.

Tantrums

Tantrums represented the seventh behavior type rated on its challenging level. Out of six paraprofessionals, one rated the behavior type as most challenging, none rated it as very challenging, four rated it as challenging, none rated it as somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging. Out of 10 teachers, five rated the behavior type as most challenging, two rated it as very challenging, two rated it as challenging, one rated it as somewhat challenging, and none rated it as least challenging. Finally, out of seven principals, one rated it as most challenging, two rated it as very challenging, one rated it as challenging, two rated it as somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging. Table 11 demonstrates the central tendency data for the tantrums behavior type.

Table 11

Round 2 analysis of the challenging level of the Tantrums behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	3	4.1	3
Median	3	4.5	3
Mode	3	5	2
Standard Deviation	1.26	1.1	1.41

Note. n=23.

Verbal aggression

The eighth behavior type rated on its challenging level was Verbal Aggression. Out of six paraprofessionals, none rated the behavior type as most challenging, three rated it as very challenging, one rated it as challenging, one rated it as somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging.

Out of 10 teachers, five rated it as most challenging, four rated it as very challenging, one rated it as challenging, and no teachers rated the behavior type as somewhat challenging or least challenging. And out of seven principals, none rated the behavior type as most challenging, three rated it as very challenging, one rated the behavior type as challenging, two rated it as somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging. Table 12 displays the central tendency data for the Verbal aggression behavior type.

Table 12

Round 2 analysis of the challenging level of the Verbal Aggression behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	3	4.4	2.86
Median	3.5	4.5	3
Mode	4	5	4
Standard Deviation	1.26	0.7	1.21

Note. n=23.

Physical aggression to self or others

The ninth behavior type rated on its challenging level was Physical Aggression to Self or Others. Out of six paraprofessionals, three rated it as most challenging, two rated it as very challenging, none rated it as challenging, none rated it to be somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging.

Out of 10 teachers, eight rated this behavior type as most challenging, none rated it as very challenging, one rated it as challenging, one rated the behavior type to be somewhat challenging, and none rated it as least challenging. And out of seven principals, two rated the behavior type as most challenging, two rated it as very challenging, none rated it as challenging, two rated it as somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging. Table 13 shows the central tendency data for the Physical Aggression to Self or Others behavior type.

Table 13

Round 2 analysis of the challenging level of the Physical Aggression to Self or Others behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	4	4.5	3.29
Median	4.5	5	4
Mode	5	5	2
Standard Deviation	1.41	1.08	1.6

Note. n=23.

Property Destruction

Property Destruction was the tenth behavior type rated on its challenging level. Out of six paraprofessionals, one paraprofessional rated the behavior type as most challenging, one rated it as very challenging, two rated it as challenging, one rated it as somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging. Out of 10 teachers, five rated it as most challenging, one rated it as very challenging, three rated it as challenging, none rated it as somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging. Finally, out of seven principals, none rated it as most challenging, two rated it as very challenging, two rated it as challenging, one rated it as somewhat challenging, and two rated it as least challenging. Table 14 reveals the central tendency data for the Property Destruction behavior type.

Table 14

Round 2 analysis of the challenging level of the Property Destruction behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	3	3.9	2.57
Median	3	4.5	3
Mode	3	5	1
Standard Deviation	1.41	1.37	1.27

Note. n=23.

Elopement

The eleventh behavior type rated on its frequency was Elopement. Out of six paraprofessionals, none rated the behavior type as most challenging, one rated it as very challenging, two rated it as challenging, two rated it as somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging. Out of 10 teachers, one rated the behavior type as most challenging, four rated it as very challenging, one rated it as challenging, three rated it as somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging. Finally, out of seven principals, none rated this behavior type as most challenging, two rated it as very challenging, one rated it as challenging, three rated it as somewhat challenging, and none rated it as least challenging. Table 15 below shows the central tendency data for the Elopement behavior.

Table 15

Round 2 analysis of the challenging level of the Elopement behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	2.5	3.1	2.57
Median	2.5	3.5	2
Mode	3	4	2
Standard Deviation	1.05	1.29	1.13

Note. n=23.

Self-Stimulatory Behavior

Self-Stimulatory Behavior represented the twelfth behavior type rated on its challenging level. Out of six paraprofessionals, none rated it as most challenging or very challenging. One rated it as challenging. Four rated it as somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging. Out of 10 teachers, one rated it as most challenging, two rated it as very challenging, two rated it as challenging, four rated it as somewhat challenging, and one rated it as least challenging. And out of seven principals, none rated the behavior type as most challenging, or very challenging. One rated the behavior type as challenging, three rated it as somewhat challenging, and three rated it as least challenging. Table 16 displays the central tendency data for the Self-Stimulatory Behavior.

Table 16

Round 2 analysis of the challenging level of the Self-Stimulatory Behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	2	2.8	1.71
Median	2	2.5	2
Mode	2	2	2
Standard Deviation	0.63	1.23	0.76

Note. n=23.

Research Question Two

The participants' responses rating the level of frequency for each behavior type are presented by behavior type and by participant group.

On Task/Student Engagement

The first behavior type to be rated on its frequency was On Task Behavior/Student Engagement. Out of six paraprofessionals, three rated this behavior type as the most frequent, and three rated it as very frequent. No paraprofessionals rated the behavior type as frequent, somewhat frequent, or least frequent.

Out of 10 teachers, four rated this behavior type as most frequent, four rated it as very frequent, and two rated it as frequent. No teachers rated the behavior type as somewhat frequent or least frequent.

And out of seven principals, three principals rated this behavior type as most frequent, and two rated it as very frequent. One principal rated it as frequent, and one rated it as somewhat frequent. No principal rated it as least frequent. Table 17 displays the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of the responses pertaining to the On Task/Student Engagement behavior type.

Table 17

Round 2 analysis of the frequency rating of the On Task/Student Engagement behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	4.5	4.2	4
Median	4.5	4	4
Mode	5	5	5
Standard Deviation	0.55	0.79	1.15

Note: n=23.

Executive Functioning

The second behavior type respondents were requested to rate in terms of frequency level was Executive functioning. Out of six paraprofessionals, one paraprofessional rated it as most frequent, three rated it as very frequent, one rated it as frequent, and one rated it as somewhat frequent. No paraprofessionals rated this behavior type as least frequent. Out of 10 teachers participating in Round 2, two teachers rated the behavior type as most frequent, six rated it as very frequent, two teachers rated the behavior type as frequent, and no teachers rated it as

somewhat frequent or least frequent. Finally, out of seven principals, one respondent rated it as most frequent, no principals rated it as very frequent, three rated it as frequent, and three rated it as somewhat frequent. No principal rated it as least frequent. Table 18 below displays the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation for Round 2 responses pertaining to the frequency level of the Executive Functioning behavior type.

Table 18

Round 2 analysis of the frequency rating of the Executive Functioning behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	3.67	4	2.86
Median	4	4	3
Mode	4	4	2
Standard Deviation	1.03	0.67	1.07

Note. n=23.

Prosocial Behaviors

The third behavior type rated on its frequency level was Prosocial Behaviors. Out of six paraprofessionals, one rated the behavior type as most frequent, one rated it as very frequent, two rated it as frequent, and two rated it as somewhat frequent. No paraprofessionals rated it as least frequent. Out of 10 teachers, three teachers rated the behavior type as most frequent, two rated it as very frequent, four rated it as frequent, and one rated it as somewhat frequent. No teachers rated the behavior type as least frequent. And out of seven principals, no principals rated the

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behavior type as most frequent, no principal rated it as very frequent, three rated it as frequent, and two respondents rated the behavior type as somewhat frequent. Two rated the behavior as least frequent. Table 19 provides the central tendencies for the Prosocial Behaviors as related to the frequency ratings in Round 2.

Table 19

Round 2 analysis of the frequency rating of the Prosocial Behaviors type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	3.17	3.7	2.14
Median	3	3.5	2
Mode	3	3	3
Standard Deviation	1.17	1.06	0.9

Note. n=23.

Emotion/Stress Management

The fourth behavior type rated on its frequency level was Emotion/Stress Management. Out of six paraprofessionals, none rated the behavior as most frequent, two rated it as very frequent, two rated it as frequent, two rated it as somewhat frequent, and none rated it as least frequent. Out of 10 teachers, none rated the behavior type as most frequent, four rated it as very frequent, two rated it as frequent, three teachers rated it as somewhat frequent, and one rated it as least frequent. And out of seven principals, none rated it as most frequent, one rated it as very frequent, one rated it as frequent, three rated it as somewhat frequent, and two rated the behavior

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type as least frequent. Table 20 below displays the central tendency data for the Emotion/Stress

Management frequency ratings.

Table 20

Round 2 analysis of the frequency rating of the Emotion/Stress Management behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	3	2.9	2.14
Median	4	3	2
Mode	4	4	2
Standard Deviation	0.09	1.1	1.07

Note. n=23.

Excessive Reliance on Adult Help

The fifth behavior type rated on its frequency level was Excessive Reliance on Adult

Help. Out of six paraprofessionals, one rated this behavior type as most frequent, one rated the

behavior type as very frequent, three rated the behavior type as frequent, one rated it as

somewhat frequent, and none rated it as least frequent. Out of 10 teachers, none rated the

behavior type as most frequent, five rated it as very frequent, three rated it as frequent, one rated

the behavior type as somewhat frequent, and one teacher rated it as least frequent. Finally, out of

seven principals, none rated the behavior as most frequent, one rated it as very frequent, two

rated it as frequent, three rated it as somewhat frequent, and one rated it as least frequent. Table

21 shows the central tendency data for the Excessive Reliance on Adult Help behavior type
frequency ratings.

Table 21

Round 2 analysis of the frequency rating of the Excessive Reliance on Adult Help behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	3.33	3.2	2.42
Median	3	3.5	2
Mode	3	4	2
Standard Deviation	1.03	1.03	0.98

Note. n=23.

Defiance

Defiance represented the sixth behavior rated on its frequency level. Out of six
paraprofessionals, two rated the behavior type as most frequent, none rated it as very frequent,
two rated it as frequent, two rated it as somewhat frequent, and none rated it as least frequent.
And out of ten teachers, three rated the behavior type as most frequent, two rated the behavior
type as very frequent, three rated it as frequent, one rated it as somewhat frequent, and one rated
it as least frequent. And out of seven principals, two rated the behavior type as most frequent,
one rated it as very frequent, no principals rated it as frequent, three rated it as somewhat
frequent, and one rated it as least frequent. Table 22 illustrates the central tendency data for the
Defiance behavior type frequency ratings.

Table 22

Round 2 analysis of the frequency rating of the Defiance behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	3.33	3.5	3
Median	3	3.5	2
Mode	5	5	2
Standard Deviation	1.37	1.35	1.63

Note. n=23.

Tantrums

The seventh behavior type rated on its frequency level was Tantrums. Out of six paraprofessionals, no respondents rated the behavior type as most frequent, one rated it as very frequent, none rated it as frequent, three rated it as somewhat frequent, and two rated it as least frequent. Out of 10 teachers, two rated the behavior type as most frequent, none rated it as very frequent, three rated it as frequent, none rated it as somewhat frequent, and five rated it as least frequent. Finally, out of seven principals, none rated it as most frequent, one rated it as very frequent, none rated it as frequent, two rated it as somewhat frequent, and four rated it as least frequent. Table 23 depicts the central tendency data for the Tantrums behavior type frequency ratings.

Table 23

Round 2 analysis of the frequency rating of the Tantrums behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	2	2.4	1.71
Median	2	2	1
Mode	2	1	1
Standard Deviation	1.09	1.64	1.11

Note. n=23.

Verbal aggression

Verbal Aggression was the eighth behavior type rated on its frequency level. Out of six paraprofessionals, none rated the behavior type most frequent, two rated it as very frequent, none rated it as frequent, one rated it as somewhat frequent, and three rated the behavior type as least frequent. Out of 10 teachers, three rated the behavior type as most frequent, one rated it as very frequent, three rated it as frequent, one teacher rated it as somewhat frequent, and two teachers rated it as least frequent. Out of seven principals, none rated the behavior type as most frequent, one rated it as very frequent, none rated the behavior type as frequent, three rated it as somewhat frequent, and three rated it as least frequent. Table 24 displays the central tendency data for the Verbal Aggression behavior type frequency ratings.

Table 24

Round 2 analysis of the frequency rating of the Verbal Aggression behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	2.17	3.2	1.86
Median	1.5	3	2
Mode	1	5	1
Standard Deviation	1.47	1.55	1.07

Note. n=23.

Physical Aggression to Self or Others

The ninth behavior rated on its frequency level was Physical Aggression to Self or Others. Out of six paraprofessionals, none rated it as most frequent, one rated it as very frequent, two rated it as frequent, one rated it as somewhat frequent, and two rated it as least frequent. Out of 10 teachers, two rated it as most frequent, none rated it as very frequent, one rated it as frequent, three rated it as somewhat frequent, and four rated it as least frequent. Finally, out of seven principals, none rated the behavior as most frequent, none rated it as very frequent, one rated it as frequent, three rated it as somewhat frequent, and three rated it as least frequent. Table 25 depicts the central tendency data for the Physical Aggression to Self or Others behavior type frequency ratings.

Table 25

Round 2 analysis of the frequency rating of the Physical Aggression to Self or Others behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	2.33	2.3	1.71
Median	2.5	2	2
Mode	3	1	2
Standard Deviation	1.21	1.57	0.75

Note. n=23.

Property Destruction

Property Destruction was the tenth behavior type rated on its frequency level. Out of six paraprofessionals, none rated the behavior type as most frequent, none rated it as very frequent, two rated the behavior type as frequent, two rated it as somewhat frequent, and two rated it as least frequent. Out of 10 teachers, no respondents rated it as most frequent, two rated it as very frequent, none rated it as frequent, two rated it as somewhat frequent, and six rated it as least frequent. Finally, out of seven principals, none rated it as most frequent, no respondents rated it as very frequent, none rated it as frequent, one rated it as somewhat frequent, and six rated it as least frequent. Table 26 shows the central tendency data for the Property Destruction behavior type frequency ratings.

Table 26

Round 2 analysis of the frequency rating of the Property Destruction behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	2	1.8	1.14
Median	2	1	1
Mode	2	1	1
Standard Deviation	0.9	1.22	0.38

Note. n=23.

Elopement

The eleventh behavior type rated on its frequency was Elopement. Out of six paraprofessionals, none rated the behavior type as most frequent, one rated it as very frequent, one rated it as frequent, one rated it as somewhat frequent, and three rated it as least frequent. Out of 10 teachers, none rated the behavior as most frequent, no respondents rated the behavior as very frequent, three rated it as frequent, one rated it as somewhat frequent, and six rated it as least frequent. And out of seven principals, none rated it as most frequent, one rated it as very frequent, none rated it as frequent, one rated it as somewhat frequent, and five rated it as least frequent. Table 27 demonstrates the central tendency data for the Elopement behavior type frequency ratings.

Table 27

Round 2 analysis of the frequency rating of the Elopement behavior type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	2	1.7	1.57
Median	1.5	1	1
Mode	1	1	1
Standard Deviation	1.26	0.95	1.13

Note. n=23.

Self-Stimulatory Behavior

Self-Stimulatory Behavior represented the twelfth behavior type rated on its frequency. Out of six paraprofessionals, none rated it as most frequent, one rated it as very frequent, none rated it as frequent, three rated it as somewhat frequent, and two rated it as least frequent. Out of 10 teachers, one rated it as most frequent, three rated it as very frequent, one rated it as frequent, two rated it as somewhat frequent, and three rated it as least frequent. Finally, out of seven principals, none rated the behavior type as most frequent, very frequent, frequent, or somewhat frequent. All seven principals rated it as least frequent. Table 28 depicts the central tendency data for the Self-Stimulatory Behaviors category frequency ratings.

Table 28

Round 2 analysis of the frequency rating of the Self-Stimulatory Behaviors type

Respondent Type/Measures of Central Tendency	Paraprofessionals	Teachers	Principals
Mean	2	2.7	1
Median	2	2.5	1
Mode	2	4	1
Standard Deviation	1.1	1.5	0

Note. n=23.

Analysis of Round 3

Round 3 was designed to answer Research Questions 2 and 3:

RQ2: What training content will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting?

RQ3: What effective training delivery methods will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting?

Research Question Two

The number of participants in Round 3 encompassed four special education paraprofessionals, six special education teachers, and seven principals. Seventeen participants responded (n=17), constituting a 56.7% response rate.

To answer Research Question 2, the study participants were requested to share "KEY CONCEPTS, BIG IDEAS, or TOPICS they believed must be included in professional development activities that would best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the types of behaviors identified through Rounds 1 and 2". Defiance; On Task Behavior/Student Engagement; Excessive Reliance on Adult Help; Tantrums; Physical Aggression to Self or Others; Executive Functioning; Prosocial Behaviors; and Emotion/Stress Management surfaced as behavior types for participant responses. The participants were provided the list of these behavior types. A copy of the Round 3 survey is available as Appendix I.

The coding process was used to analyze responses pertaining to professional development for each of the behavior types. Data were grouped into categories to identify common emerging themes. Examples provided by the respondents used to identify the professional development topics are listed in parenthesis.

When expressing key training concepts for the Defiance behavior type, the respondents provided answers that were grouped into the professional development topics. The following topics were identified:

- Understanding function of the behavior (understand why a certain behavior occurs)
- Having general knowledge about disability categories (understand disability traits)

- Defining behavior (understanding the intensity of the behavior, being able to prioritize behaviors by their severity, and knowing when to address the behavior and when to call for help)

- Understanding environmental factors (what triggers behavior; what tasks have a high likelihood of causing a specific maladaptive behavior; and understanding what staff directions, demands, expectations, or reactions may trigger a specific maladaptive behavior)

- Preventing behavior from occurring (creating schedules for students, implementing transition warnings, and presenting students with clear expectations)

- Teaching replacement behaviors (teaching students positive behaviors, teaching students how to ask for something in an appropriate manner)

- Providing positive reinforcement (knowing what interests the student, being able to survey students' interests, using positive language with students, utilizing positive reinforcement to reward behavior, incorporating a student's interest into tasks)

- De-escalating students (de-escalation strategies, Pro-Act, CPI training)

- Reactive strategies (knowing what to do when the behavior is occurring, ensuring physical safety, removing student from the situation)

- Maintaining good composure and communication (using positive language with students, not getting into power struggles, having patience, being consistent, accepting that behavior as part of the paraeducator's job, knowing and understanding one's own feelings and knowing how one's own reactions or responses project onto students)

When discussing key concepts or big ideas for the training on managing the On Task/Student Engagement behavior type, respondents provided answers that were grouped into the following training topics:

- Understanding behavior (understanding the function of the behavior, knowing disability traits, knowing how to develop and implement behavior plans, understanding referral procedures)

- Keeping the student engaged (generating ideas on how to keep the student focused and how to motivate a student, finding relevance in the activity to keep the student engaged, collecting data and sharing it with the student, getting the students to buy-in to the activity)

- Providing positive reinforcement (knowing how to use a reinforcement schedule, using checklists with positive checkmarks)

- Teaching PBIS strategies (behavioral interventions)

- Teaching social skills (such as BoysTown curriculum)

- Providing structure (using visual schedules, timers, and informing students of keeping their knees under the desk)

- Redirecting the student (refraining from arguing with the student)

- Modifying the task (knowing how to modify the task, changing the activity, offering choices, allowing escape methods, using peer tutors, incorporating sensory activities)

When discussing the Excessive Reliance on Adult Help behavioral type, the respondents provided answers that were grouped into the following training topics:

- Fostering independence strategies (hierarchy of prompting; allowing students to initiate or complete the task on their own; using task analysis and letting the student start with

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easier sections of the task, such as reading instructions, and interfering after the task becomes more challenging for the student; prompting and teaching self-confidence; creating situations in which students could be independent; being able to assess when assistance is needed; teaching students how to use reference materials, such as Cornell notes and multiplication charts; setting up independent work stations; teaching fading physical proximity, e.g. how not to be overbearing)

- Using peer models

- Engaging the student (providing specific language on how to motivate and engage the student, using a questioning strategy to keep the student engaged in the assignment, and using backward chaining)

- PECS (picture communication systems)

- Understanding behavior (backward chaining, task analysis)

- Teaching fading strategies

Responses provided to describe training for the Tantrums behavior type included ideas that were grouped into the following training topics:

- Understanding the behavior (function of the behavior, functional analysis)

- Preventative strategies (modifying the environment, changing the antecedents, creating structure, using visual schedules, using social stories)

- Teaching replacement behaviors

- Teaching students how to deal with emotions and employing coping strategies

- Using de-escalating strategies (calming strategies, patience, wait time, evasion, re-directing)

- Keeping the environment safe (removing the student, attending to the rest of the class)

- Interacting and communicating with students (listening to students, knowing when to ignore the behavior)

- Redirecting

- PBIS strategies

Responses provided conveying key concepts and training ideas for the Executive Functioning behavior type were grouped into the following training topics:

- How to teach students organizational skills (binders, alarms, checklists, visual schedules, written schedules, planners)

- Knowing how to make disability related accommodations

- How to interact with students (talking to students without escalating, reminding them of assignments or tasks)

- Teaching student individual accountability (how to monitor self, creating daily & weekly sheets, understanding consequences)

- Using parent/school communication sheets

- PBIS

- AVID

Responses provided relating key concepts and training ideas for the Prosocial Behaviors behavior type were grouped into the following training topics:

- Teaching on how to talk to students (how to use positive language and tone, re-direct a student)

- Implementing behavior plans

- Using reinforcements

- Using social stories

- Using BoysTown curriculum

- How to use time away to refocus

- How to model behavior

- How to create an organized and structured environment (visual schedules, clear expectations for the student)

- How to teach replacement behavior

- How to use peer-modeling

- Understanding of natural consequences

Responses provided detailing key concepts and ideas for the Emotion/Stress Management behavior type were grouped into the following training topics:

- Understanding behavior and emotions (function, motivation behind the behavior)

- Teaching social skills

- PBIS

- How to talk to the student (how to encourage the student, how to give verbal prompts, using social stories, providing reassurance)

- Teaching the student how to manage stress and emotions (modeling how to handle feelings, using some time-away (chair) to re-focus, employing stress training, using stress balls, using self-regulatory strategies, using calming strategies, understanding how to have a positive attitude, using video-modeling)

- PECS training

- Teaching students about healthy habits (getting a good night's sleep, eating healthily)

- How to utilize peers

Research Question Three

To collect data for Research Question 3, the participants were requested to share "effective professional development activities or training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring behaviors identified in Rounds 1 and 2". In addition to conveying ideas about training content, respondents were asked to offer effective ways of providing training to special education paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals listed the following effective training delivery methods: lecture format, informative packets, videos, modeling, individual class staff trainings, weekly team meetings, role play, group activities, shadowing, on-going training, continuous feedback, and videos.

Special education teachers' responses included the following effective training delivery methods: CPI, PBIS, teaching channel videos, modeling strategies followed by observations, review of progress, lecture, shadowing, and providing feedback. Several responses included comments on the content of the training. Such responses included writing behavioral plans, thinking outside the box, setting up room environments, using positive strategies, teaching students about their disability, and journaling strategies.

Principals' responses included the following recommendations for effective training delivery methods: lectures including important information with relevant examples and time to practice, modeling, shadowing, role-play, PBIS training, interactive lectures with time to practice, providing on-going feedback, empathy activities, and videos. One principal recommended lectures with "modeling and follow up shadowing and coaching".

Role play was mentioned separately and as a "continuation of Pro-Act training". One principal asserted "coaching paraprofessionals through tantrums happening with kids" to be "a great way for them to learn hands-on immediately" because "until it's occurring, it's hard to

visualize the situation". Additionally, one principal recommended "having the paraprofessionals watch a child doing this type of behavior and then analyzing and evaluating the video clip".

Some responses from principals addressed training content rather than a training delivery method. For example, one principal declared, "[using] incentive programs that work or have worked in the past with the paraprofessionals will help them with re-directing and pushing student engagement". Another principal mentioned utilizing videos on de-escalation. Furthermore, another principal stated the need to for teachers to "go over the lesson plans and activities prior to the students coming in for the day" and averred, "reducing the amount of down time is imperative to a successful classroom experience". Moreover, one principal stated that the best training involved teachers providing feedback to the paraprofessionals regarding whether paraprofessionals are providing too much support to students. One principal recommended "showing the paraprofessionals the best types of incentive programs" and "having them come up with their own and getting teacher feedback". One principal advised to add "guidance toward being a peer helper or school helper", and finally, one principal expressed the need to draw "situations that point to the antecedent and new planned reactions".

Summary

Chapter 4 included an overview of the purpose of the study, the three research questions, the methodology, the population, and the sample. The presentation of the data was aligned with the research questions, and the three rounds of the Delphi survey were analyzed.

In Round 1, the participants were requested to "identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 setting". Twenty three participants out of the 30 who consented to participate in the study responded to Round 1,

constituting a 76.7% response rate, and identified 12 behavior types that were most challenging. The 23 participants comprised nine paraprofessionals, seven special education teachers, and seven principals. The coding process was used to analyze the data. As a result of the coding process, 12 behavior types were identified. The behavior types identified in Round 1 served as a foundation to formulate Round 2 survey questions.

In Round 2, the participants were given a five point Likert scale and were requested to rate the challenging level and the frequency of the behavior types identified in Round 1. Twenty three respondents (n=23), comprising six paraprofessionals, 10 teachers, and seven principals participated in Round 2. The response rate for Round 2 equaled 76.7%.

In Round 3, the participants were asked to share key concepts, big ideas, or topics they believed must be included in professional development activities designed to prepare special education paraprofessionals to best manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring behavior types identified in the previous rounds. In addition, the participants were asked to express "effective professional development activities or training delivery methods that would best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring behaviors identified in Rounds 1 and 2". Seventeen respondents (a response rate of 56.7%), encompassing four SE paraprofessionals, six special education teachers, and seven principals, participated in Round 3. The responses were coded, analyzed, and grouped into emerging themes.

Chapter 5 presents conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"I am turned into a sort of machine for observing facts and grinding out conclusions." Charles Darwin

Summary

The research focused on determining special education paraprofessionals' perceived training needs in the area of challenging student behavior. The study involved the opinions of a panel of experts in the area of student behavioral training for special education paraprofessionals by requesting them to participate in an anonymous electronic survey. First, the data were used to identify the most challenging and frequently occurring behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in a k-12 school setting. Second, the data were used to generate key concepts, ideas, and topics that must be included into professional development activities for special education paraprofessionals. Lastly, the data were used to identify the most effective methods of delivering training to help special education paraprofessionals manage the most challenging and frequently occurring student behaviors.

Chapter 1 of the study provided a brief overview of special education and the challenges associated with providing special education services in American public education today. This chapter discussed the role special education paraprofessionals play in managing student behaviors and the need for systematic, comprehensive, and evidence-based professional development for the growing work force. Also included was the research problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. In Chapter 1, I reviewed the organization of the study and explained the methodology selected to carry out the study.

Chapter 2 encompassed a review of existing literature addressing the current state of special education, legal mandates, the evolution of paraprofessionals' roles in meeting special

education students' needs, and issues pertaining to managing challenging student behaviors in the school setting. The chapter also emphasized the impact of behavior management on student achievement. In this chapter, I highlighted the need to provide the growing work force of special education paraprofessionals with effective professional development that accounts for principles of andragogy.

Chapter 3 provided a detailed overview of the study's methodology and explained the process of collecting data to answer the research questions. The selection of the Delphi study expert panel was also reviewed. Furthermore, the validity and reliability of the study were discussed to ensure the quality of the data collected to carry out the study's purpose.

Chapter 4 included a presentation of the data and an analysis of each round of surveys provided to the study expert panel. The data was presented in alignment with the research questions. The response rate for each of the rounds was presented along with the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data that the study participants provided.

Chapter 5 presents an overview of the study, aligning the research questions, survey questions presented to the participants, and its methodology with the study's purpose. It also presents the major findings and study conclusions. The chapter additionally includes a discussion of practical implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study was to identify the most challenging and most frequently occurring types of behavioral problems that paraprofessionals in the K-12 public school setting encounter.

In addition, the purpose of the study included identifying the most effective ways of preparing SE paraprofessionals to manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors through effective professional development practices.

Research Questions

The study investigated the following research questions:

1. What student behaviors that special education paraprofessionals in the k-12 setting manage are the most challenging and most frequently occurring?

2. What training content will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting?

3. What effective training delivery methods will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 school setting?

Methodology

A Delphi study was employed to obtain data defining special education paraprofessionals' perceived training needs. A study expert panel was selected using criteria that a pilot expert panel developed. The study expert panel consisted of 30 educators—nine special education paraprofessionals, 12 special education teachers, and nine principals. Twenty three participants responded to the first survey round. The respondents comprised nine paraprofessionals, seven teachers, and seven principals, a 76.7% response rate. Twenty three expert panel members, comprising six special education paraprofessionals, 10 special education teachers, and seven principals, participated in Round 2. The response rate for Round 2 also

equaled 76.7%. Round 3 received 17 responses from four special education paraprofessionals, six special education teachers, and seven principals, a response rate of 56.7%.

<div align="center">**Major Findings**</div>

The findings from the study are presented in alignment with the study's three research questions.

Research Question One

Three research questions constituted this study. A three round anonymous electronic survey consisting of five questions was designed to collect data to answer the research questions. Rounds 1 and 2 were designed to answer Research Question 1 below:

1. What student behaviors that special education paraprofessionals in the k-12 setting manage are the most challenging and most frequently occurring?

Study participants were requested to list the most challenging student behaviors special education paraprofessionals managed in the k-12 setting.

The responses that special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals provided demonstrated common themes that were categorized into the following twelve behavior types:

1. On task behavior/student engagement
2. Executive functioning
3. Prosocial behaviors
4. Emotion/stress management
5. Excessive reliance on adult help
6. Defiance

7. Tantrums

8. Verbal aggression

9. Physical aggression to self or others

10. Property destruction

11. Elopement

12. Self-stimulatory behaviors

Categorization Criteria

Researchers are required to "reflect on, deal with, and report potential sources of bias and error" (Patton, 2002, p. 51) when conducting "qualitative inquiry" (p. 51). This evidences the importance of discussing the role of bias and explaining the principles used to group the above behaviors into specific categories. It is equally important to note that the examples of behaviors the study participants expressed were analyzed without knowing the specific situations in which the study expert panel members observed the behaviors. I analyzed the behaviors without knowing the behavior's trigger or function. My experience with managing student behaviors may have brought a personal bias in the way the behaviors were categorized into behavior types.

The coding method was used to group the examples and to categorize them into behavior types. Coding refers to identifying common patterns, grouping data, and forming them into categories. The two following criteria judge the process of categorization: "internal homogeneity" (Patton, 2002, p. 465) and external heterogeneity" (p. 465). Patton (2002) described the first criterion as concerned with the "extent to which the data that belong in a certain category hold together or 'dovetail' in a meaningful way" (p. 465). The second criterion involved the "extent to which differences among categories are bold and clear" (p. 465). The two

criteria Patton outlined were applied to categorizing the examples of behaviors the study participants provided.

These examples of behaviors were used to group the behaviors into behavior types and were judged using the two above criteria before being grouped into categories. For example, a common theme emerged when analyzing behaviors forming the categories of Defiance, Verbal Aggression, and Tantrums. The common theme was a protest students communicated through their behaviors. But although the behaviors overlapped because they involved a protesting student, they differed in the intensity in which the protest was displayed, which engendered their separation into three different categories. Examples that were grouped into the behavior type of defiance included protesting verbally, protesting physically, not following directions, refusing to bring necessary materials/equipment to school, avoiding or refusing a task. All of these behavior examples involved a student's protest without demonstrating aggression. The two common themes, protest and absence of aggression, formed an internal homogeneity for this category. Examples grouped under the behavior type of verbal aggression involved cursing, yelling, making verbal threats, engaging in verbal confrontations, and name-calling. These examples involved a protest, but they also included aggressiveness, which differentiated them from the examples included under the behavior type of defiance. The presence of aggression served as the external heterogeneity and formed the basis for creating a separate category of verbal aggression. Behaviors included under the category of tantrums involved outbursts, throwing oneself on the floor, screaming, and hysterically crying. Although the behaviors listed in this category had in common a student's intent to protest against something, the intensity with which the protest was demonstrated differentiated these behavior examples from the behavior examples in defiance and

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in verbal aggression. The increased intensity served as the external heterogeneity to group the behaviors into a separate category of tantrums.

Round 2 was designed to collect data for the first research question. Participants were given a 5-point Likert scale and were requested to rate the behavior types on their challenging level and frequency. The data were analyzed, and the means for ranking each behavior type were compared. All participants were on the study expert panel. The study expert panel viewed Physical aggression to self or others as the most challenging behavior paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 school setting. Self-stimulatory behaviors surfaced as the least challenging. Figure 8 serves as a visual representation of the behavior type rankings by challenging level.

Figure 8. Rankings for each behavior type by challenging level
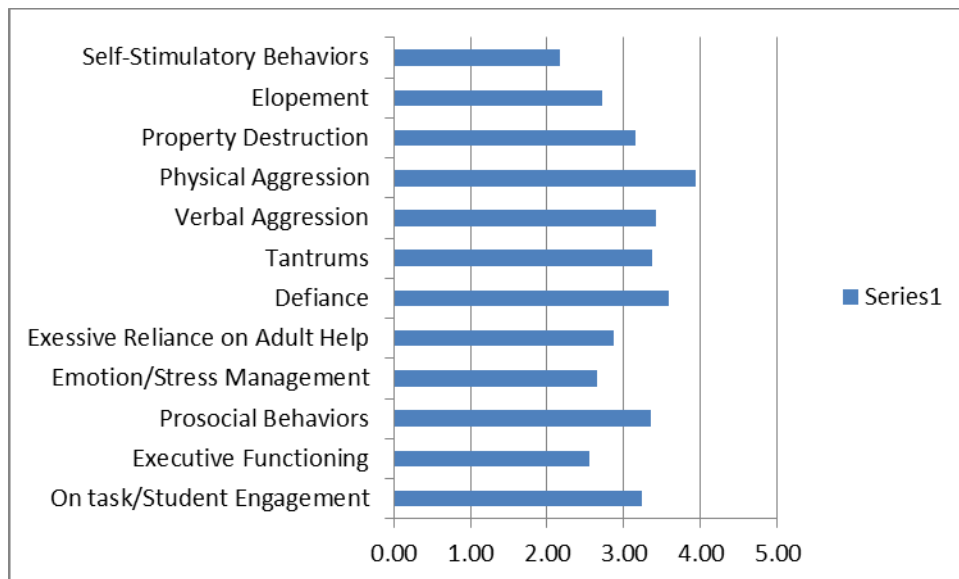
The figure shows each behavior type's rankings by challenging level based on mean scores. The panel rated Physical Aggression to self or others as the most challenging of the 12 behavior types. Self-stimulatory behaviors emerged as the least challenging of the 12 behavior types.

The data were also analyzed to determine the most frequently occurring behavior type. The panel rated On Task/Student Engagement behavior as the most frequently occurring and Self-Stimulatory Behavior as the least frequently occurring. Additionally, the behavior types were analyzed by a combined rate of challenging level and frequency. The means for each behavior type were added and averaged to determine the combined (challenging level and frequency) means. The panel rated On Task/Student Engagement as the most challenging and the most frequently occurring behavior. Conversely, the panel rated Self-Stimulatory Behaviors as the least challenging and most frequently occurring. Figure 9 provides a chart representing the behavior type rankings by frequency.

Figure 9. Rankings for each behavior type by frequency level.
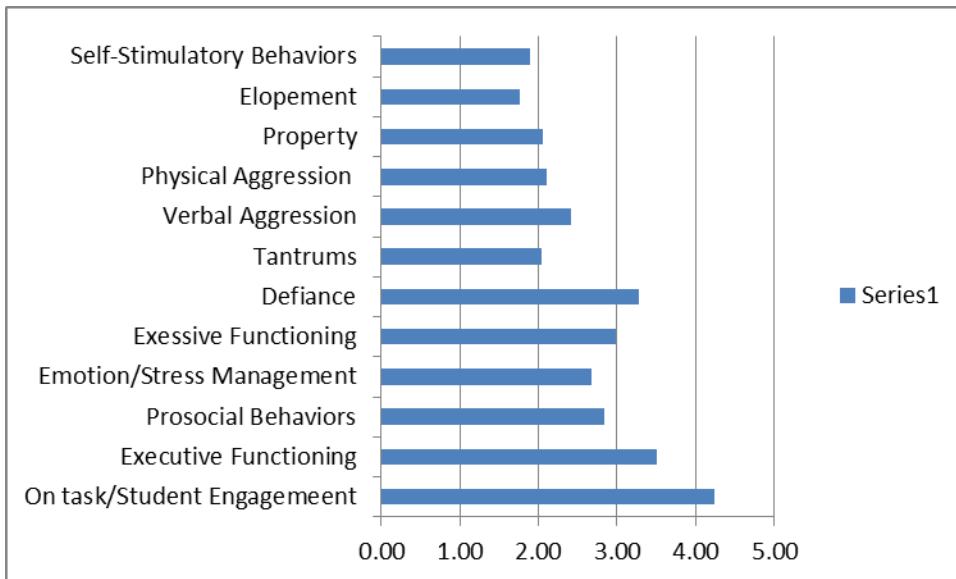
The figure provides each behavior type's frequency rankings based on mean scores. The panel rated on task/student engagement as the most frequent of the 12 behavior types, and self-stimulatory behaviors emerged as the least frequently occurring of the 12 behavior types.

The behaviors were analyzed based on the combined Likert score they were given for their challenging level and frequency. The means were added and averaged. On Task/Student Engagement received the highest mean, and Self-Stimulatory Behaviors received the lowest mean score.

Figure 10 shows the behavior type rankings based on both criteria, including the challenging level and frequency.

Figure 10. Ranking of behavior types based on challenging level and frequency
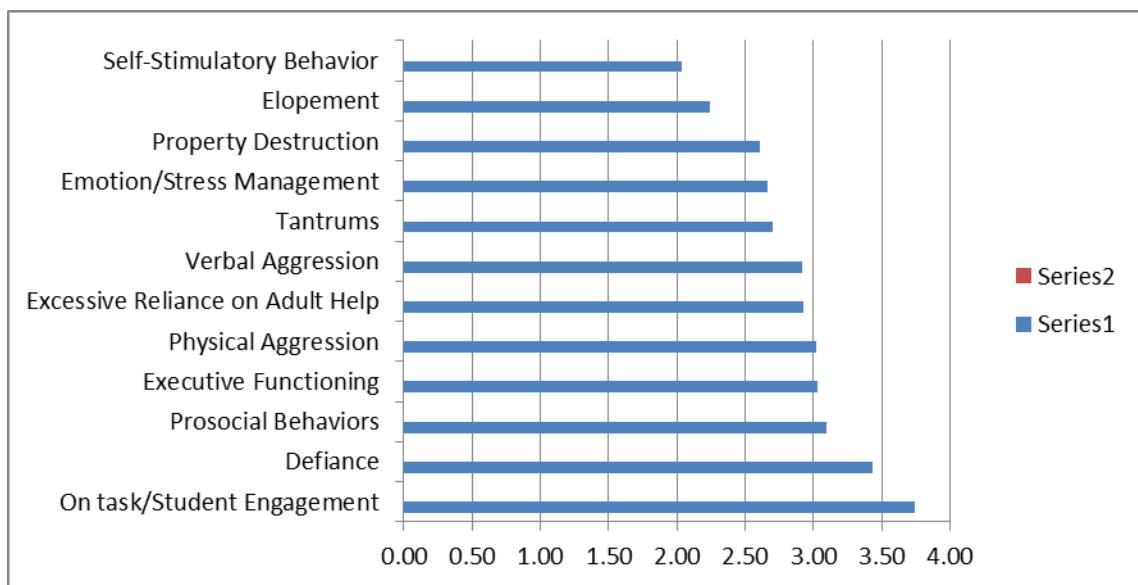
The figure provides each behavior type's combined average mean score for challenging level and frequency. The panel gave on task/student engagement the highest average mean score of the 12 behavior types. Self-stimulatory behaviors received the lowest average mean score of the 12 behavior types.

The eight most frequently occurring challenging behaviors were selected for further analysis: On task/student engagement; Defiance; Prosocial behaviors; Executive functioning; Physical aggression; Excessive reliance on adult help; Verbal aggression; and Tantrums.

Research Question Two

In Round 3, the participants were asked to review the top eight behavior types and to express key concepts, big ideas, or topics they believed must be included in professional development activities that would best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the types of behaviors identified through Rounds 1 and 2. The following key concepts, big ideas, and topics emerged from responses to the question (examples in parentheses represent responses provided by participants):

1) Motivating students, keeping the student engaged (generating ideas on how to keep students focused, how to motivate a student, finding relevance in the activity to keep the student engaged, collecting data and sharing it with the student, getting the students to buy-in to the activity)

2) Understanding environmental factors (what triggers behavior; what tasks have a high likelihood of causing a specific maladaptive behavior; what staff directions, demands, expectations, or reactions may trigger a specific maladaptive behavior)

3) Creating an environment that would reduce the likelihood of the behavior reoccurring (providing structure, using visual schedules and/or timers, informing students of keeping their knees under the desk)

4) Using peer models

5) Providing positive reinforcement (knowing what interests the student, being able to survey students' interests, using positive language with students, utilizing positive reinforcement to reward behavior, incorporating students' interests into tasks, having a positive attitude and positive interactions with students/ preventing behavior from

occurring [creating schedules for students, implementing transition warnings, using checklists with positive checkmarks, presenting students with clear expectations)

6) Modifying the task (knowing how to modify the task, changing the activity, offering choices, allowing escape methods, using peer tutors, incorporating sensory activities)

7) Maintaining good composure and communication (using positive language with students, not getting into power struggles, having patience, being consistent, accepting that behavior as part of the paraeducator's job, knowing and understanding one's own feelings and knowing how one's own reactions or responses project onto students, refraining from arguing with the student)

8) Fading strategies and fostering independence

9) Understanding different disability categories

10) Describing/defining behavior (understanding the intensity of the behavior, being able to prioritize behaviors by their severity, knowing when to address the behavior and when to call for help)

11) Understanding the function of the behavior

12) Using de-escalation strategies, Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training, Pro-Act training /professional assault crisis training

13) Reactive strategies, keeping the environment safe

14) Completing communication sheets, data collection forms

15) Teaching replacement behaviors (teaching students positive behaviors, teaching students how to ask for something in an appropriate manner)

16))De-escalating students (de-escalation strategies, Pro-Act, CPI training)

17) Reactive strategies (knowing what to do when the behavior is occurring, ensuring physical safety, removing student from the situation)

18) Understanding behavior (understanding the function of the behavior, knowing disability traits, knowing how to develop and implement behavior plans, understanding referral procedures)

19) Teaching PBIS strategies

20) Teaching social skills (such as BoysTown curriculum)

21) Redirecting the student

The themes identified from the review of literature correlated with some of the themes emerging from the Round 3 responses.

Research Question Three

To collect data for Research Question 3, the participants were asked to convey "effective professional development activities or training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring behaviors identified in Rounds 1 and 2". The responses provided were grouped into the following categories of effective professional development practices:

- Lecture

- Videos

- Hands-on activities

- Individual and small group activities

- Modeling

- Shadowing

- Role play

- Weekly team meetings

- Follow-up observations

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- Continuous feedback/review of progress

- Time to practice

- Activities allowing paraprofessionals to analyze and evaluate videos

Some of the responses provided to the survey prompt asking participants to offer effective training delivery models addressed content of the training. Such responses included CPI, PBIS, proactive strategies, journaling, and thinking outside the box. Additionally, some responses indicated the need to include activities involving higher levels of the Bloom's taxonomy, such as analyzing (videos), creating, and evaluating (incentive programs).

In summary, the study expert panel recommended systematic, consistent, professional development provided in individual and small-group settings with hands-on and higher-level thinking activities that allow time for practice, follow-up observations, continuous feedback, and review of their progress.

Correlation with Literature Review

The literature review uncovered the need to treat paraprofessionals as adult learners (Ashbacker, 2001) and the need to consider their experience and expertise. The literature review also uncovered paraprofessionals' following needs: independence, problem-solving, effective instructional practices, relevant content, a question/answer format, encouragement, recognition of their efforts, clear job expectations, modeling, and continuous feedback. Knowles (1980) asserted that the learner controls the learning process and stressed the need to offer a "self-directed inquiry" (p.56).

Causton-Theoharis et al. (2007) recommended written directions for implementing behavior plans. Decades before, Knowles (1980) and Cross (1981) emphasized problem-solving

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as a required element for adult learning. Knowles suggested establishing a climate conducive to adult learning and suggested (a) developing an organizational structure for participative planning, (b) developing a needs assessment, (c) communicating learning objectives, and (d) using self-directed learning.

Participants of this study conveyed the need to keep students engaged and motivated. The study expert panel responses agreed with prior research findings, as many of the responses addressed the need to involve modeling, continuous feedback, analysis and evaluation of scenarios. Dweck (2012) emphasized the need to have a growth mindset when working with students and believing every student can learn. Responses from the panel included teaching special education paraprofessionals how to talk to students by equipping them with the proper language. Growth mindset training involves specific examples of motivational language that can be used with students and would be beneficial for paraprofessionals.

Triangulation

Triangulation strengthens research by using a combination of methods to obtain data (Patton, 2002) and may include using "both quantitative and qualitative research" (p. 247). Triangulation may also involve comparing data collected in different studies that use similar sample (Harvey, 2015). This study included both qualitative and quantitative methods, and I compared the findings to previous research. The quantitative methods entailed requesting study participants to answer open-ended questions. For example, as part of Round 1, the study expert panel was asked to list the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors, and the panel members generated examples of the most frequent and challenging student behaviors. The responses were analyzed and used to produce the following 12 behavior types:

1. On task behavior/student engagement

2. Executive functioning

3. Prosocial behaviors

4. Emotion/stress management

5. Excessive reliance on adult help

6. Defiance

7. Tantrums

8. Verbal aggression

9. Physical aggression to self or others

10. Property destruction

11. Elopement

12. Self-stimulatory behaviors

Round 2 of the survey entailed asking the participants to rate the behavior types using a Likert scale, generating quantitative data. As a result of the findings from Round 2, the list of 12 behavior types was reduced to the following eight most challenging and most frequently occurring in the k-12 school setting:

1. On Task/Student Engagement

2. Defiance

3. Prosocial Behaviors

4. Executive Functioning

5. Physical Aggression

6. Excessive Reliance on Adult help

7. Verbal Aggression

8. Tantrums

The most challenging behaviors identified in Round 1 of the study were compared to data

obtained in two previous studies investigating challenging student behaviors. The first study

yielded the list of challenging behaviors by surveying teachers in Northern Italy (Pepe &

Addimando, 2013). The second study (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013) that was used to

triangulate the data obtained from the current research focused on the influence of demographics

on teacher perceptions of student behaviors. The study used a list of problematic and prevalent

behaviors (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013). Teachers participated in both studies (Pepe &

Addimando, 2013; Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013). The first study investigated the most

challenging student behaviors in Northern Italy (Pepe & Addimando, 2013). The second study

referenced problematic student behaviors in the United States (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013).

The behaviors identified in the study investigating challenging behaviors in Northern Italy (Pepe

& Addimando, 2013) are displayed in Table 29 below.

Table 29

Most challenging student behaviors in schools in Northern Italy

Behavior Category	Description, examples
Against the grain (AG)	The most common contemporary meaning of against the grain is to describe something that fails to follow social or cultural expectations. Even if behaving counter to social norms is not necessarily misconduct per se, the impact of such behaviors in

educational settings is remarkable. In the framework of the questionnaire this subscale includes behaviors such as breaking classroom rules, seeking conflict with adults and undermining the role of the teacher.

Full of activity/Easily distractible (FA)	In spite of referring to ADHD syndrome (which requires an objective use of DSM-IV-RT criteria developed by trained specialists), this measure simply describes situations in which a student is more active than other students (i.e., he/she is unable to sit still or leaves his/her seat very often).
Needs a lot of attention/Weak student (WS)	This subscale described those circumstances in which teachers are asked to spend extra time with a particular student to facilitate his/her achievement of educational goals. This student is generally considered weak because he/she has learning difficulties or has trouble following class instructions.
Needs a lot of attention/Weak student (WS)	This subscale described those circumstances in which teachers are asked to spend extra time with a particular student to facilitate his/her achievement of educational goals. This student is generally considered weak because he/she has learning difficulties or has trouble following class instructions.
Easily upset (EU)	Some students misbehave because they come to school with emotional problems that originate in other contexts. As a result,

some of their emotional responses lead to inappropriate behaviors. Some examples include being overly sensitive to mood, crying very often, or being difficult to reassure when upset.

Failure syndrome/Excessively Perfectionist (EP)	In educational literature two types of perfectionism exist: normal and neurotic (Parker & Adkins, 1994). Normal perfectionists are pupils that naturally derive a sense of pleasure when their tasks are accomplished, but perfectionism is a more complex set of behaviors, which can also include compulsiveness in work habits. Neurotic perfectionists are mostly unable to feel satisfaction because, in their own eyes, they never seem to do things well enough (Roedell, 1984). Adderholth-Elliot (1989) proposed that perfectionist students may underachieve because of procrastination and fear of failure.
Aggressive/Hostile (AH)	Aggressive-Hostile misconduct is frequently encountered (and sometimes dreaded) by many teachers. Students who engage in such behaviors are classically labelled as problem students due to the impact they have on classroom management. Two major categories of these behaviors are: verbal and physical aggression. The former includes being rude, arguing, sarcasm and teasing, [and] the latter includes kicking, hitting, fighting, spitting, throwing objects and biting. Aggressive/hostile behaviors undermine [the]

learning process when the main target is the teacher, or when directed toward other classmates. From teachers' point of view, an aggressive misconduct is a severe threat because it can escalate when incorrectly managed or underestimated.

Although the perceptions of behaviors are highly influenced by the demographics of the respondents (Pepe & Addimando, 2013; Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013), I perceived value in comparing the challenging student behaviors collected by Pepe and Addimando (2013), as well as the *most problematic* and *most prevalent* behaviors identified by Alter, Walker, and Landers (2013) with the behaviors identified in the current research.

When comparing the data obtained in the current study to the most problematic and most prevalent behaviors that Alter, Walker, and Landers (2013) presented, the most problematic behaviors corresponded to the *most challenging* behavior term used in the current study. Additionally, the description of most prevalent was correlated to *most frequently occurring*. Data triangulation presents a challenge because behavior descriptors are inconsistent throughout research. Alter, Walker, and Landers concurred with the difficulty of painting a "current picture" (p. 52) of prevalent behaviors due to "different ways [of] using different behavior descriptors" (p. 52) in previous research. Furthermore, the list of behaviors that Alter, Walker, and Landers produced was compared to the list of most challenging and most frequently occurring behaviors identified in the current study. Alter, Walker, and Landers (2013, p. 57) identified the following behaviors:

1) Off-task

2) Verbal disruption

3) Verbal aggression

4) Noncompliance

5) Out of seat

6) Physical disruption

7) Physical aggression

8) Isolation/ No social interaction

9) Self-stimulatory

It is not uncommon for researchers to compare data from past research despite the different terminology (Alter, Walker, & Lander, 2013). The behavior types identified in the current study were compared with the behavior types identified in the previous two studies (Pepe & Addimando, 2013; Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013). The behavior types in the current study were correlated by matching them with similar behavior types from the other two studies. Table 30 shows the correlation of the behavior types. The behavior types correlating with both studies are shown in bold font.

Table 30

Comparison and correlation of behavior types identified in three studies

Behavior type (Pepe & Addimando , 2013)	Behavior type (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013)	Corresponding behavior type identified in the current study
Against the grain (AG)	Verbal disruption Noncompliance Physical disruption	**Defiance**
Full of activity/Easily distractible (FA)	Off-task Out of seat	**Off Task/Student Engagement**
Needs a lot of attention/Weak student (WS)	None	None
Easily upset (EU)	None	Emotion/Stress Management
Failure syndrome/Excessively perfectionist (EP)	None	Emotion/Stress Management
Aggressive/Hostile (AH)	Verbal aggression Physical aggression	**Verbal Aggression** **Physical Aggression to Self or Others**
None	Self-stimulatory	Self-Stimulatory

None	Isolation/ No social interaction	None

The comparison unveiled specific behavior types from the current study that overlapped with the behavior types identified in previous research (Pepe & Addimando, 2013; Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013). The following four behaviors identified in the current study found matching behavior types that Pepe and Addimando (2013) and Alter, Walker, and Landers (2013) identified:

- Defiance

- On task/student engagement

- Verbal aggression

- Physical aggression

Pepe and Addimando (2013) cited "full of activity/easily distractible behaviours" (p.23) as the most challenging student behavior type. On Task/Student Engagement surfaced as the most challenging behavior identified in the current study. Pepe and Addimando (2013) confirmed the finding of the current study, as both studies identified the same type of behavior of Off Task/Student Behavior as the most challenging.

Data triangulation showed that out of the eight behavior types identified in the current study as the most challenging and most frequently occurring, four were found to be most problematic and most prevalent by Alter, Walker, & Landers (2013) and most challenging by Pepe & Addimando (2013).

Conclusions

This study was designed to identify special education paraprofessionals' training needs as perceived by special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals. It was designed to identify the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in the k-12 setting. In addition, the purpose of the study was to develop training content and effective training delivery methods to best prepare special education paraprofessionals to manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors. The study yielded data from surveying participants which later were corroborated with prior research. The following conclusions were made as a result of the study:

1) The most challenging student behavior types were reported as On Task Behavior/Student Engagement; Executive Functioning; Prosocial Behaviors; Emotion/Stress Management; Excessive Reliance on Adult Help; Defiance; Tantrums; Verbal Aggression; Physical Aggression to Self or Others; Property Destruction; Elopement; and Self-Stimulatory Behaviors.

2) Out of the most challenging behaviors, the most frequently occurring were reported as On Task/Student Engagement; Defiance; Prosocial Behaviors; Executive Functioning; Physical Aggression to Self or Others; Excessive Reliance on Adult Help; Verbal Aggression; and Tantrums.

3) It is critical to treat special education paraprofessionals as adult learners and to use principles of andragogy in professional development practices. The professional development practices must account for paraprofessionals' experience and expertise and their needs for independence, relevant content, encouragement, clarity of job expectations, and environments that welcome question/answer formats. It is important

that the adult learner be in control of the learning process, be involved in self-inquiry, and participate in the planning process of training activities.

4) The content for special education paraprofessional training should include the understanding of behavior (i.e., behavior function, operant definition of behavior, environmental factors, preventative measures, teaching replacement behavior, providing positive reinforcement, reactive strategies, de-escalation, positive reinforcement, behavioral data collection, parent communication forms), clear expectations, and clarification of job responsibilities and functions. The training should also focus on building a positive, safe, and structured environment. The SE paraprofessionals must be trained on setting expectations for students, keeping them engaged, teaching social skills, and using peer models.

5) Paraprofessional training should include using PBIS, social skills programs, crisis prevention and management trainings, such as Pro-Act and CPI (Crisis Prevention Institute).

6) The training delivery method should use a lecture format, videos, hands-on training in individual settings or in small groups, modeling, a question/answer format with a needs assessment process, recognition for paraprofessionals for doing exemplary work, and offering special education paraprofessionals time to practice. Training must be provided in an on-going manner using different modalities and must include lecture, hands-on training, modeling, shadowing, continuous feedback, follow-up observations, and review of progress.

7) Paraprofessional training should offer a variety of activities that involve higher level thinking skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The special education paraprofessionals should be given an opportunity to evaluate practices, create their own strategies, and receive feedback.
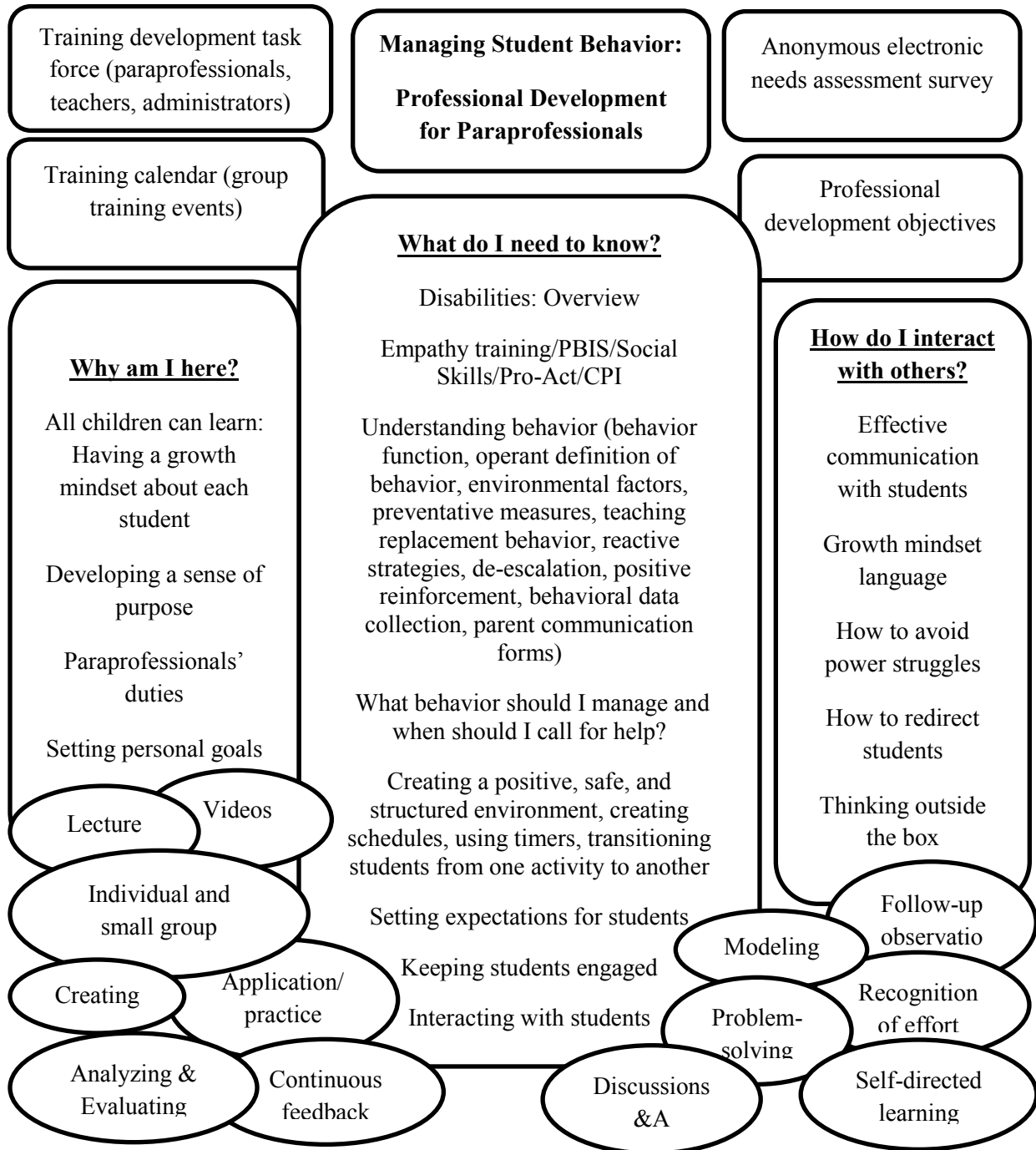
Recommendations for Actions

It is important to provide SE paraprofessionals with systematic, comprehensive, relevant, and evidence-based professional development throughout the school year. The recommendations include involving SE paraprofessionals in the development of training activities. An anonymous needs assessment survey and the communication of the training focus areas tied to the district's mission will provide purpose to the paraprofessionals' duties, responsibilities, and implementation of instructional and behavioral strategies. A committee consisting of a variety of stakeholders including special education teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals will offer a wide range of thinking and emphasize the important role paraeducators play in today's education. Training should focus on the growth mindset (Dweck, 2012) staff must develop when working with students with and without disabilities. Clear job duties, evidence-based strategies, and sample scripts to use when interacting with children with challenging behaviors are recommended. The training calendar should consist of workshop events with a variety of training activities, as well as planned opportunities for shadowing experienced and skilled paraprofessionals. On-going observations of practicing behavioral strategies in the real classroom should be part of the professional development activities and include continuous meaningful feedback from supervisors and peer models. Scheduled opportunities for paraprofessionals to meet their colleagues, teachers, and administrators to ask questions will allow refining behavioral management skills. Training topics should include general knowledge about special education, disability categories, psychological principles of behavior management, social skills instruction, and strategies to support students with challenging and frequently occurring behaviors identified in the current study. Professional development of

paraprofessionals should move from one day training events to an on-going and carefully

planned year-long journey of learning and practicing evidence-based behavioral strategies.

The recommendations are summarized in Figure 11 below.

Figure 11. Professional development outline

Managing Student Behavior:

Professional Development for Paraprofessionals

Training development task force (paraprofessionals, teachers, administrators)

Anonymous electronic needs assessment survey

Training calendar (group training events)

Professional development objectives

What do I need to know?

Disabilities: Overview

Empathy training/PBIS/Social Skills/Pro-Act/CPI

Understanding behavior (behavior function, operant definition of behavior, environmental factors, preventative measures, teaching replacement behavior, reactive strategies, de-escalation, positive reinforcement, behavioral data collection, parent communication forms)

What behavior should I manage and when should I call for help?

Creating a positive, safe, and structured environment, creating schedules, using timers, transitioning students from one activity to another

Setting expectations for students

Keeping students engaged

Interacting with students

Why am I here?

All children can learn: Having a growth mindset about each student

Developing a sense of purpose

Paraprofessionals' duties

Setting personal goals

How do I interact with others?

Effective communication with students

Growth mindset language

How to avoid power struggles

How to redirect students

Thinking outside the box

Lecture

Videos

Individual and small group

Creating

Application/ practice

Analyzing & Evaluating

Continuous feedback

Discussions &A

Problem-solving

Modeling

Follow-up observatio

Recognition of effort

Self-directed learning

Recommendations for Further Research

The study findings suggest additional research that answers the following questions:

1) What are the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in general education classrooms?

2) What are the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors in specialized segregated special education programs?

3) What are the most challenging and most frequently occurring student behaviors as perceived by general education teachers?

4) What are the perceived training needs of special education teachers in the area of managing challenging student behaviors?

5) What are the perceived training needs of general education teachers in the area of managing challenging student behaviors?

6) What professional development activities provided to school staff will lead to an improved school climate?

7) What professional development activities in the area of behavior management will lead to an increase in student engagement?

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Without proper training paraprofessionals will lack skills permitting them to assist a student with problem behavior. The growing work force of SE paraprofessionals requires systematic, evidence-based, comprehensive, and relevant training. Ascertaining SE paraprofessionals' assessments of challenging student behaviors offers a unique examination of the professional development practices established to help them address these behaviors.

Treating paraprofessionals as adult learners requires a shift from large group, one-time training events to on-going, consistent, systematic, and comprehensive professional development. Without time to practice, apply, and receive continuous feedback in small group training modules, paraprofessionals will face obstacles in effectively managing the most challenging most and frequently occurring student behaviors.

The identification of paraprofessionals', teachers', and principals' perceptions of the most challenging and frequently occurring student behaviors and paraprofessionals' training needs serves multiple purposes. First, identifying problem behaviors can lead to developing targeted and effective behavioral interventions. Second, the identified behaviors and effective training methods have a significant impact on professional development practices. Third, the identification of most challenging behaviors may lead to changes in the way schools provide instruction to students and prompt the integration of executive functioning and prosocial skills into the k-12 curriculum.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Doctoral Program in Organizational Leadership/Dissertation Research

Brandman University

Doctoral Program in Organizational Leadership

Dissertation Research

Zhanna Preston

Dissertation Title

Challenging Behaviors: Perceived Training Needs of Special Education Paraprofessionals (Paraeductors/Aides)

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to identify the training requirements of paraeducators to manage student behavior in school settings as perceived by paraeducators, teachers, and administrators**.**

Methodology

The investigation will involve a descriptive study unfolding the perceptions of special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and site administrators on the research topic. The study will use a Delphi process to acquire perceptions from "key knowledgeables in a field to solicit the latest and best thinking" (Patton, 2002, p. 200) in the form of surveys and interviews.

Request of Superintendent or Designee

The research results will be used to inform staff development practices on special education paraeducator training on behavior. Please grant permission to conduct the study and request your special education director to collaborate with this researcher by securing the following participants: two special education paraprofessionals, two principals, and two special education teachers from your district. Your support of the study is greatly appreciated.

Approved _____ (signature) Date_____ District_____

Approved by _____ (printed name)

Appendix B

Copy of the Email Sent to Special Education Administrators

> **Study:** Perceived Training Needs of Special Education
> Paraprofessionals

Date: November 11, 2014

Dear ███████████

I am excited to inform you that Superintendent Mr. Ritter has provided permission to conduct a study in the ████████████████████████

I am a doctoral candidate in the field of Organizational Leadership in the School of Education at Brandman University and am employed by the Murrieta Valley Unified School District as its executive director of special education. I am conducting a study of on the perceived needs of special education paraprofessionals in the area of student behavior. The study will survey special education paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and principals, identify the most difficult and frequent student behaviors, and recommend evidence-based professional development practices.

At this time I am requesting names **of two special education paraprofessionals, two special education teachers, and two principals,** who meet the criteria for the population sample of my study. I would like to contact the study participants by **November 17, 2014**. Additional information on the study and the criteria for selecting participants can be found on the attached document titled "Study Overview for Research Participants."

The participants' consent to take part in the study will be obtained prior to conducting research. The paraprofessionals, teachers, and principals agreeing to participate in the study will be asked to respond to a **five-question anonymous electronic questionnaire** administered in three rounds during the months of November-December of 2014. Each participant is estimated to spend **fifteen minutes** answering questions of each round. **The participants' data, their districts, and your name will be kept confidential and no personally identifiable information will be reported in the study.**

Please see attached with this email the following documents:

- o Doctoral Program in Organizational Leadership /Dissertation Research
- o Study Overview for Research Participants
- o Letter of Invitation to Study Participants
- o Participant Selection Criteria

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at my cell phone ████████████████ or via email at ████████████████ I highly appreciate your time and support of this research and will be happy to share with you its results.

Sincerely,

Zhanna Preston

Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C

Study Overview for Research Participants

What is the purpose of the study?	• The purpose of the study is to make recommendations on how to train special education paraprofessionals on how to address the most difficult and frequent student behaviors.
How the study will be carried out?	• Literature and existing research is reviewed on the topic to identify common themes and patterns. • A field test study panel is formed to review/modify the proposed data collection instruments to increase their validity and reliability. • Special education administrators of Riverside County LEAs are provided participant criteria and are requested to recommend two special education paraprofessionals, two special education teachers, and two principals to participate in the survey. A study expert panel is formed to complete electronic anonymous surveys. • Survey data is gathered and analyzed. • Recommendations on how to best train special education paraprofessionals in the area of behavior are developed.
What is the title/topic of the study?	Perceived Needs of Special Education Paraprofessionals
What is your role and duties as a participant?	• As part of the study expert panel, your duty to share your perceptions pertaining to staff development needs of special education paraprofessionals. • You will be asked to review the Study Overview, ask any questions you may have about the study, provide consent to participate in the study , and complete three rounds of surveys consisting of one-three questions that take about 15 minutes to complete. You will be requested to complete each survey round within three days.
Are there any risks involved?	• The surveys are anonymous and data obtained will not be tracked to each participant. Your name and position will kept confidential electronically. The researcher will have access to your name and position only throughout the research. • All information about the participants will be deleted after the data is gathered. Some questions are open-ended and some require you to rate the questions. The intent of the surveys is to identify the best way to train special education paraprofessionals on how to effective manage student Behavior.

Appendix D

Letter of Invitation to Study Participants

Study: Perceived training needs of special education paraprofessionals

Principal researcher: Zhanna Preston

Dear Study Participant,

I am a doctoral candidate in the field of Organizational Leadership in the School of Education at Brandman University. In my career and as a doctoral student, I have been passionate in supporting the work of special education paraprofessionals, also referred to as instructional aides or paraeducators. I am conducting a study of training needs of special education paraprofessionals in the area of behavior management.

You have been identified by an administrator in your district as an expert on this topic. I am requesting that you participate in this study by responding to three rounds of electronic surveys.

Attached to this email, please find a document titled "Study Overview for Research Participants" that provides information on the following aspects of the study: its purpose, procedures, duties of participants, time required to participate, discomfort/risk level, compensation, benefits, and confidentiality.

The study will be conducted in three rounds. The study will begin during the period of October-December 2014 and will take about one month to complete. Participants are estimated to spend about 15 minutes to complete each of the three rounds of questions offered through an electronic survey and will have three days to complete each round.

Please be assured that your participation in the study is confidential. The surveys are anonymous and your information will not be attached to the survey response or tracked to your name.

Please review the following attached documents:

o   Informed Consent form

o   Study Overview (email attachment)

o   Research Participant's Bill of Rights

If you agree to participate, please respond to this email and confirm that you agree to participate in the study. Please also type in your name and date on the Consent Form that appears in the body of the email. Your response via email and your typed name/date on the Consent Form will signify your agreement to participate in the study. Your signature is not required to provide consent. After receiving your consent, I will send you the link to the first round of questions. There will be three rounds of questions consisting of 1-3 questions each, a total of five questions.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at am available by phone at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or email me at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Your participation is greatly appreciated, valued, and will contribute to effective professional development practices for special education paraprofessionals.

Sincerely,

Zhanna Preston
Doctoral student

Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

<div style="border:1px solid red; padding:10px;">

Study: Perceived training needs of special education paraprofessionals

Principal researcher: Zhanna Preston

</div>

I agree to participate in this study devoted to Perceived Training Needs of Special Education Paraprofessionals. As a participant, I will participate in electronic survey consisting of three rounds.

- ✓ I have been informed of and understand the following:
  - ✓ I will be requested to participate in a three round electronic survey.
  - ✓ I will receive a link to the surveys via email.
  - ✓ Each survey will take about fifteen minutes and will need to be completed within three days after I receive them.
  - ✓ I will be requested to answer open-ended questions and rate items using a Likert Scale.
  - ✓ There are minimal foreseeable risks or discomfort involved in the study.
  - ✓ My identity as the study participant will be confidential and known to the researcher. I am aware that an administrator in my district recommended me to the researcher as a study participant.
  - ✓ My confidentiality will be protected pursuant to any limits that may be set forth by law.
  - ✓ No information about my participation in the study may be shared without an additional separate consent.
  - ✓ After the study is completed information regarding all participants will be deleted.
  - ✓ Information of all participants will not be presented in the study or tracked to the survey responses.
  - ✓ There is no compensation for the participation in the study.
  - ✓ The benefits of the study include contributing to the body of research in the area of professional development for special education paraprofessionals.
  - ✓ If I have questions I can call Zhanna Preston at her cell phone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or email her at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
  - ✓ The participation in the study is voluntary.
  - ✓ There is no penalty in refusing to participate in the study.
  - ✓ I may withdraw from the study at any time.
  - ✓ While the primary researcher in the study is Zhanna Preston, doctoral candidate at Brandman University, Brandman University is not conducting the study.

- ✓ If have concerns regarding the informed consent process I may contact the Office of Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University at the following address: 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, California, or call them at (949) 341-7641.
- ✓ I understand that my signature is not required to show consent to participate in the study. My response via email indicating my agreement to participate in the research and addressed to the principal researcher will serve as my informed consent to participate in this study.
- ✓ If I do not agree to participate in the study or decide to withdraw from the study after I agree to participate in it, I will simply not respond to the survey questions.
- ✓ If I agree to participate in the study, I will send an email to the principal researcher Zhanna Preston. In addition, I will type my name on this form and email it to Zhanna Preston.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

- I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed this form, the Study Overview for Research Participants, and the "Research Participant's Bill of Rights" documents.
- I have not made changes to this document.

CONSENT: I have read and understand the above "Informed Consent Form", and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

_____ (typed name of participant indicating agreement to participate in the study) _____ (date)

(Printed name of participant date (the participant types in his or her name and date)

Zhanna Preston (principal researcher's name) **11.11.2014** (date)

(Printed name of principal investigator (the principal researcher types in her name and date)

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.

Brandman University IRB   Adopted   November 2013

Round 1 Survey

Survey Round 1

If you are a principal and have provided informed consent to participate in this survey, please answer the question below.

* Required

1. **RQ 1. Identify the types of challenging behaviors special education paraprofessionals manage in the k-12 setting. ***
A challenging behavior is "any repeated pattern of behavior or perception of behavior that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers or adults (Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Round 1 Survey

Survey Round 2
* Required

Of the challenging behavioral types identified in Round One/Research Question One, using a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one being the least challenging and 5 being the most challenging), please rate the challenging level of each behavior type. *

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in the study! Before completing the survey, please first carefully review the definition of "challenging behavior" and read the entire list of the behavior types. Please note that each behavior types is not limited to the examples of behaviors found in parenthesis. Challenging behavior is "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers or adults (Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 5)

Mark only one oval per row.

	1 (Least challenging)	2 (Somewhat challenging)	3 (Challenging)	4 (Very challenging)	5 (Most challenging)
B. ON TASK BEHAVIOR/STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (being off task, showing lack of focus, daydreaming, surfing the internet, not getting back on task, playing, staying out of seat, unmotivated, withdrawn; disengaged).	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
C. EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING (forgetting to turn in assignments, forgetting to bring necessary materials/equipment to school, not turning in homework, not following through).	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
D. PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS (refusing to	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

accept help, blurting out, making off topic/inappropriate comments, not accepting "No" for an answer; not following social cues, making loud verbal responses, not waiting for one's turn, not accepting feedback appropriately, not raising hand in class, not observing personal space or touching things/others, not working well with others, not resolving conflicts or expressing disagreement appropriately).					
E. EMOTION/ STRESS MANAGEMENT (crying, whining, feeling embarrassed, inappropriately dealing with the feeling of hunger).	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
F. EXCESSIVE RELIANCE ON ADULT HELP (lack of independence, overly relying on adult help).	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
G. DEFIANCE (protesting verbally, protesting physically, dropping on the floor; not following directions, refusing to bring necessary materials/equipment to school, avoiding or refusing a task).	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
H. TANTRUMS (outbursts, throwing oneself on the floor, yelling, screaming, hysterically crying).	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
I. VERBAL AGGRESSION (cursing, yelling, screaming, making verbal threats, engaging in verbal confrontations, name calling).	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

J. PHYSICAL AGGRESSION TO SELF OR OTHERS (hitting, scratching, biting, slapping, head- butting, throwing objects, pinching; punching, kicking, spitting, using a common object as a stabbing tool, grabbing, charging at someone, pulling hair; and self-injurious behaviors such as head-banging, biting, pinching, hitting oneself).	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
K. PROPERTY DESTRUCTION (flipping furniture).	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
L. ELOPEMENT (wandering, running away).	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
M. SELF- STIMULATORY BEHAVIOR (hand-flapping, echolalia, lining up objects, making repetitive noises, repeating phrases).	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

Of the behavior types identified in Round One, using a Likert scale (with one being the least frequent and 5 being the most frequent), please rate the level of frequency of each behavior type. *

The same list of behavior types is provided below. You have just rated their challenging level. Now please rate their frequency.

Mark only one oval per row.

	1 (LEAST FREQUENT)	2 (SOMEWHAT FREQUENT)	3 (FREQUENT)	4 (VERY FREQUENT)	5 (MOST FREQUENT)
B. ON TASK BEHAVIOR/STUDENT ENGAGEMENT	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
C. EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
D. PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
E. EMOTION/ STRESS MANAGEMENT	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
F. EXCESSIVE RELIANCE ON ADULT HELP	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
G. DEFIANCE	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
H. TANTRUMS	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I. VERBAL AGGRESSION	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
J. PHYSICAL AGGRESSION TO SELF OR OTHERS	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
K. PROPERTY DESTRUCTION	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
L. ELOPEMENT	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
M. SELF- STIMULATORY BEHAVIOR	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Survey Round 3

Please share KEY CONCEPTS, BIG IDEAS, TOPICS you believe must be included in professional development activities designed to prepare special education paraprofessionals to best manage the following behavior types identified through Rounds One & Two:

* Required

G. DEFIANCE (protesting verbally, protesting physically, not following directions, refusing to bring necessary materials/equipment to school, avoiding or refusing a task). *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

B. ON TASK BEHAVIOR/STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (being off task, showing lack of focus, daydreaming, surfing the internet, not getting on back on task, playing, staying out of seat, unmotivated, withdrawn; disengaged). *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

F. EXCESSIVE RELIANCE ON ADULT HELP (lack of independence, overly relying on adult help). *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

H. TANTRUMS (outbursts, throwing oneself on the floor, yelling, screaming, hysterically crying). *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

J. PHYSICAL AGGRESSION TO SELF OR OTHERS (hitting, scratching, biting, slapping, head-butting, throwing objects, pinching; punching, kicking, spitting, using a common object as a stabbing tool, grabbing, charging at someone, pulling hair; and self-injurious behaviors such as head-banging, biting, pinching, hitting oneself). *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

C. EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING (forgetting to turn in assignments, forgetting to bring necessary materials/equipment to school, not turning in homework, not following through). *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

D. PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS (refusing to accept help, blurting out, making off topic/inappropriate comments, not accepting "No" for an answer; not following social cues, making loud verbal responses, not waiting for one's turn, not accepting feedback appropriately, not raising hand in class, not observing personal space or touching things/others, not working well with others, not resolving conflicts or expressing disagreement appropriately). *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

E. EMOTION/ STRESS MANAGEMENT (crying, whining, feeling embarrassed, inappropriately dealing with the feeling of hunger). *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please share effective professional development activities or training delivery methods that will best prepare special education paraprofessionals to effectively manage the most challenging and most frequently occurring behaviors identified in Rounds One & 2. Examples of training methods and training components may include lecture format, modeling, shadowing, on-going feedback etc. *

G. DEFIANCE

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

B. ON TASK BEHAVIOR/STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

_____

_____

_____

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F. EXCESSIVE RELIANCE ON ADULT HELP

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H. TANTRUMS

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J. PHYSICAL AGGRESSION TO SELF OR OTHERS

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C. EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

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D. PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS

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