

EXPERIENCES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS RESPONSIBLE FOR TRAINING
NOVICE PARAEDUCATORS IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY

by

Rachel L. Wilbur-Carlyle

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study, as outlined by Moustakas, was to describe the experiences of special education teachers serving as trainers of novice paraeducators in the inclusion setting. It occurred within the metro-Atlanta area. The theory guiding this study was Lave and Wenger's theory of situatedness. This theory focused upon social practices occurring within relationships amongst communities and supported the inquiry of special education teachers. The central research question that guided the study was: "How do special education teachers who work in the elementary school inclusive settings describe their experiences supervising special education paraeducators?" To support the focus of the central research question, three sub-questions were used to enhance and guide the study. The setting consisted of two elementary schools in the metro-Atlanta area. The study's sample consisted of 10 special education teachers with 2+ years of experience teaching in the inclusive setting. Data collection methods used included observations, one-on-one interviews, and focus group data. Data was analyzed using phenomenological reduction, which began with epoche, (bracketing), followed by horizontalization. Statements were collected from the participants and were organized into themes, so that an essence of the phenomenon could be reached.

Keywords: special education teachers, special needs, paraeducators, inclusive setting

Dedication

I dedicate this study to my parents, Troy and Linda Wilbur. Since I was a child, they have encouraged me to continue my education and remain a life-long learner. The habits of hard-work and determination that they instilled within me as a child without a doubt played a role in my persistence of finishing this study. I love you both.

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List of Abbreviations

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Interrelated Resource Setting (IRR)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Special education teachers serving as trainers of paraeducators is a typical scenario within classrooms that contain both students with and without special needs (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016). This study sought to investigate the experiences of special education teachers who served as trainers of paraeducators. One problem discussed in the literature is the many duties and responsibilities assigned to special education teachers (Bettini, Crockett, Brownell, & Merrill, 2016; Cancio et al., 2018; Conley & You, 2017; Rock et al., 2016), and being given the additional responsibility of training paraeducators complicates the special education teacher's workload manageability even further (Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2016). In this study, special education teachers were provided an opportunity to voice their experiences as trainers of novice paraeducators.

Background information was included in order to provide an overview of special education; specifically targeting why and how special education teachers serve as trainers of paraeducators. The researcher's background with training paraeducators and connections to special education teachers who train paraeducators was discussed. Potential practical applications for the training of novice paraeducators for school systems and future special education teachers was also examined. Finally, the research questions and explanations were reviewed in order to provide a narrow focus and explicit connection to the study.

Background

The general education setting is where students with and without special needs co-exist and have their individual learning needs met. General education classrooms typically will have a classroom teacher who is considered to be the content expert and a special education teacher who

is considered to be the learning expert who provides the supports and modifications needed for students with disabilities. In this teaching scenario, both individuals are certified teachers, one in general education and the other in special education. Another scenario that occurs frequently in the general education classroom is the classroom teacher working alongside a special education paraeducator (non-certificated individual) or a teacher assistant, who provides the supports and modifications needed for students with disabilities. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) serves as a written plan that drives the instructional programming and supports provided for the child with a disability. This plan may include supports and modifications for one, or for a combination of the following: academic, behavioral, or physical deficits.

The decision as to whether a special education teacher or a paraeducator is working within the classroom is dependent upon the student's IEP requirements. From there, supports and services are integrated for the student in a specialized fashion, which allows them to access the general education curriculum in the environment that is least restrictive, with non-disabled peers (Florian, 2007). This has resulted in an increase of novice paraeducator personnel who provide instruction and supports to students with disabilities, yet the qualifications of individuals hired to meet the needs of students learning in the inclusive setting have remained immobile (Nguyen, 2015).

Historical Context

Prior to the mid-18th century, society had little to no tolerance for individuals who did not adhere with the norms (i.e., unwritten rules of how one should look or act) of that time period. Individuals with special needs were considered both a liability and a disruption (Florian, 2007). In the 19th century, the United States made attempts for the first time to educate students with special needs by creating schools for students who were either blind or deaf (Kauffman,

Hallahan, Pullen, & Badar, 2018). In 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was created, which is a law that ensures students with disabilities who have cognitive or physical differences receive an education that is considered free and appropriate. Since 1975 it has been mandated that the least restrictive environment (LRE) be considered when students with disabilities are accessing the learning setting. The idea of educating students with disabilities within the general education setting, or inclusion classroom, has become more prevalent. Debates regarding inclusion of students within the general education setting began to emerge in the 1990s when the U.S. Department of Education's Public Law-94-142 was revamped as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, stressing the need for schools to make adaptations in general education classrooms so that students with disabilities could learn in an environment with their peers (Osgood, 2005). This requirement drives not only the parents, but the entire IEP team to consider an additional source of support in the general education classroom. This is often a paraeducator, to ensure the child's progress toward their IEP goals are being met.

Social Context

Studies have been conducted regarding the social situations that occur between special education teachers and paraeducators (Biggs et al., 2016; Cipriano, Barnes, Bertol, Flynn, & River, 2016; Douglas, et al., 2016; Nguyen, 2015). Social situations in this context entail the times when the paraeducator and special education teacher are working together in the classroom, attending professional development sessions, or engaging in conversation that may be formal (e.g., faculty or departmental meetings), or informal (e.g., hallway or planning time). Although researchers have examined the relationship between the special education teacher and the paraeducator, the specific factors that influence this relationship have not been studied in

detail (Biggs et al., 2016). Douglas et al. (2016) found that the relationship between the special education teacher and paraeducator was important to both educators, which indirectly benefitted the students in a positive way. Additionally, Douglas et al. (2016) found that creating an effective team with shared responsibilities was another way to cultivate a positive relationship between the paraeducator and special education teacher. Azad, Locke, Downey, Xie, and Mandell (2015) noted that whenever special education teachers were found to be effective supervisors of paraeducators and one-to-one student assistants, their classrooms were more active.

Experienced special education teachers working together as a team with the novice paraeducators they train develops positive social scenarios. Biggs et al. (2019), concluded that an experienced special education teacher serving as a supervisor not only has more leadership knowledge and skills, but also uses a balanced leadership approach to cultivate a positive social relationship with the paraeducator. In a study conducted by Douglas et al. (2016), the use of empathy and respect by the special education teacher trainer prompted the paraeducator to feel as if a positive relationship had been established. In turn, this factor, as well as a consideration of personality alignment, influenced future personnel decisions, such as whether or not certain special education teachers and paraeducators who worked together in the past would be working together again in the future. The researchers noted that those special education teachers who did not fully appreciate the paraeducator and used them to help with mundane tasks such as fetching coffee or making copies, were eventually assigned a different paraeducator. Douglas et al. (2016) concluded that being able to understand the personality and role of the paraeducator contributed to important future departmental decisions.

Studies have shown that special education teachers' perspectives, and teaching experience greatly influence the social context of forging a relationship between the teacher trainer and paraeducator (Douglas et al., 2016; Biggs et al., 2016). Biggs et al. (2016) noted that this social context specifies that relationship qualities will move from a professional to a more personal social aspect within the workplace, and shared that good communication and interpersonal connections were factors that created this social aspect. Two professionals building a social relationship in the workplace not only helps to support students' needs, but additionally helps to support the personal training need for the role of paraeducator (Biggs et al., 2019; Douglas et al., 2016).

In Long and Simpson's (2017) study, experienced special education teachers felt that collaborative teaming (i.e., the special education teacher and novice paraeducator working together side-by-side) was imperative in order to produce positive student outcomes. Collaborative teaming not only ensured that all paraeducators were functioning within the same role consistently, but that the knowledge and skills they were acquiring were being applied correctly in learning situations with students. Long and Simpson discussed the specific skills the special education teacher and novice paraeducator had in common; however, the social context of collaborative teaming was not part of their study. Because special education teachers have no control over hiring requests, it is imperative that the experiences of the special education teachers working with novice paraeducators be revealed, in order to convey specific social situations that may be transferred into new situations that may ensure student success.

Biggs et al. (2016) revealed that the specific character education traits of respect or empathy should be present within the social relationship between special education teachers and paraeducators. Many special education teachers within the study stressed the importance of

showing appreciation for paraeducators, as well as stressing the importance of the paraeducator's role. Fisher and Pleasant (2012) concluded that both general education teachers and special education teachers need to display appreciation and concern for novice and experienced paraeducators.

Theoretical Context

The theoretical context that guided this study was the situated learning theory developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). The situated learning theory is based upon all knowledge being founded within real-life situations that occur, which must include personal encounters and situated circumstances. This type of structure, or specific view of learning, which seeks to explain the behaviors of teachers and their professional learning, will provide an intentional way of aligning the researcher to the experiences provided by special education teachers. This is based on their situated relationships and scenarios with the novice paraeducators they train. As the researcher, I conscientiously understood the experiences occurring within myself. Because of that, I was able to relate to whatever was presented to me from the participants, thus making an inseparable connection (Patton, 2015).

Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory reinforced the experiences that special education teachers shared within the literature with respect to the relationship between special education teachers and novice paraeducators. These encounters are shaped by their social values, the behavior of those around them, definite perspectives, and a sense of what is wrong (Korth, 2010). By applying the situated learning theory, the researcher was provided with an outlook of legitimate peripheral participation from the participant, where those new to a social situation can become accustomed to the practices and norms of the social group over time. They work to eventually be functioning in a place where they are competent with completing tasks

without a need for support (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This outlook of legitimate peripheral participation aligned with the relationship between the participant and the novice paraeducator, with the researcher capturing the participant experience with that same particular lens, or aspect of apprentice and mentor. Due to the participant serving as a trainer within the special education department or situated learning environment, the relationship he or she has with the novice paraeducator he or she works with is brought to light. This relationship is brought forward by uncovering the experience of the participant from the perspective of Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory. This is the belief that learning is dependent upon situations that occur, where social and environmental aspects shape the learning rather than one's cognitive ability or absolute knowledge being a basis for learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Situation to Self

One of the most challenging but necessary components within my role as a special education teacher has been the support and training I have provided to novice paraeducators serving students with special needs. After having spent seven years teaching special education in the inclusive setting, training has been a test of both patience and time regarding the novice paraeducators with whom I have worked. Having spent only half my teaching career thus far in special education, there have been times where I may have felt unsure about directing another professional regarding what to do in specific learning instances for students who require more specialization than their non-disabled peers. In addition, the duties and responsibilities of teaching students, planning lessons, planning and conducting IEP meetings, as well as fulfilling school-wide duties and attending school-wide meetings have left little time for training novice paraeducators. My motivation for conducting this study was to draw attention to the complex role of training novice paraeducators, which is embedded within the job description of a special

education teacher, yet is typically not referred to or thought of as a job requirement of a special education teacher. Given the specialized nature of working with students who have individualized needs that may be non-transferrable to other situations, the amount of time and effort it takes to train another person is a separate job within itself. My reason for conducting this study was to highlight the complex role of training novice paraeducators. This training process includes many aspects or conditions that must be met by the special education teacher. With the exception of teaching students, the job of training novice paraeducators is perhaps the most time-consuming yet most overlooked aspect of their role as special educator. The special education teacher who spent four years in college to learn, perfect, and apply curriculum strategies for students with special needs is expected to pass along those same strategies to another individual who may possess little or no background experience in the field of special education. This individual may be a seasoned paraeducator, yet may not consistently retain/or reapply the strategies that have been taught to them by the special education teacher who trained them. Drawing attention to the seriousness of this expectation for special education teachers should hopefully prompt special education leaders to collaborate and consider alternative training methods for novice paraeducators. This may take some of the burden off the special education teacher, whose ultimate goal is to ensure their students are making academic and behavioral gains and showing growth in deficit areas.

When the special education teacher has carved time out of his or her schedule to train a novice paraeducator, and for whatever reason, the paraeducator decides to not be receptive to the training or apply the advice or suggestions being offered, difficulties may arise. Being a trainer of novice paraeducators was challenging at first; however, as I have grown as a special educator, so have my strategies for working with both students and novice paraeducators. It is rewarding

whenever a novice paraeducator whom I have trained uses a specialized strategy and finds it to be a success. In response to those novice paraeducators unreceptive to the training I had implemented, I documented that I had done my part to train them. The next step was to seek the help of a special education facilitator (leader) or administrator who might hopefully then make more positive progress with the novice paraeducator.

Another motivation for this study was to potentially develop alternative training methods for novice paraeducators that would allow the special education teacher to more easily train the novice paraeducator. Sometimes it is not always possible for the special education teacher to provide side-by-side coaching for the paraeducator due to the incompatibility of their daily schedules. It is difficult to provide on the spot remediation and guidance when a special education teacher has his or her own separate schedule to attend to throughout the day, separate from the one the novice paraeducator follows. The special education teacher and novice paraeducator may end up working with the same student(s) throughout the day, but at different parts of the day when the two professionals are not side-by-side. Due to specific training situations being less transferrable than others based upon unique student factors, alternative training methods may provide support for those special education teachers who are training novice paraeducators but still need to meet the needs of their students.

Since the study sought to understand the environment of the special education teacher within their work setting, a social constructivist paradigm was used. The meanings developed by the special education teacher participants were subjective; their personal feelings, instincts, and emotions played a role in their overall experiences, or phenomena that they had in common as trainers of novice paraeducators. The meanings that I gathered as the researcher were complex. This was due to the special education teacher participants each having their own set of values,

approaches, and personalities that they brought to the training experience. These unique characteristics had an effect on the novice paraeducator and training scenario. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that the goal of research is to fall back on the views of the participants, which were formed primarily through the training situations and interactions that made up their role. It was not simply the special education teacher constantly telling the novice paraeducator what to do, where a one-sided training situation was created; but fundamentally it was the interactions that occurred with the novice paraeducator that played a role in shaping the special education teacher's patterns of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Because the training relationship that existed amid special education teachers and novice paraeducators cultivated relationships made up of value and trust between one another, an axiological philosophical assumption was used in the study. Killam (2013) shared that the attributes of ethical behavior are addressed through axiology. As the researcher, this supported what I felt was not only ethical, but also valued. Special education teachers and novice paraeducators should value the reciprocal support they provide to one other whenever they are faced with difficult situations that tend to be both abnormal and taxing. These atypical situations that are inconsistent from day to day are due to the unique, and constantly changing needs of their students with IEPs. Although the needs of the student in the inclusive setting may differ from day to day, the students themselves did not make a choice to be born with a physical/or intellectual difference that has inhibited their learning without supports and services in special education. With ethics being practiced by both the special education teacher and novice paraeducator through the confidentiality they keep regarding student background information, an axiological assumption corresponded to the special education teacher and novice paraeducator's ethical behavior.

As the researcher I held an epistemological philosophical assumption, due to participants having gained knowledge through their working relationships with the novice paraeducators they were training. Knowledge is not something that may only be found through a textbook, or a set of step-by-step instructions. This knowledge being transferred from person to person is an example of authoritative knowledge that has manifested between the special education teacher and novice paraeducator. I worked to collect and analyze the data through phenomenological reduction. I dismissed any factors that could have potentially created a barrier for relating to the participants or collecting data. As the researcher I analyzed, along with the participants, whether the findings aligned with what they already know to be true about their role as a special education teacher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In the special education teacher and novice paraeducator training relationship, authoritative knowledge has been transferred from the special education teacher to the novice paraeducator through the one-on-one training scenarios that occur not only within the classroom with students, but also during explicit trainings. Explicit trainings may be provided in a formal workshop format or through informal questioning and discussion. As the researcher, I wished to document the experiences of special education teachers serving as trainers of novice paraeducators, while aligning an epistemological view. This alignment mirrored the situation of the special education teacher imparting knowledge to the novice paraeducator. Taking an epistemological view provided me with knowledge regarding what specifically the special education teacher experienced. The knowledge I gained as a result of this study may be applied to future training sessions that the special education teachers may conduct with their future novice paraeducators. The knowledge gained from the experience of a special education teacher such as myself may allow for valid decision making regarding future procedures and methods of training that are more effective. These philosophical

assumptions supported the precise methods of qualitative data collection in a way that was logical and scientific. It removed redundancy and supported cause and effect adjustments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By holding value and knowledge as standards of the study, not only did I collect data in a way that avoided potential assumptions, but also allowed my personal beliefs to be embedded into the processes and character of the data that were collected from the individual views of each participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), an ontological belief, or nature of reality, is associated with the social constructivism framework. The social constructivism framework is a viewpoint of lived experience that creates multiple realities based upon the individual living within the experience. According to Kiraly (2014), an individual who is actively present has no choice but to be immersed within what is occurring around them, creating an inter-subjective interaction based upon both language usage and one's unique or individual characteristics. These multiple realities, which are based upon individual's interactions with others, are present within the working relationship between special education teachers and novice paraeducators. The experiences of the special education teachers took a social constructivist approach due to their experiences being immersed with the characteristics, discussions, and working nature of the role they are placed within as a trainer of novice paraeducators. In this study, the lived experiences of special education teachers, based upon their training interactions with novice paraeducators, were described. Because of this, an ontological assumption was applied within the study. Because the experiences of special education teachers were based upon many factors, such as student need, guiding the paraeducator training, or administrative requirements, many different realities or truths that came to light. None of these realities are more important or more correct than the others. Instead, the different truths highlighted from the research all worked

together to create a cohesive experience or phenomenon for the special education teacher participants.

Problem Statement

According to Douglas, et al., (2016), knowledge is lacking regarding the actual experiences of special education teachers who provide training to novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting. Recent research has indicated that special education teachers have many roles and responsibilities assigned to them, thus creating work-load manageability issues (Cancio et al. 2018; El Helou, Nabhani, & Bahous, 2016; Langher, Caputo, & Ricci, 2017; Ryan, et al., 2017; Vittek, 2015). A special education teacher's imperfect job design that consists of paperwork, teaching responsibilities, and providing specialized instruction to students becomes complicated even further (Conley & You, 2017). As a result, low teacher satisfaction was found to be paired with a lack of administrative support and teacher effectiveness, which then further led to the issue of special education teacher attrition (Conley & You, 2017). The role of the special education teacher is unique, but at the same time vague due to the specialized needs of the students and the various personnel with whom they must collaborate in order to serve the students effectively (Rock et al., 2016). This, paired with the legal and logistical guidelines special education teachers are bound to, creates a shortage of special education teachers, as well as a need for an altered system that supports special education teacher retention (Conley & You, 2017; O'Connor, Yasik, & Horner, 2016). It was critical to examine the experiences of special education teachers who trained paraeducators to find out whether their role as a trainer contributed to the complicated job design of a special education teacher. This knowledge helped analyze the implementation of appropriate supports to help special education teachers manage their complex and ever-changing role. There is a lack of workload manageability within the role

of a special education teacher. The problem consists of the many duties and responsibilities to which the special education teacher has been assigned, which becomes complicated further by the expectation that he or she must also train paraeducators within their department (Biggs et al., 2019; Douglas et al., 2016)

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of special educators responsible for training novice paraeducators in inclusive settings in the metro-Atlanta area. At this stage in the research, the training experiences of special education teachers were generally defined as support and on-the-job training that special education teachers provided to novice paraeducators during the school day and after school hours during professional development meetings. The theory guiding this study was Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory (1991), as it bases learning upon situations that occur in an apprenticeship manner, rather than on cognitive ability or background knowledge.

Significance of the Study

The study's significance was based upon the prospective empirical, theoretical, and practical significances and the potential for all three significances to emerge. This might create a perspective for those leading special education teachers to understand the amount of time, resources, and multitasking it takes for a special education teacher to train novice paraeducators effectively. By addressing multiple contexts of significance, transferability was not only improved, but the relevance of the study was brought forth by the researcher, creating both a worthy and supportive study to the field of special education.

Empirical Significance

Existing research on special education teachers and paraeducators has looked closely at the preparation provided to both preservice and in-service special education teachers to support their training of paraeducators (Biggs et al., 2019). Additionally, it has examined the psychological needs of special education teachers, the experiences of training paraeducators within self-contained special education settings where students with more severe disabilities are served, and ways that schools might enhance the special education teacher's intentions to remain within their field (Bozgeyikli 2018; Douglas et al., 2016; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001). Biggs et al. (2019) found that special education teachers need to be prepared in university preparatory programs to work alongside paraeducators before beginning their job as a teacher. It was also found that administrators need to be a source of support for teachers working alongside paraeducators, in addition to a realization that special education teachers need to continue their own professional development to create an effective team with the paraeducator. By providing a voice to special education teachers, these professionals may potentially through hindsight be able to share preparatory strategies or techniques that would have been helpful to them before they were asked to train paraeducators. Additional support may be uncovered in this study, to provide even more research regarding the need to prepare special education teachers to train paraeducators. In Bozgeyikli's (2018) study, it was determined that there was a positive, solid correlation between psychological needs (i.e., success, relationship, autonomy, and dominance) and sub-dimensions of professional life quality (i.e., compassion, fatigue, and burnout). As the psychological needs of the special education teacher grew, so did the compassion satisfaction level, while burnout and compassion fatigue levels declined (Bozgeyikli, 2018). By having special education teachers share their experiences as trainers of paraeducators, it might potentially uncover new successful strategies or paraeducator training scenarios that support a

special education teacher's psychological needs, while at the same time extinguishing job burnout. Schools may be able to put practices or steps in place to solicit positive feelings that correlate to vigor and solidity of professional life quality based upon experiences special education teachers share.

Douglas et al. (2016) conducted a study that was closely tied to experiences of special education teachers serving as trainers within inclusive settings. The special education teachers recruited for the study served students with autism, multiple disabilities, or intellectual disabilities who participated in the general education setting for at least half of the school day. Findings indicated that themes of creating and cultivating effective teams amongst special education teachers and paraeducators, and establishing training and evaluation were essential in order to create a strong learning experience for students served in special education. By gathering the experiences of special education teachers who train paraeducators, strategies that those participants used to create a feeling of teamwork and strength amongst the special education teacher and paraeducator might be uncovered. Those strategies might be applied to training teams who are struggling to become an effective team for various reasons. Gersten et al. (2001) conducted a study that found special education teachers are more likely to remain in the field whenever they receive support from administrators, and are less likely to transfer to positions in general education teaching whenever the design of the special education teacher's job decreases in complexity, to reduce stress. Additionally, Gersten et al. restated that redesigning the schedule and duties of the special education teacher was a critical, nationwide need in order to decrease stress amongst special education teachers and increase job satisfaction. By providing special education teachers with a voice to share their experiences in regard to a schedule that consists of training paraeducators, potential ideas toward a redesign of special

education teacher schedules may come forth. This would support special education teachers nationwide if an innovative approach could be taken and the schedules of special education teachers could be rearranged to support workload manageability along with reasonable scheduling manageability.

Theoretical Significance

The theoretical significance was addressed through the situated learning theory. This theory provided a way of looking closely at two individuals who worked together in an apprenticeship style relationship. The theory focuses upon two individuals working together; one serves as a mentor or leader, while the other individual serves as a mentee. The mentee, or novice individual within the relationship, is growing and developing into an expert professional over time. Eventually, the mentee reaches a full-participation stage where he or she is able to carry out all practices competently (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The first-hand experiences shared by special education teachers regarding their on-the-job training of paraeducators is an example of a teaching and learning relationship that is situated by school systems based upon federal mandates (French 2001; Sobel, Chopra, & DiPalma, 2015). The situated learning theory provided a way of looking closely at practices of teaching and learning through relationships. By examining the way the paraeducator acquires knowledge from the special education teacher trainer, not only is the social relationship stressed between the two, but the specific steps that occur to attain knowledge end up being examined (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Patel, 2018). The situated learning theory was extended due to the special education teacher serving as the mentor or leader within the apprentice style relationship. The paraeducator aligned to the role of the novice individual who is developing their skill and advancing their competencies through the training being provided to them by the special education teacher (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

French (2001) found that teachers should provide on-the-job training to paraeducators working in special education. This was not only to comply with a teacher's code of ethics, but additionally to provide training the paraeducator may need due to being inexperienced within their position or working with students in general. Lave and Wenger (1991) explained that the atmosphere the special education teacher and paraeducator work together within, in addition to the background knowledge they both bring to the training relationship, creates a situated, legitimate relationship amongst the two. From there, the paraeducator acquires a skill set that helps them advance within their role, becoming proficient, as the situated learning theory indicates (Douglas et al., 2016; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Practical Significance

By sharing the experiences of special education teachers regarding their role as a trainer of inexperienced novice paraeducators, quality professional development opportunities may potentially be facilitated. This would help attain the ultimate goal of providing the type of support students need within the inclusive setting. This information would help not only trainers of novice paraeducators, but also those supporting special education teachers, such as administrators or system-wide special education coordinators who provide guidance. These leaders prioritize the specific skills that are essential for special education teacher trainers to pass along to novice paraeducators, in a facet of education where there are hectic schedules and timing hindrances for all personnel involved (Shepherd, Fowler, McCormick, Wilson, & Morgan, 2016).

Sharing the experiences of special educators who train paraeducators has provided specific suggestions that may potentially ease the burden of the special education teacher's job, and also provide information regarding typical novice paraeducator characteristics that a special

education trainer would expect to encounter. Information about novice paraeducator characteristics that have led to successful training and learning situations with students are also provided, so that special education teachers who support school administration in personnel interviews might be able to watch for these positive characteristics when interviewing a new applicant. When novice paraeducators are hired, they must instantly begin working to meet the complex and unique needs of students with special needs. Hiring a paraeducator who possesses many of the desired competencies would make his or her transition more seamless and also help the already overloaded special education teacher in the training process.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study were rooted within Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory (1991). This theory places emphasis upon knowledge being created through social situations amongst social groups. Examples of social groups where relationships are formed through learning from one another includes, but are not limited to, friendships, any co-worker situations from an apprenticeship viewpoint, or military branches working together. At the start of the relationship, those new to the community or relationship situation are given tasks to carry out that are not perceived to be difficult. As they grow accustomed to the work and social relationship that the work is based and built upon, knowledge is acquired. Their tasks increase in complexity based upon what they have learned within the social situation around them. This process of learning through social processes is kept separate from any prior knowledge learned from textbooks, science, or intellectual processes (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The central research question that guided the study was: How do special education teachers describe their experience training novice paraeducators within the inclusive setting? According to Alquraini and Gut (2012), the inclusive setting is defined as a general education

classroom where both students with and without special needs learn amongst one another. Acceptance, understanding, specialized instruction, and interventions must be provided for those students with specific learning needs being guided by an IEP. This central research question provided an opportunity for special education teachers to describe their experience as a trainer of novice paraeducators in the elementary, interrelated resource setting. Stainback and Stainback (1991) define the interrelated resource setting (IRR) as a succinct term used to describe the learning settings of both the large, general education classroom and the smaller resource classroom where more intense learning interventions may be provided. These settings are used in tandem to meet the needs of students with low-incidence disabilities who learn on a general curriculum pathway. The large, general education classroom contains both students with and without disabilities learning amongst one another. This setting may be appropriate to address specific subjects for a special needs learner, while other subjects may require more support provided in a smaller resource setting. The student is able to travel back and forth amongst the two settings during the school day, depending upon the amount of academic/or behavioral support they require in their IEP. IRR teachers are certified to teach students with special needs who learn from the general curriculum, or content areas that students without disabilities learn from. For a student to leave the least restrictive, large general education classroom with their non-disabled peers, they must be multiple grade levels behind in a particular subject. Student data must drive the need for a resource setting to be used for specific parts of a student's academic schedule, and the IEP team must reach a consensus that they require instruction in a resource classroom (Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996).

Not only does the job of an IRR teacher consist of specializing instruction for students, but also preparing novice paraeducators with the skills needed to provide supports to students

within the supportive instruction role. In Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, and Blatchford's (2015) study, it was discovered that best practice entailed the special education teacher and paraeducator working together as partners within the classroom, while at the same time more thought was required to define the role of the paraeducator. Irwin et al., (2018) shared that within the literature there is limited information regarding causes and factors that impact the training teachers administer to their paraeducators. This places a restriction on understanding the relationship between the two professionals and the relationship they share. In Sharma and Salend's (2016) study, unclear arrangements regarding regulations, or supervision of duties were uncovered, regarding the paraeducators working within inclusive classrooms.

The first sub-question that guided the study was: How do participants describe the interaction that occurs with their paraeducators? The first sub-question within the research allowed for the special education teacher who serves as a trainer of novice paraeducators to provide information regarding the continuously evolving and renewed set of connections between one another, or those working in special education (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The novice paraeducator obtains the skills to fulfill their role by participating and interacting with the special education teacher trainer in the process. Through this interaction, connections are made between the two individuals working together. Sometimes the interaction occurs within unique situations that the special education teacher and novice paraeducator are required to support, versus more traditional or expected situations related to general education. Because these different learning scenarios are often due to the behaviors or academic deficits that are different from what is typically seen or experienced within general education classrooms, the situated learning theory applies. It is continuous, just like the situations encountered in the training relationship. As students in the inclusive setting evolve and change based upon the interventions and specialized

supports provided to them consistently over time, this changes their learning scenarios. The students that the participant and novice paraeducator start and end the school year with have grown and evolved based upon the supports they have received to become proficient, in what was once a weak area for them. The paraeducator being trained also grows and evolves over time and becomes proficient in supporting students, when at one time they did not know or understand how to provide specialized support. In a study conducted by Barnes, Bertoli, Flynn, and Rivers (2016), it was found that the outcomes for not only students, but also outcomes for the special education teachers who worked within self-contained classrooms were improved as a result of regularly interacting and partnering with a paraeducator. Regular meetings between the special education teacher and paraeducator was the cause of the improvement. The study pinpointed the specific interactions that occurred between the special education teacher and paraeducator and identified whether the interactions were positive or restrictive toward student outcomes. These positive interactions that the students were able to watch provided a visual model for students to later implement in their own interactions. Whenever students' behavioral or academic needs cause the special education teacher and novice paraeducator to collaborate to address a difficult situation, they then take the knowledge gained from that new context and rely upon one another as resources for future situations. Rock et al., (2016) explained that the more teams interact with one another and collaborate, the more operative they become, as long as collaboration is done in a systematic and intentional way.

The second sub-question guiding the study was: How do participants describe the interdependence that occurs between themselves and their paraeducator? The situated learning theory supported the context of those new to a role or position learning from others around them and moving from an initial, interdependent role to a more complex and full-participatory role

(Lave & Wenger, 1991). This sub-question sought to identify how the special education teacher may or may not be able to effectively perform their job of supporting students without collaboration from the novice paraeducator, and also determine the level of dependence the special education teacher has on the paraeducator. Additionally, this question attempted to discover whether the novice paraeducator became more than a trainee and began to serve as a competent partner who may be relied upon. It also sought to determine whether there were specific working situations where the special education teacher may not be dependent upon the novice paraeducator trainee as a partner. Rock et al., (2016) explained that role ambiguity is experienced by special education teachers, forcing them to collaborate with and train novice paraeducators. Because there are uncertainties related to this role, general and special education personnel must support one another to come up with approaches to direct instruction that students in the inclusive setting require in order to access the general education curriculum.

The third sub-question guiding the study was: How do participants describe the behaviors occurring between themselves and the paraeducators? This sub-question supported the behaviors that occurred between individuals as legitimate peripheral participation occurred in the workplace. Legitimate peripheral participation is the process of entering the profession at a novice status, with the behaviors or work practices of a novice individual transitioning them to an experienced professional over time (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Behaviors of work practices which includes learning from an experienced mentor, is filled with contradictions, struggles, identity formation, and successes. A novice individual's behaviors that support their learning, or opposite behaviors that promote their failure to learn and grow within the workplace, is a product of concealed association or relations of legitimate peripheral participation in the workplace (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Douglas et al. (2016) found within their study that two themes related to behavior were uncovered from examining effective special education teacher supervision of paraeducators. Those themes consisted of creating teams that were effective, in addition to the special education teacher trainer providing appropriate training to paraeducators. Whenever paraeducators were shown respect and had a special education teacher supervisor that showed empathy toward the paraeducator, the paraeducator effectively learned how to support students. The paraeducator successfully worked through the process of legitimate peripheral participation, or transitioning from a novice status to accomplished professional in this study. Any relationship challenges between the trainer and trainee were resolved either between the two of them, or with help from an administrator. McLeskey et al. (2014) found that behaviors of distributed decision making or delegating responsibilities, supported a successful learning environment for all paraeducators and special education teachers. With a shared approach to decision making, a secure sense of community combined with the act of taking on ownership of the school, was recognized. Nguyen's (2015) study found that when paraeducators were not fully engaged in legitimate peripheral participation, and did not reach full membership within their community as an accomplished professional, the behaviors and support the paraeducator demonstrated on the job was ineffective. This may or may not be the result of the paraeducator feeling excluded, unvalued, or feeling as if what they are doing within their role is unnatural (Nguyen, 2015).

Definitions

1. *Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)* –The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act of 1973 requires that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education, or personalized instruction, which is not only provided but also documented within a student's IEP. It provides adequate support so that a student is

able to benefit educationally. FAPE is provided at the expense of the public. (Zirkel, 2013)

2. *Inclusion* – Children with special needs are educated within regular education settings. (Lee, Yeung, Tracey, & Barker, 2015)
3. *Individualized Education Program (IEP)* – The IEP is a written foundation for the arrangement of special education services provided to a student with a disability. (Patti, 2016)
4. *Interrelated Resource Setting (IRR)* – Term used to describe the general education classroom setting and resource classroom setting, where both settings are used in tandem to meet the needs of students with low-incidence disabilities. (Stainback & Stainback, 1991).
5. *Novice Paraeducator* – Term used to describe a paraprofessional, instructional assistant, teacher aide, or a teaching assistant with three or less years' experience. (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Jones et al. 2012)
6. *Paraeducator* – This term is synonymous with paraprofessional, instructional assistant, teacher aide, or teaching assistant. (Jones et al. 2012)
7. *Special Education* – This is programming for students who are classified to have specific learning problems or cognitive, physical, or emotional/behavioral needs that impact their education. (Sousa, 2016)
8. *Special Education Teacher* – These are teachers who work with children who have a wide-range of physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities who require specialized instruction, modifications, and adaptations made by the teacher to access the curriculum. (Gee & Gonsier-Gerdin, 2018)

9. *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* – This is a Federal law where procedural safeguards have been set in place for students with disabilities (Mueller, 2015).

10. *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)* – This is an improvement made upon IDEA in 2004 that both reauthorized and made changes to IDEA (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of special educators who were responsible for training novice paraeducators in inclusive settings in the metro-Atlanta area. Special education teachers serving as trainers of novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting have not been provided an opportunity to share their voice. Their experiences relating to their working role with novice paraeducators in providing on-the-job support goes deeper than what one would see on the surface from an observation or infer from a specific situation. The problem relates to the many overwhelming tasks special education teachers are assigned to complete each day (Bettini, Jones, Brownell, Conroy, & Leite, 2018; Conley & You, 2017; Vittek, 2015). Because of the critical need for paraeducators who work with students with special needs, paraeducators are often hired with little to no experience. Another problem that often arises is that once a paraeducator receives the necessary training, that specific training may soon become non-applicable for a different situation or student.

Other factors that are part of daily school life, can also be reasons that training for paraeducators may need to be constantly tweaked; for example, a change in the curriculum or with a student's IEP goals. The training, scaffolding, and experiences with students where the novice paraeducator and the special education teacher must support one another in order to meet

the needs of students has many complex layers. Moustakas (1994) stated that the relationship created between two professionals must be shared from a deep, transformative perspective.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In 2005, The United States Department of Education required that paraeducators be provided with training by a certified professional (Douglas et al., 2016). Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory (1991) serves as the theoretical framework for this study. This theoretical framework provides the reader with a context and a discernment of how the special education teacher and novice paraeducator work together. The theoretical framework illustrates the learning scenarios the special education teacher and paraeducator encounter. Each scenario has a strong basis built on external factors occurring within the classroom, as well as the special education teacher's and paraeducator's combined prior knowledge that creates a learning-teaching scenario between the two professionals. The literature shared within the chapter provides the reader with an understanding of a special education teacher's entire responsibility, as well as why there has been an influx of paraeducators working within the inclusive setting. A context of novice paraeducator training methods is provided in order to share specifically what has been previously implemented to support paraeducators with various skill levels. The literature also reveals how school systems and those in charge of overseeing special education departments at the system-wide level have approached different types of training. Various options that school systems have pursued regarding methods that might be appropriate for individualized paraeducator training needs and specific situations are discussed. These different training options were based upon students, paraeducator past experiences, and day to day needs within specific special education programs. The different relationships a novice paraeducator creates within his or her role as an inclusive special education staff member are also explored.

Finally, the working relationship between the special education teacher and paraeducator is examined in detail.

Theoretical Framework

Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory (1991) provides a perspective where learning occurs within a shared relationship between two professionals: the trainer and trainee, or the special education teacher and novice paraeducator. These two working individuals create their own learning, based upon their interactions with one another, the background knowledge they each have, along with the interactions and exposure to situations occurring around them. Given the social context of the two professionals, skills are illuminated and acquired, beginning with a fundamental approach, leading up to a developed skillset of specialized methods. The novice paraeducator may implement their developed skills whenever providing supportive instruction to students with special needs, working into an expert paraeducator status over time once learning has been created and skills have been mastered (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Situated Learning Theory

Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory supports the idea of an individual's learning occurring within an arranged or situated within social situations. These social situations incorporate tools and other resources that come from within the individual's environment. Whenever learning is regarded as a situated activity, or whenever trainees become experienced community members functioning with expertise, it is referred to as legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The situated learning theory is a complex system, made up of the behaviors of oneself and those around them. Learners within the community (or community of practice) are participating with an expert or experienced leader, in order to understand and obtain not only skills but also knowledge that is constantly evolving and

developing. Because nothing ever stays the same and nothing can be looked at in isolation without a connection to another aspect within the learning setting, the learning situations are expected to be a full reproduction of shifts and developments (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Ideas and scenarios within the situated learning theory should not be looked at in isolation, but rather as a whole, where one idea helps define another. This develops a pattern of everything within a learning scenario being intertwined (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), the trainer and trainee relationship is based upon an overlying system of interaction, interdependence, and behaviors. These communicative and interactive behaviors displayed may seem meaningless at first, but in actuality, are critical. The interactive behaviors imply that the special education teacher and novice paraeducator's interactions and working relationship grows over time and cultivates a relationship that moves from an apprenticeship scenario, to a close-knit position of social exercises, or practice. This practice carried out between the trainer and trainee, or in this case, the special education teacher and novice paraeducator, is a combination of analytic thinking processes (learning processes). The analytic thinking processes the special education teacher and novice paraeducator create through their work with one another, is considered to be the central idea. This is combined with social practices the special education teacher and novice paraeducator implement within their roles, which in turn creates a phenomenon, where learning is a characteristic of the thinking processes and social practices between the trainer and trainee (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The practices between the special education teacher and novice paraeducator transfers to the quality of support the novice paraeducator provides to students. Because the novice paraeducator has not been exposed to the same amount/or quality of training at the start of his or her apprenticeship as they are at the end of training, the novice paraeducator's skill level changes

and develops. Once the novice paraeducator has been led to what Lave and Wenger (1991) described as the full-participation stage, the paraeducator holds the schemata, skills, and interactive approaches and is no longer considered novice. This is a creation that is built upon over time between the special education teacher and the novice paraeducator. It is based upon the background knowledge of the paraeducator and the social situations they have learned within while being trained by the special education teacher.

Learning opportunities are brought forth through work practices and procedures rather than solely the relationship between the professional and his or her experienced leader. The act of participation between a professional and an experienced leader is unavoidable. The processes and procedures worked through by the new individual and his or her leader eventually leads to the newcomer, or trainee, to a level of full-participation or complete participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Full participation means that the newcomer is no longer a novice worker. They are a part of the community they work within, and they are becoming proficient with the skills being taught to them by the trainer, or expert they are working alongside (Lave & Wenger, 1991). During this phase, the newcomer's position is becoming more intense, with an emphasis being placed upon aspects that have yet to be reached within partial participation, where a trainee is still in the novice phase of learning. Lave and Wenger explained that individuals working within the stage of peripheral participation or full participation are just as connected to his or her role and community in either phase. While the phases are opposite regarding the trainee's experience level, the phase does not play a role in a trainee's connection or disconnection to their community they work within. The novice individual working within the peripheral phase has an entryway to gaining both understanding and growth within his or her field of work. Because the individual in this stage is open and willing to strengthen individual skills and make a deep-rooted

change within his or her field of work, they are connected to the guidelines or rules of the learning community they belong to (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Lave & Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory reinforces the relationship and environmental factors affecting the relationship between the special education teachers and the novice paraeducators they train. Both the expert special education teacher and novice paraeducator are participating in a community, which in this study happens to be an elementary school. The membership of a special education teacher or novice paraeducator within the school community may be broken down even further into another smaller division within the large division, or specific school. In this case, the smaller division is special education. The social structure or environmental factors that special education teacher trainers face, connects to the relations between themselves and the novice paraeducator. Lave and Wenger explained that factors within a community are intertwined and should be viewed as a whole, rather than separate parts that do not touch on one another. The identity of individuals within a training scenario, in addition to the identities of others they work with, paired with tangible resources and knowledge gained through practices, trainings, and others in the community create a community of practice. In this case, the community of practice would be equivalent to the elementary school that the special education teacher and novice paraeducator apprenticeship occurs within. Conley and You (2017) described factors that special education teachers deal with. Those factors are not specific to special education teachers who serve as trainers, or do not serve as trainers of paraeducators. These factors included administrative support, role problems (work overload or conflict with others) as well as student disengagement, and poor life experiences that drain them physically and emotionally. These factors are all more specifically revealed as concerns that special education teachers experience. They run parallel to the community of practice and the

relationships functioning within it (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Douglas et al. (2016) found that many special education teachers felt as if they were unprepared to direct the work of novice paraeducators and take on the training role. The training of a novice paraeducator plays a part within a larger system of interactions between the social community that the special education teacher and novice paraeducator interact within. For a special education teacher, his or her own views are not solitary, but rather combined with the views of the novice paraeducator, as well as the rest of the environmental factors within the setting (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Greeno (1998) found that arrangements of activity provide an opportunity for learning to occur. If the experiences of special education teachers were gathered regarding his or her activity of supervising paraeducators, it might provide information to further professional development for the novice paraeducator. Those environmental factors include but are not limited to mandatory school-wide meetings and trainings, curriculum planning and adaptation, grading student work, and working with the federal regulations of the IEP, which consists of the planning of meetings, completion, and implementation of paperwork (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014).

The situated learning theory aligns with the environmental factors a special education teacher faces daily, such as curriculum planning, providing instruction, and progress monitoring the behavioral/or academic achievement of students (Vlachou, Didaskalou, & Knotofryou, 2015). These attrition factors existing within the elementary school community of practice, along with the views of the special education teacher and novice paraeducator, intertwine to create the complex role of a special education teacher. Feldman and Matos (2013) suggested from research they have conducted that adequate paraeducator training is lacking and, in some cases, paraeducators may serve as a hinderance if not prepared for students with specific behavioral and academic needs. Because there are novice paraeducators who may enter the

learning community or special education department with little to no skillset for working with students with special needs, over time his or her skills grow and become responsible for more complex tasks as they continually learn from the special education teacher. Lave and Wenger (1991) described the situated learning theory as one where people end up learning more and more after joining a community. One starts off as a worker along the outside perimeter of a social group, and he or she will gradually learn more. As basic tasks are completed with fidelity and skill, workers move from legitimate peripheral participation to full participation. The social participation is what brings the novice paraeducator knowledge, rather than cognitive abilities or schema alone. Naturally, sub-systems are created within the community of practice that overlap and create a result. Combining all the internal and external factors in a social work situation form the situated learning theory in the inner-related resource setting. This theory supports the make-up of increasingly more and more paraeducators within the general education settings requiring training.

The basis or apprenticeship set-up for the situated learning theory in the special education teacher and novice paraeducator training relationship, is on-the-job training in addition to the training that occurs before and after school hours provided by special education teachers. When the novice paraeducator returns to the classroom setting after receiving advice and examples of learning strategies they can apply with the students, they are able to adjust and try the skills taught to them by a trainer. The situated learning theory is based upon communities where members start off working with those around them to learn a skill. This skill will build in complexity and responsibility as time goes on and the situation and practice has fostered a relationship that builds, while his or her skill set builds as well (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It raises the question of whether the ideas, suggestions, emotions, and perspectives of special education

teachers who are training the novice paraeducators within a department could change the quality of support being provided to students. By examining and discussing the experiences of special education teachers, it provides either the potential for continuation or changes, in regard to the learning experiences provided for students.

There are many aspects that contribute to a special education teachers' view of training novice paraeducators, including the demands for skilled paraeducators to be hired. The situated learning theory developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) reinforces the environmental factors that special education teachers face regarding the wide span of duties, which includes novice paraeducator training. The situated learning theory attempts to illustrate the concept of apprenticeship. Special education teachers who are the experts within an apprenticeship scenario with the novice paraeducator, have yet to voice any experience regarding their training relationships. They have not been provided with an opportunity to share what they have faced as an experienced practitioner. One of the most complex and time-consuming roles a special education teacher fulfills is the supervision of novice paraeducators. The focus shifts from the special education teacher toward the concern of taking care of job requirements. This specifically aligns to the individualized lessons that they must implement, as well as building-level requirements for the school. Lave and Wenger (1991) described the situated learning theory as a complex relationship made up of inseparable aspects of combinations. These combinations come together to create a landscape of shapes, ranks, and surfaces. All the duties that special education teachers are responsible for within his or her role, are equivalent to different shapes, ranks, and surfaces, that come together to create a landscape, or a portrait of the special education teacher's day at work (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014; Lave & Wenger, 1991). These defining duties they are responsible for within a school or community, are referred to as

inseparable aspects of combinations that are unavoidable. Because a landscape incorporates many parts that come together to make a whole, this means that the special education teacher's views are not solitary, but rather combined with the views of the novice paraeducator and others around them helping to create relationships combined with the environmental factors within the setting (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Lave and Wenger (1991) explained that learning is never as simple as transferring information or naturally taking in information. Learning must be accompanied with transformation and change. With learning, transformation and change processes are overlapping within one another. The cycles, or relationships between the special education teacher and novice paraeducator are brought forth through any opposing ideas of both individuals as they at the same time are working together in the legitimate participation phase (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Environmental factors or struggles of social practice the special education teacher may experience includes, but is not limited to: mandatory school-wide meetings, trainings, curriculum planning and adaptation, grading student work, and working with the federal regulations of the IEP, such as the planning and execution of IEP meetings (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The situated learning theory aligns with all the environmental factors a special education teacher faces daily that build in creating a landscape of a special education teacher's day. Those factors, along with his or her own views, plus the views of the novice paraeducator intertwine to create the complex role or landscape of the special education teacher.

Greeno (1998) shared that the situated learning theory is the complex system of behaviors in situated (planned or on the spot arranged) social learning activities. Because of this, sub-systems within roles are created, which overlap and create situations of learning. Combining all the occurring internal and external factors within the training situation of the special education

teacher and novice paraeducator form situated learning, within the inner-related resource setting. More paraeducators within the general education setting requiring training is the result, leaving the special education teacher trying to fulfill too many roles at the same time. This makes it difficult for the special education teacher and novice paraeducator to form a relationship based upon collaboration. A relationship between the special education teacher and novice paraeducator who are working together is needed, in order to support the academic and social growth of students with special needs in the inclusive setting (Irwin, Ingram, Huffman, Mason, & Wills, 2018).

Related Literature

The literature examined places emphasis upon the many roles and responsibilities special education teachers with all levels of experience face. Specific methods and types of training for paraeducators has been highlighted within the literature. Specific traditional and non-traditional training methods that may or may not carry over into various classroom settings, or work for different exceptionalities of students is looked upon as an attempt to better prepare novice paraeducators, or paraeducators with various levels of experience in general, in order to meet the growing demand of inclusive education. The literature has disclosed the significance that relationships play from the perspective of the paraeducator. Relationships between the special education teacher and paraeducator, as well as the paraeducators and families of students they support, is revealed. Currently, there is no literature to voice the experiences of special educators responsible for training novice paraeducators in inclusive settings. Special education teacher attrition factors are revealed within the literature, yet it the literature has not examined whether the responsibility of training novice paraeducators is an attrition factor. The opinion of special education teachers regarding their role as the trainer of paraeducators has not been brought to the

forefront. Irwin et al. (2018) claimed that there is very little information regarding different factors that impact the supervisory role that special education teachers serve within to paraeducators. It raises the question of whether the ideas, suggestions, emotions, and perspectives of special education teachers who are training the paraeducators in their department could change the quality of support being provided to students if their perspective were provided. According to Greeno (1998), arrangements of activity have provided an opportunity for learning to occur. If the experiences of special education teachers were gathered with the potential to be arranged for effective learning, it might not only provide further learning for the paraeducator to support the constantly changing skills needed for their role, but also further the learning of students in the long run. Douglas et al. (2016) pointed out that amidst all the training opportunities for special education paraeducators, knowledge is lacking about the actual experiences of special education teachers and what they feel should serve as training aspects. Those who serve within the role of a successful paraeducator supervisor should be able to provide input.

Special Education Teacher Responsibilities

Special education teachers have a broad range of roles and responsibilities that over time contribute to teacher burnout (Brunsting et al., 2014). Between the years of 2005 and 2012, the number of special education teachers employed by schools within the United States fell by 17% based upon formulas deciding the funding for special education teachers and a redirection of resources (Dewey et al., 2017). Because the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education classrooms is a movement that has occurred world-wide, it has led to an increased demand for both special education teachers and paraeducators (Lee, Yeung, Tracey, & Barker, 2015). This increased demand has spiraled into an overall need for qualified special education

paraeducators, yet the level to which they are qualified to meet the demand is comparatively dormant (Nguyen, 2015). The paraeducator job requirement has less preparatory education and certification requirements than that of a certified special education teacher, making it easier for school systems to hire individuals for the paraeducator role who are dependent upon special education teachers to provide training. According to Stewart (2018), paraeducator hiring requirements have commonly consisted of a high school diploma or an equivalent and having attended a minimum of two-years at an institution for higher education, an associate degree, or having passed a math, reading, and mathematics assessment. Having prior experience in working within or training in special education is not a requirement. Federal laws place the training of paraeducators upon special education teachers since the individual providing the training must be certified (Stewart, 2018). Special education teachers providing the training often report that they have not been prepared to handle that responsibility (Scheeler, Morano, & Lee, 2018). Along with the paraeducator training responsibility comes the instructional responsibility the special education teacher was primarily hired to do, which is to provide specialized instruction to students and attend to non-instructional responsibilities (Brunsting et al., 2014).

Instruction to students. Urbach et al. (2015) clarified that more accomplished special education teachers within studies shared personally that it was the special education teacher's primary role and responsibility to provide intense instruction to students. This tied the special education teacher's role specifically to the needs of his or her students participating in special education, rather than the fellow teachers around them. More experienced special education teachers held greater satisfaction in regard to their role, and did not allow for outside responsibilities to influence their satisfaction toward the role they

carried out. Special education teacher satisfaction did not include the aspect of having the responsibility of training novice paraeducators (Urbach et al., 2015). Gee and Gonsier-Gerdin (2018) conveyed that new special education teachers' responsibilities of making schedules and working with staff who were resistant to change proved to be challenging and reoccurring concerns, with thoughts on training paraeducators, were left out of the picture. Mason et. al., (2016) highlighted that in addition to supervising paraeducators, special education teachers may be providing one on one support to students on a caseload assigned to them, or may be providing specialized instruction to students in small groups, while at the same time performing clerical/or administrative duties such as special education paperwork or writing lesson plans. In other words, they are overloaded with the demands of the classroom (Mason et al., 2016).

In Hagaman and Casey's (2017) study, they determined that crisis intervention (special education teachers implementing the process of verbally/or physically de-escalating students who begin to hurt themselves or others) was a factor playing into the struggle of teaching special education. This crisis intervention at times took special education teachers away from other students requiring their support. Beam and Gershwin-Mueller's (2017) study concluded that more and more students participating in special education with defiant or combative behaviors are entirely included or involved for a large percentage of the day in general education classrooms. Their academic and behavioral instruction must be provided and remediated by the special education teacher. In turn, this places a need for special education personnel to confidently address these behaviors in a qualified and knowledgeable way whenever they escalate around non-disabled peers (Beam & Gershwin Muller, 2017).

Training paraeducators. Sobel, Chopra, and DiPalma (2015) stressed that paraeducators are progressively being utilized to implement services to special education

students. Paraeducator qualifications are not firm due to states and local departments being given the freedom to decide upon what qualification standards they require paraeducators to have (Sobel et al., 2015). In most school systems, paraeducators are required to hold a high school diploma, or in some cases a two-year degree from a college institution, not limited to a specific field. Because paraeducators are often hired without experience in the field of education, such as prior experience as a paraeducator or in substitute teaching, the training responsibility is given to a special education teacher in the building, creating a hardship within the already heavy job description they face. Jones, Ratcliff, Sheehan, and Hunt (2012) explained that school districts and programs providing education and support for children have job descriptions and requirements that are stated up front, although variation occurs regarding what the paraeducators are doing within a day-to-day role versus the qualifications they possess. Much of a paraeducator's job description consists of tasks that are misunderstood by the faculty and staff working alongside them. There is a shortfall of special education training with not only how it relates to instructional practices, but also special education law (Pazey & Cole, 2013). This absence of awareness and training in the field creates an unpredictability and inconsistency that falls back onto the role of the special education teacher. This impacts the quality of instruction they deliver to students (Rock et al., 2016).

The requirement of special education teachers serving as trainers is primarily due to the federal government providing only 16% to special education, out of all funds allotted to education (Pazey & Cole, 2013). According to Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2018), special education teachers provide regular supervision over paraeducators, yet in some cases have been provided with little to no training themselves to implement this requirement from the government with fidelity and expertise. While special education teachers are experienced at

what they do within their roles in teaching children, they have not been provided with the explicit skills it takes to train another individual. Areas such as communication, feedback, and coordinating approaches between each other while working with students at different times of the school day are all areas that a special education teacher must address, while also providing training to a paraeducator (Stockall, 2014). Biggs et al. (2018) stressed that future research should be conducted to compile special education teacher dialogue, which may potentially reinforce confidence within special education teachers, to help keep up with the influx of paraeducators hired requiring ongoing training.

Howard (2015) shared that one responsibility of a special education teacher who is serving as a trainer of paraeducators is for them to provide a list of responsibilities and assignments to the paraeducator. This gives them clear expectations and something to discuss whenever the special education teacher is meeting with or working alongside of them. They also explained that it is the responsibility of the supervising special education teacher to stress the goal of student independence in the end. Because paraeducators have been found to provide too much support to students at times, successful methods to scaffold learning and over time lessening supports for student skills are necessary (Howard, 2015).

Collaborating with general education teachers. Another obligation of the special education teacher is to make sure they are collaborating on a regular basis with the general education teachers with whom they co-teach (Tzivinikou, 2015). Friend and Cook (2017) described co-teaching as an approach that uses two teachers in one classroom, where each teacher provides significant instruction. This set-up is typically used whenever students with special needs are being placed in classes amongst general education peers, thus requiring two teachers. The role of one teacher (general education teacher) is to ensure the accuracy and

spacing of the content being delivered to all students. The role of the second teacher (special education teacher) is to specialize the content for those learners with deficits in psychological processing skills who require supports in special education. This set-up for the co-teachers may vary depending upon the particular skill, lesson, or needs of students within the classroom.

Approaches of co-teaching include: one teacher providing instruction while the other observes, one teaches while the other assists, students are split into small groups where they rotate through stations, one teacher instructs half the class, while the remaining half is placed with the other teacher, or team-teaching where both teachers instruct the entire class side-by-side (Conderman & Hedin, 2017). In Tzivinikou's (2015) study, it was found that both teachers planning together weekly for both teachers to deliver quality instruction was essential. Finding time for common planning together, while also attempting to work between a conflicting relationship between one another were at times factors that co-teachers must face. While the study discovered that co-teacher trainings to support their working together helped improve and facilitate better co-teacher relationships, it did not improve student instructional outcomes, nor did it discover whether it contributed to the stress, or lack of special education teacher effectiveness. Nielsen, Nielsen, and Weisschadel (2017) found within their study that the deficiency in co-teacher planning places the burden of implementing curriculum and special education services back onto the special education teacher exclusively, with little regard or understanding of the IEP on the general education teacher's part. With both the general education teacher and special education teacher planning separately with a lack of planning management, the effectiveness of both teachers is weakened.

Special Education Teacher Attrition

Teacher shifts in special education is a serious problem, with teachers leaving the field for reasons aside from retirement (Conley & You, 2017). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future estimates the cost of a teacher leaving to be as much as \$17,862 per teacher, in order to recruit, re-train, and put teacher retention efforts in place (Ryan et al., 2017). Research has provided evidence that there are many factors relating to general education and special education teacher attrition, yet it has yet to be determined from special education teachers whether their role of supervising paraeducators is a factor that affects job attrition, or burnout (Argon, 2016; Conley & You, 2017). Because the retention of special education teachers is critical, special education teachers who train paraeducators should have an opportunity to voice their experiences regarding the training scenarios of which they have been a part.

In a study by El Helou et al. (2016), it was determined that serving as a coordinator or a mentor in any capacity (not specifically in a special education role) created a path to burnout for teachers in general. Conley and You (2017) explained that there are many workplace factors that affect special education teacher attrition, including administrative support, teacher team efficacy, job design, student disengagement, and poor socioeconomic factors. Dewey et al. (2017) found that one fundamental factor contributing to the special education teacher shortage was the ratio of students being served by special education teachers, as the number of students on the special education teacher's caseload is rising. Cancio et al. (2018) found that special education teachers experienced stress that was work related (e.g., increased caseloads, the fulfilling of many roles, pressure toward student achievement and behavior, and worrying over whether they would remain in their current teaching position). According to Hagan and Casey (2017), attrition

regarding teachers in special education is a limited area of research. Teachers who prepare and teach four or more subjects per week were found to experience a higher amount of depersonalization burnout than others (El Helou et al., 2016). This scenario aligns with the roles and responsibilities of all special education teachers, including those who are experienced and supervising paraeducators. Bettini et al. (2018) stressed that there are many cases where experienced special education teachers who serve as trainers of paraeducators are also preparing to teach seven or more subjects per week. These teachers end up serving anywhere between one to six different grade levels. This is because they are competent and have prior experience teaching many different grade levels and subjects within the same school day. This scenario is not the case for special education teachers just entering the profession (Bettini et al., 2018). Previous data obtained through survey format have failed to reveal the complex details of why a special education teacher would leave the field (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Conley and You's (2017) study found that the outright amount of duties and responsibilities placed upon special education teachers and the need for relief from some of those duties were found to affect special education teacher attrition. The study stressed that special education teachers not only need relief from duties, but also have a need for camaraderie and togetherness. The researchers concluded that when special education teachers felt as if they could work well with others within the school building, they were less likely to leave the role of teaching special education, and less likely to experience attrition as a special education teacher.

Administrative Support

While administrators are typically the source of leadership amongst general education teachers and provide guidance toward instruction and day-to-day responsibilities in special education, this role falls to the special education teacher (Bettini, Cheyney, Wang, & Leko,

2015). Claxton, Beam, and Smith (2016) stressed that managing and supervising special education services was a challenge due to the parents of students in special education and the complaints they brought forward, as well as being afraid of making mistakes that would hold legal implications as a result.

The most important factors for special education teacher attrition were found to be support from the school administration and team efficacy (Conley & You, 2017). One typical reason cited by special education teachers who expressed that they would like to leave, or from special education teachers who followed through with leaving the field of special education, was a lack of support from the administration (Conley & You, 2017). To the administrator's defense, Pazey and Cole (2013) explained that special education content and laws tied to the subject have been non-existent within administration preparatory programs. It may be difficult to provide support and intervene in situations occurring within special education when one is not aware of the responses one should make, or which approached should be passed along. Even more difficult is when situations become unique and non-transferable based upon student need. Hagaman and Casey (2017) were able to brainstorm future supports that administrators could provide that might help alleviate stress amongst special education teachers serving as trainers of paraeducators; however, the school district was limited in providing these supports due to a lack of resources. Bettini et al. (2015) noted that administrators should set clear expectations for special education teachers who are new to the field and should also work with the special education teachers to help them handle the demands of the role. Jones et al. (2012) stressed that it is essential for administrators to have an internal desire to know what special education teachers and paraeducators do, so that they may provide resources, time, and professional development to cultivate administrative support. Beam and Gershwin Muller (2017) concluded

that the administration should provide resources in the form of in-service classes within the school buildings to current teachers who struggled to provide support for students in the general education classroom who exhibited challenging behaviors and required de-escalation strategies. The researchers stressed that these in-services classes should not solely be a presentation of information, but rather a hands-on opportunity that builds teamwork and provides specific feedback, investigations, adjustments, and support. This type of opportunity would not only support the special education teacher's individual growth, but also indirectly aid students and co-teachers in the classroom who may feel insecure when working with students exhibiting behavioral needs.

El Helou et al. (2016) found that administrators in some cases were too over-bearing, leading to teacher attrition as a whole, while not specifically related to special education. One example provided within the study shared that a certain administrator would enter a teacher's classroom at his or her own leisure, take over the lesson or direct students in a way that took the authority away from the teacher, which inadvertently added personal insult. The researchers concluded that teacher evaluations conducted by administrators were too detailed, were influenced by the administrator's personal feelings, and contained inconsistencies. This served to reverse teachers' effective efforts in the classroom by creating feelings of confusion that eventually led to attrition.

Increased Demands and Requirements for Paraeducators

The National Education Association (2015) shared that out of the 1.2 million paraeducators in the United States, 71% work with students with special needs. This increased demand for paraeducators has created implications for school systems, trickling down to the special education teachers who train paraeducators. Paraeducators are being expected to provide

refined instruction and support to students with special needs who are learning within the general education setting (Cameron, 2014). Wright (2013) described that special education teachers create the lesson plans, but the paraeducator is often the one responsible for implementing the plan or collecting data to help the special education teacher determine whether the strategies put in place by the paraeducator are working. The needs of students participating in special education are complex and ever-changing. In Brownell, Bettini, Pua, Peyton, and Benedict's (2018) study, they determined that individual student factors and needs, such as early success in learning or socioeconomic status must be considered; however, teachers' effectiveness in both reading and mathematics instruction was what truly made an outstanding contribution. If paraeducators are to be supporting students instructionally, it is essential that they receive the training that will allow them to implement the specialized and refined skills the students must be taught in an effective way.

Paraeducator Skill Levels

Banerjee, Chopra, and DiPalma (2017) shared that paraeducators are used extensively within early childhood special education settings, yet there is an absence of guidance at both the national and state levels in regard to how paraeducators working in special education are trained. Paraeducators who have acquired knowledge, skills, and awareness of potential resources that can support students with special needs in the general education setting help carve a learning environment that is appropriate for a group of challenging learners (Long & Simpson, 2017). Often a student will be in the middle of an activity and need help; the paraeducator must be able to assess the situation on the spot and have the skill-set to change or adapt what the student is working on so that he or she is able to understand the same content as the peers around them, but complete the assignment in an alternate way that works for his or her needs. The paraeducator

may encounter a student who is trying to use the appropriate skills he or she has learned, but may need encouragement and specific, concise reminders of what to say or do next to foster his or her ultimate goal of independence. This type of support may or may not be in place based upon the background knowledge and prior training a paraeducator brings to the classroom. According to Nguyen (2015), there is currently a paraeducator paradox; our most unskilled human resources are working with students who have the most challenging needs, either academically, behaviorally, or in some cases, both. This is a result of a system that is functioning improperly, which leaves paraeducators in the same rut of being unable to move forward, not improving their own skillsets in order to effectively support the students. Gee and Gonsier-Gerdin (2018) shared specific paraeducator struggles not related to working with students, which consisted of being on time, asking for a substitute when needed, and staying off a cellular phone while providing supports to students. To the defense of the unskilled paraeducator, it was found that there is a large gap between what a paraeducator is expected to do with students, and the skills they are hired in with (Jones et al., 2012). Morrison and Lightner's (2017) study revealed that some paraeducators are hired into their position with background knowledge and experience in the field of education. Some paraeducators may have a skill level that gives them a distinct advantage over others; they perhaps might be able to help fulfill teacher shortages and pursue an alternative certification path toward becoming a teacher. Radford et al. (2017) expressed that in addition to the United States, many countries continue to use teacher assistants, or paraeducators, to provide support for students in the inclusion setting. Paraeducators utilized in the United Kingdom to support students with low-incidence disabilities in the inclusion setting were found to have low skill sets upon being hired. Radford et al. noted that these paraeducators would ask lower level thinking questions and provide too much information to students. Students would

end up receiving the answer from the paraeducator without having to generate the answer themselves. The skill levels the paraeducators in this study possessed resulted in a negative association between student achievement and support provided by the paraeducators.

Training Methods for Paraeducators

Shepherd et al. (2016) presented the following paraeducator training specifications that were shared by both special education paraeducators and teachers: (a) information specific to student disabilities, (b) student services and goals, (c) instructional related methods, (d) student care and management, and (d) assistive technology. Lee et al. (2015) explained that methods of training influence the attitudes of teachers responsible for training paraeducators. Specific aspects of training that have influenced and shaped effective inclusive environments should be identified and be available as a resource for all special education teachers serving not only as teachers themselves, but trainers of paraeducators who are responsible for implementing specialized instructional supports. Little focus has been given to preparing teachers to train paraeducators, with the potential to build this preparation into teacher preparation programs (Biggs et al., 2016). Research has uncovered various types of training and methodologies for paraeducators working with students who have special needs, but they are yet to be examined formally by special education teachers. In a study conducted by Radford et al. (2015), scaffolding was found to be a key practice to inform the practices of paraeducators. Scheeler et al. (2018) found that a beneficial system for paraeducators learning to support students with autism was for the special education teacher trainer to provide specific and immediate feedback and praise to paraeducators through a bug-in-ear device that the paraeducator wore while working with students. Eichelberger's (2015) study uncovered that middle school paraeducators who were provided with modeling of skills through a video, then provided with guided practice

in real time with bug-in ear-feedback, supported the paraeducator learning many skills in a shorter period of time. Paraeducators who receive on-going training and supports in the classroom from certified teachers were found to foster positive learning outcomes for students (Butt, 2016). The effectiveness and practicality of specific types of paraeducator training methods that should or should not be used have thus far not been researched thoroughly. Chopra, Banjeree, DiPalma, Merrill, and Ferguson (2013) explained that the degree of training needed for an inexperienced paraeducator should be carried out through a 2- or 4-year paraeducator to teacher program, yet experienced special education teachers are fulfilling that role instead. This has become an accepted practice. Lee et al. (2015) revealed that those working with students who have special needs must understand the various types of disabilities. They must also be provided with clear leadership in regard to the type of professional development needed.

Traditional training methods. Kim, Koegel, and Koegel (2017) shared that research related to specific, effective training options to choose from for special education paraeducators is limited. Even though research has shown that paraeducators play a relevant and meaningful role in the lives of certain students, such as those under the autism exceptionality category, the training options are few and far between. Westover and Martin (2014) clarified that students with significant disabilities receive the majority of instruction from special education paraeducators rather than by the teachers. Methods of pyramidal training, which are specific and individualized types of training provided to paraeducators that are overseen by special education teachers, have been shown to support paraeducators regarding their skillsets for working with students (Andzik & Cannella-Malone, 2017). Just as the students being supported by the paraeducator require specialized and individualized supports, so does the paraeducator working

to build proficiency need support. Paraeducators fill a role that serves as a worthwhile opportunity that will ultimately benefit long-term student success academically and behaviorally. McLeskey et al. (2014) found that evaluative studies have focused on two types of training: didactic instruction and experiential learning. Didactic instruction involves taking apart pieces of knowledge through the form of workshops, classes, or speakers (Walker & Smith, 2015). This type of methodology is intended for paraeducators who have prior experience with providing support to students with special needs. A drawback of the didactic training method is that it does not provide an opportunity for paraeducators to apply the skills they have learned within practice settings to what occurs during a typical school day. In Douglas, Uitto, Reinfelds, and D'Agostino's (2018) study, a rubric was designed that would help support special education teachers or others training special education paraeducators. This rubric listed a variety of traditional training methods typically used for paraeducator training or best practices that might be used in many instances of teacher development. The rubric allowed the trainer to answer a series of questions and rate training priorities and outcomes, so that traditional methods of training such as teacher trainers, after school modeling and practice, or independent book studies could be assigned. The rubric helped the trainer decide what strategies would work to best to support the paraeducator's weak points or highlight the specific classroom situations they were in where more training proved to be a necessity. The majority of training methods and materials used with the rubrics aligned with federal regulations. The methods went along with traditional adult learning methods that school systems chose to implement for all types of professional learning for all teachers.

Walker and Snell (2017) conducted a study that focused on behavioral interventions for students whose emotional or behavioral challenges created injury to themselves or others. It was

found that whenever paraeducators were provided with training workshops and were then supervised during the school day to support the implementation of function-based interventions, improvements in student behavior occurred. This type of training provided by either the special education teacher or the school system's special education department did not reveal the transferability of skills a paraeducator needs to acquire due to the participants' behavior and maintenance of skills not being measured in the study. Brock and Carter (2015) concluded that instead of solely using workshops and stand-alone training, special education teachers serving as trainers should arrange follow-up training by providing coaching sessions during the school year that would provide a more centered version of support and help evaluate special education paraeducator skills. The researchers also noted that the opinions and understanding of this practice from the viewpoint of the special education teacher, and how this time-consuming task affected or impacted other duties, has yet to be discovered.

Another type of traditional pyramidal training is side-by-side coaching. Stockall (2014) explained that guidance is provided to the paraeducator in a side-by-side coaching format within the actual implementation setting. Because side-by-side training methods can be efficient (i.e., paraeducators do not need to leave the building) it is commonly used. Stockall stressed that teachers are both influential and crucial to any positive results gained from paraeducator training in this type of capacity. In Irvin, Ingram, Huffman, Rose, and Wills' (2018) study, special education teacher supervision training and supervision of paraeducators occurred frequently within alternate, self-contained classrooms with students who had moderate to severe disabilities. Within these settings, side-by-side training methods were used daily. From their findings, the researchers proposed that local, state, and federal support should be allocated to the task of

paraprofessional training and supervision so that they could occur at the same rate in the inclusive setting as well.

One effective training method for special education paraeducators that was shown to improve the skills of the paraeducator was performance feedback (Westover & Martin, 2014). Providing the paraeducator with specific feedback after an on-the-job situation occurs gives specifics about the amount of support and the standards they provided to the student in need. This feedback not only increases desired behaviors within the paraeducator, but also helps the trainer monitor the behaviors related to the support and instruction. The feedback helps the special education teacher trainer gauge the effectiveness of the training they provided. Majack, Carol and Chopra (2017) shared that engaging in collaboration is one contrasting method of feedback for paraeducators. This was primarily because it occurred before the paraeducator began to work with a specific teacher or individual. Whenever students in Carol and Chopra's study were being accompanied by and participated in art class with a paraeducator present, the art teacher and special education teacher discussed expectations they had with the paraeducator beforehand, which ensured that clear directions were given to the paraeducator. For example, the art teacher had the expectation that the paraeducator would be assisting any student in the classroom who needed support, while the special education teacher had the expectation that the paraeducator would be exclusively helping the student(s) with special needs. The precondition of clarifying paraeducator responsibilities before the collaborative services began within the general education settings was a training method for paraeducators that was shown to work (Capizzi, 2015). Sobel et al. (2015) concluded that a standards-based curriculum should be created in order to effectively train paraeducators. The researchers noted that revisions should be made to the created curriculum as necessary in order to not only train but also to assess the

paraeducators and the ongoing accomplishments they experienced. Mason et al. (2018) stressed that whenever certified teachers provided coaching for paraeducators, paired with performance feedback, paraeducators were able to effectively collect data on student behavior that were related to the on-task performance of the paraeducator.

Alternate training methods. Overseeing and providing remedial training to paraeducators must occur whether system-wide training has occurred or not (Irwin et al., 2016). Per the U.S. Department of Education (2014), if the student's IEP states that they are to receive an instructional or behavioral support, it must be provided by the support staff (i.e., the special education teacher or paraeducator) per the Free and Appropriate Public Education Act (FAPE). FAPE outlines that students with disabilities will receive an education provided by the expense of the public. If the appropriate education does not occur, parents of students with disabilities are able to argue denial of FAPE (Zirkel & Bauer, 2016). If a paraeducator, teacher, or service provider does not know how to adequately provide supports necessitated to a student outlined by his or her IEP, they must find out how from the school district, due to being legally bound to the IEP document (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). School districts have the responsibility to arrange for a paraprofessional to be hired and provide for his or her in-service training (Howley, Howley, & Telfer, 2017). This responsibility aligns with the quality of individualized support that students in special education require, even though the majority of special education students have less obvious or extreme needs (Kauffman et al., 2018).

The extensive task of training paraeducators to provide the supports stated within an IEP may be met through alternate training methods such as video modeling or coaching systems that provide practice with strategies, implementation, and feedback; however, these alternatives do not completely remove the duty of training from the special education teacher's agenda (Scheeler

et al., 2018). In Brock and Carter's (2015) study, limitations were noted, sharing that sample practice situations presented through video modeling or coaching were not all able to be transferred into all classrooms due to the small sample size of the study. The researchers also noted that no determination was made as to whether or not the paraeducator training provided actually improved student learning outcomes. They stressed that video training and modeling cannot be completely effective without on-the-job support, and follow-up training is necessary, as there were unique situations that occurred in the classroom between the paraeducator and student that were not covered in the video or modeling. Mason et al. (2018) described an instance within their study where video modeling was used to train a paraeducator working with a student exhibiting challenging behaviors. This alternate method of training allowed the paraeducator to observe the correct behaviors or steps they should take as a professional, to help correct student behavior. The student's behaviors were an attempt to escape instructional requirements, so video modeling was used. Video modeling was paired with the use of traditional performance feedback to support future continuation of success. With this alternative training method of video modeling paired with a didactic traditional method of performance feedback, Mason et al. suggested that there was an affiliation correlated with the proficiency of paraeducators and their relationship with special education teachers. They noted that less competent paraeducators working with special education teachers where there was a poor relationship were not as effective.

Use of a scripted lesson plan is another paraeducator training method used, which has been shown to be more transferable than video training. McCray, Butler, and Bettini (2014) noted that this method provided a 99.3% accuracy rate regarding the instruction embedded within the scripted lesson.

Garcia, Manuel, and Buly (2019) described an alternate training pathway that novice special education paraeducators, paraeducators serving English as second language learners, or paraeducators who provide bilingual education services may utilize. The Woodring Highline Program was described, which is a Route 1 program that is used as an option for classified staff under active employment who hold an associate's degree. Paraeducators who meet the requirements are able to pursue this certification path that focuses on growth and professional development. The 2-year program is available based on individual state laws, and has a board of professionals who are appointed by the governor of each state to oversee the program's practices and expectations. The paraeducator who successfully completes the program is awarded a teacher certificate. Whether or not the paraeducator chooses to pursue the role of a certified special education teacher or remain serving as a paraeducator is up to them. The authors noted that one drawback to this program is the fact that although this is an alternate route to certifying new special education teachers, it also adds to the critical shortage of qualified paraeducators. They further noted that this program does not necessarily promote paraeducator retention, nor does it go into detail about on-the-job training and daily mentoring that would be provided to the paraeducator by a special education teacher trainer.

Paraeducator Relationships With Trainers

Biggs et al. (2016) found that the relationship of the special education teacher and paraeducator was a complex relationship that highlighted the importance of reciprocal support between the two professionals. The paraeducator's role is not to provide initial instruction to students, but to support and reinforce prior information through scaffolding and supportive strategies brought forth to the paraeducator during the training scenarios (Douglas et al., 2016). Stockall (2014) found that when the special education teacher served as the trainer of the

paraeducator, it was essential that he or she create a relationship consisting of togetherness and a common view. Stockall noted that being able to communicate with one another was not only helpful, but essential. Established lines of communication that are both effective and efficient between the special education teacher and paraeducator were found to be something that did not occur overnight (Stockall, 2014). Research by Biggs et al. (2016) found that when novice paraeducators and special education teachers shared challenges together or dealt with situations that were beyond one another's control, the relationship was influenced. The social situations of training created between the novice paraeducator and special education teacher help the trainer and trainee form a relationship. This is also true whenever they experience difficult training situations together, such as when students are physically hurting themselves or another (Biggs et al., 2016). Additional factors were found to help form relationships between the special education teacher and novice paraeducator, such as when the combination of trust and support was provided between one another. This relationship formed not only between the professionals in the study, but also the professionals and the students they met (Biggs et al., 2016). Tan (2013) found that social activities the special education teacher and paraeducator were a part of together, brought forth an opportunity for paraeducator learning to occur. Certain aspects of situations and scenarios that the special education teacher and paraeducator were a part of may make the working relationship between the two individuals take a completely different turn than what was intended to happen. This is due to an individual's own factors (e.g., personality, background knowledge, or exposures to situations and people) being involved. This coincides with the situated learning theory, which involves emotions combined with situations and aspects occurring around a person that will influence one's experience (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Chambers (2015) emphasized that in order for a special education teacher trainer and paraeducator to have a successful training relationship, metaphors must be used to help incorporate characteristics of what the relationship between the two currently is, and what they are striving to be. The supervising teacher and paraeducator must come up with a metaphor that describes the relationship between the two of them, and then think about what is being said directly and indirectly, as well as any implied actions or things that are not being said that reflect the relationship. For example, if the teacher and paraeducator come up with peanut butter and jelly as the metaphor for the relationship they have, it might imply that they work together very well and are ordinary without any pretentious desires or outcomes regarding the hard work they put in day in and day out. It may also suggest that like a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, they are ordinary; nothing special. Perhaps they need to work together to come up with instructional strategies that go above what is typically done to help students reach success. The peanut butter and jelly metaphor also implies that they keep it simple and safe, not taking risks or drawing any attention to themselves as a training partnership (Chambers, 2015). Just as developing a metaphor may strengthen a special education teacher and paraeducator training relationship, feedback is an essential element to the daily training scenario. Feedback was found to be a necessity that must occur in any situation where new skills are being acquired by the paraeducator (Douglas et al., 2016). Paraeducators and special education teachers shared that opportunities for training were inadequate when combined with limited skill levels held by paraeducators that could not meet the different the needs of students with disabilities (Walker & Smith, 2015). For example, training success instances were found when the special education teacher and paraeducator were determining a metaphor that helped the special education teacher and paraeducator describe their training relationship (Chambers, 2015). These research findings

that have been found to promote special education teacher and paraeducator relationship success must be conveyed to the special education teacher and paraeducator through professional development opportunities (Walker & Smith, 2015).

Paraeducators need to receive pre-lesson preparation before they implement strategies, and then be provided with feedback regarding the on-the-job supports and often unplanned situations they encounter based on the sensitive nature of their role (Radford et al., 2015). The needs of the students create an entirely new aspect of the working relationship established over time between the paraeducator and the special education teacher. For paraeducators to feel confident and grow within their role, they must apply the skills they have acquired and receive feedback from those around them. Douglas et al. (2016) stressed that paraeducators must work within a culture and climate that promotes student learning, teamwork, and their own professional growth. Professionals cannot correct an error or continue implementing successful strategies if they do not know what to continue or revamp (Douglas et al., 2016). Internal and external factors such as personality, experience, and student needs all interact with one another as part of the paraeducator and special education teacher relationship (Jones et al., 2012).

Chambers (2015) found that when the role of paraeducators in special education progressed from one that took a clerical stance to one that included direct specialized instruction with students, the manner in which the paraeducators were supported changed. Jones et al. (2012) argued that there is a lack of documented evidence related to the relationships between paraeducators and special education teachers. One of the reasons for this lack of evidence may be a lack of time for reflecting on situations in the classroom after they occur. Due to time constraints, this straightforward and essential reflection process is a challenge for special education teachers and paraeducators alike (Biggs et al., 2016). Professionals in education

finding the time to meet and come up with ideas that will foster student learning and support students accessing the general education curriculum should be a priority. Whenever administrators create schedules and agendas for special education departments (DaFonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). Irvin et al. (2018) found that special education teachers and paraeducators in the self-contained setting were able to complete on-the-job training more regularly when working alongside one another. Paraeducators received more supervision within the self-contained setting than in an inclusive setting due to students in the inclusive setting having disabilities that are low incidence. Because the needs of these students were less severe than those in self-contained settings, paraeducators received less supervision since the students they were working with required less support (Irvin et al., 2018). Douglas et al. (2016) noted that the paraeducators who worked in inclusive settings with students who had low-incidence disabilities and were found to be less competent had difficulty developing a relationship with the classroom teacher. With the special education teacher serving as a trainer typically having his or her own individual schedule and courses to teach that do not coincide with the paraeducator's schedule, providing on-the-job-training is more inconvenient to find a compatible training time in the inclusive setting. As a result, training often occurs during either professional's planning period (Irvin et al., 2018).

Student outcomes were found to suffer whenever the paraeducator was not prepared to address student needs or was not equipped to handle the student's evolving academic skills (Knight, Kuntz, & Brown, 2018). Douglas et al. (2016) found that collaboration regarding academic subjects was not the only area where paraeducator and special education teacher relationships were not being cultivated. Lack of collaboration between physical education teachers and paraeducators in the inclusive setting was noted by Wilson, Stone, and Cardinal

(2013). Biggs et al. (2016) emphasized that there was a complexity of issues related to special education teacher and paraprofessional relationships across academic subjects. Establishing a rapport was based upon communication, trust, and openness. Douglas et al. (2016) found that a shared vision between the paraeducator and special education teacher was an additional aspect related to a successful paraeducator and special education teacher relationship. Understanding why certain arrangements and processes occurred within the classroom was found to be linked to paraeducator and special education teacher relationships. It was also found that paraeducator and special education teacher relationships that were positive made a positive impact on student learning (Douglas et al., 2016)

Summary

Literature relating to special education teachers and paraeducators who work in special education places stresses the many responsibilities that special education teachers have within schools (Douglas et al., 2016). Because of the many job-related responsibilities and challenges a special education teacher must balance, special education teacher attrition has become a critical factor to address (Conley & You, 2017). Administrative support was found within the literature to be the most important element to support special education teacher retention and prevent special education teacher burnout (McLeskey, et al., 2014). Stressed within the literature are the increased demands for paraeducators, primarily due to the fact that more students with low incidence disabilities are being taught in inclusive settings (Sobel et al., 2015). Because there is a greater need for paraeducators to work in special education than ever before to support students with disabilities in the inclusive setting, the skill levels of paraeducators have been examined (Douglas, et al., 2016). With the addition of so many paraeducators needed for special education, paraeducators are being hired with little to no experience (Nguyen, 2015). As a

result, school systems have been forced to examine the skill levels of paraeducators, and as a result, create or acquire training programs for paraeducators in special education. Traditional training methods and alternative training method types have been examined within the literature (Douglas et al., 2018; Ledford et al., 2017; Long & Simpson, 2017; Mason et al., 2017; Mason et al., 2018; Nguyen, 2015; Scheeler et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2013). With so many different types of paraeducator training occurring, it has prompted the need to examine the relationship between the paraeducator and the individual providing the training, whether it be the special education teacher or another trainer involved with the school system (Cipriano et al., 2016; Douglas et al., 2016). The specific experiences of special education teachers serving as trainers of paraeducators in the inclusive setting represents the gap within the literature that needs to be examined.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The design of transcendental phenomenology was used within this study to capture the lived experience of special education teachers within their multi-dimensional role (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of special education teachers who served as trainers of novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting within the metro-Atlanta area. Within this chapter, an explanation of the research design and procedures that aligned with the data collection is described. The research questions were sustained by the situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This apprenticeship model supported an experienced individual leading a novice individual, who advances to becoming proficient based upon the environment around them and the past experiences they bring to the learning scenario. The situated learning theory was combined with literature that relates to special education teachers and paraeducator training to support special education teacher experience. The processes of data collection, data analysis, and ethics are described within the chapter as well.

Design

A qualitative approach was appropriate due to the experiences of special education teachers who train novice paraeducators being explored. Bryman (2008) describes qualitative research as an approach that places emphasis upon words, as opposed to numbers or a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. In the 1960's, the use of qualitative research became more widespread due to its flexible nature. With a qualitative design, the researcher is able to gather and develop descriptive explanations from participants, which allows for a flexible research approach as opposed to one that must be laid out ahead of time and implemented (Hammersley, 2013). Through qualitative research, descriptive explanations are

collected through observations and interviews. From there, patterns and themes may be identified through document analysis by the researcher, to base themes and patterns upon (Lodicio, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2013).

The experiences of special education teachers who train novice paraeducators had yet to be uncovered, and with this study the information collected in the participant's natural setting supported the discovery of the special education teacher's experience (Husserl, 1931). The qualitative approach used in this study coincides with the smaller intricate pieces of the complex whole, or training scenarios special education teachers are provided with an opportunity to share about. These experiences may then be uncovered and understood by the researcher, leaving the context of the research in place to derive the full phenomena being experienced by the participants (Lodicio et al. 2013). Qualitative inquiry seeks to discover and to describe in narrative reporting what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them. Due to phenomenology being based upon a familiar context or lived experience that several human participants have in common, a phenomenon is achieved between them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These individuals' commonality or lived experience placed emphasis upon distinct conclusions that were drawn with an essence of the participant's background and involvement. The purpose of this qualitative analysis was to reach an essence of special education teachers' experiences as trainers of novice paraeducators. The detailed descriptions provided by the participants filled a current gap within the literature, making this a necessary qualitative study. The human experiences, or depictions from situations that were placed within the training situations of the special education teacher and novice paraeducator helped develop the essence of the experiences from multiple special education teachers who have been assigned the duty of training paraeducators (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ideas and concepts that

participants shared were filled with human character. Once these were collected from all participants, a created essence, or heart of the collective experiences between the participants was formed. Epoche, a process where the researcher takes steps to set themselves apart from schema, judgments, and what was currently known about ideas was applied (Moustakas, 1994). The Epoche process intends for the researcher to abandon a typical discernment of the information collected from the participants and retain what information is brought forth to them, as if the researcher had absolutely no schema whatsoever connected to the information collected. For the researcher to ultimately create an essence of the phenomenon, he or she must collect an experience from each of the participants that is original, while consciously forcing away all thoughts, background knowledge, or potentially influencing external factors. This provided the researcher with an increasingly guileless perspective that has them gathering findings that will later serve as a basis for further reflection (Moustakas, 1994).

A phenomenological design was selected due to the research participants having all experienced the same phenomenon or common experience; the researcher wished to determine whether the shared phenomenon resulted in a neutral, negative, or positive stance according to the participants' experiences. A description of what all the participants have in common based upon the phenomenon, or a common experience serving as an experienced special education teacher who serves as a trainer of paraeducators, was provided. This described not only what they have experienced but also how potential mind and body viewpoints merged. This created one perspective of dual Cartesian recognition, which was provided by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With a phenomenological design selected, the lived experiences of the special education teachers who serve as trainers of paraeducators was examined. Because federal law requires that paraeducators be supervised by a certificated individual within the school system, a

specific study design containing a more specific set of conditions was not applicable. The study was qualitative in nature, due to the study being carried out in the natural setting, consisting of several types of data collection, such as one-on-one interviews, observation, and focus groups, which were all based upon the researcher portraying the special education teacher participants' views without including past experience or views of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The meanings of the information shared by the participants were derived by the researcher through a research model that was complex, consisting of a step-by-step process that derived both the textural and structural descriptions the research participants will provided (Moustakas, 1994).

A qualitative study with a transcendental phenomenological research design guided this study and provided a description of the lived experience regarding the training that special education teachers have provided to paraeducators (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Husserl's (1931) transcendental phenomenology ensures that the researcher only resorts to using the data collected that is accessible to his or her own personal awareness (Moustakas, 1994). One's own consciousness is always focused upon an object and the object's reality, or the way that a person perceives it. The way the researcher perceives a participant's experience or information shared is not split into categories or specific subject areas, but rather an aspect that combines one's mental and physical perceptions into one, holistic view (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustak). The transcendental phenomenological design focused strictly upon a portrayal of the research participant's experience, as opposed to a hermeneutical approach, which not only captures the participant's experience, but also the researcher's stance on the phenomenon, where the researcher does not bracket themselves out of the study, and includes his or her own personal experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The end result provided a textural and structural written

representation that created an essence, or heart of information from the combined experiences of the participants.

Research Questions

CQ1: How do special education teachers describe their experience supervising novice paraeducators within the interrelated resource setting?

SQ1. How do participants describe the interaction that occurs with their paraeducators?

SQ2. How do participants describe the interdependence that occurs between themselves and the paraeducators?

SQ3. How do participants describe the behaviors occurring between themselves and the paraeducators?

Setting

The setting of the study was held at two schools within the District A School System, in metro-Atlanta, Georgia. Elementary School A and Elementary School B served as the respective locations. The school system and respective schools are noted as pseudonyms to protect the school system and participant confidentiality. These two locations were selected due to the proximity they had to the researcher. They were also selected to support maximum variation sampling. By implementing maximum variation sampling, the two sites selected were differentiated, meaning they were not all located in the same enrollment zones of district A. Maximum variation allowed the researcher maximize differences at the start of the study, increasing the likelihood that different participant perspectives will be collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). At each of the two settings, only special education teachers participated. At both locations, 95% of the teachers were certified and had three or more years teaching experience.

These locations were organized with not only a designated lead and assistant principal, but additionally had a student support facilitator at each of the sites who supervised the entire special education department, including the department chair, special education teachers, and special education paraeducators within the building.

Demographic information below (Table 3.1) includes the race, ethnicity, and free and reduced lunch statistics pertaining to the two schools participating in the study. Numbers in the table reflect percentages. Participating schools had anywhere between 550 and 920 students at each site.

Table 3.1

Student Race, Ethnicity, and Free and Reduced Lunch Rates

Race/Ethnicity	District A	Site A	Site B
Black	45	14	14
White	40	75	75
Hispanic	5.5	5	6
Multi-Racial	4	4	5
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	0	0
American Indian/Alaskan	0.1	0	0
Free and Reduced Lunch Rate	50	36	43

Participants

Purposeful criterion sampling was used, to allow the researcher to select the sites and specific individuals that meet specifications of the study. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to include only those individuals who have met the predetermined qualities

participants in the study must have. It also allowed the researcher to select participants based upon specific criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants consisted of special education teachers, which for the purpose of this study were defined as individuals currently working in the field of special education with two or more years of special education teaching experience. An additional stipulation of each participant was that they must be currently serving as a trainer of at least one novice paraeducator in the inclusive setting. The potential pool of special education teachers available at both of the research sites meeting these necessary requirements to serve as a participant within the study consisted of 35 to 50 teachers total. Each school had approximately three to seven special education teachers per site. Names of special education teacher participants were kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Female participants with various backgrounds and ethnicities served as study participants.

Purposeful sampling was conducted in order to interview, observe, and create focus groups for participants. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to find participants who met the study's specified criteria of having taught special education for at least two years, work in the inclusive setting, and who currently train a paraeducator. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested between 5 and 25 participants for a phenomenological study. For that reason, 10 special education teachers working in the interrelated resource setting were selected; a minimum of 10 participants should have been used. Due to developing saturation within the model, further description of the phenomenon was not needed, and for that reason, a minimum of 10 participants were adequate for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Procedures

Liberty University IRB forms and templates were used and submitted to District A School System. Upon receiving pending approval from District A School System, approval from

the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was sought after. Once approval was given by the IRB, the researcher contacted the District A School System once more to reverse pending approval to approval that allowed the researcher to begin conducting research. The next step was to involve the researcher sending an email to the respective schools selected for the study to gain the approval from each of the respective school administrators. Once this approval was granted, the researcher sent a formal email to potential participants who met the participant criteria at each school. Participant criteria consisted of the following: (1.) must have taught special education for 2+ years, and (2.) currently training at least one novice paraeducator in the inclusive setting. Potential participants were blind carbon copied on the email. This ensured that participants were unable to see the names of other potential participants to whom the researcher was extending the invitation. The email served as an invitation to participate in the study, and within the email the participants received an attachment that consisted of an informed consent letter. The invitation email was sent from the researcher's email account that was set up and put into place by the university the researcher was completing the research within. Whenever potential participants responded back to the researcher, the emails were received by the researcher within the inbox of the same email account used for the outgoing emails that were sent to potential participants. The informed consent letter and its signed and dated response from the special education teacher(s) returning the letter to the researcher served as an indicator as to whether or not the participant would participate. Based upon the participant responses collected by the researcher, data collection began upon receiving informed consent. The researcher did not need to continue searching for participants who met the specifications since enough participants responded. Whenever the researcher did not receive a response back from a potential participant, the researcher followed up with an additional email within seven to 12 days to ensure the potential

participant did not inadvertently forget to respond.

Prior to participants signing the informed consent, they were provided with information regarding the intent of the researcher to conduct an audio recorded one-on-one interview, as well as an observation of the setting in which they work with the paraeducator. The informed consent form provided to the participant also allowed the participant to indicate whether or not they would be willing to serve as a participant within a focus group. This provided the participant with the direct intentions of the researcher, the details regarding the type of data to be collected, as well as the methods of data collection. The researcher began contacting each participant individually to set up convenient times and dates to conduct interviews. Upon the completion of the interviews, the researcher began to schedule the observations individually with each participant. Scheduling and following through with a focus group session was the last process for data collection for those participants who indicated that they would be willing to participate within one on the informed consent form provided to them.

The Researcher's Role

By taking a research approach that was based upon the uncovering the essences of experiences, it was important that I, as the human instrument of data collection, presented my findings as a full conscious experience. This full conscious experience led to an essence being derived (Moustakas, 1994). Due to having spent an equal amount of time within my career in both the general and special education roles, collecting the experiences of special education teachers within the inclusion, or general education settings I hoped to make a positive impact toward the general education teachers' understanding regarding why students with special needs are placed within their classrooms and how their specialized instruction should be delivered. Because the needs of students in special education can often be obscure and misunderstood,

those special education teachers and paraeducators working with the students must go to great lengths to ensure the role of meeting the students' needs. They must rely upon one another to ensure that daily tasks are accomplished. Sometimes, this includes unreasonable expectations, such as being pulled out of the assigned location they are working within to help create a temporary IEP for a student who is enrolling in the school office and is new to the school system. This may also include being pulled from an assigned location to assist with a student who is displaying behaviors that are physically harmful to him/herself or others. The unwritten expectations for special education teachers and paraeducators to be in two locations at one time is taxing. In order to discover the complexity and unique situations the working partnership experiences, a specialized approach was implemented in order to provide information that was a comprehensive description. By using the textural and structural descriptions I obtained from the data, a conclusion was drawn that provided a visible design. This design revealed a pattern of thinking that may be applied to future situated learning scenarios. The design uncovered how special education teachers each have a perspective individual to themselves, creating a set of structural descriptions. A pattern became visible as I examined the data in its natural setting. Moustakas (1994) shared that the natural setting goes hand in hand with the required subjectivity the researcher must have; the researcher obtaining knowledge exactly as it appears to them in their consciousness. This was the major function of the transcendental phenomenological approach taken through my research. Because the study was transcendental, I took an approach where background knowledge and prejudgments were set aside; this was especially true due to my past experience as a trainer of special education paraeducators and the seven years I have spent as a special education teacher. It was essential that I utilized the process of Epoche and journaling what I knew about paraeducator supervision as well as any prior experiences in

special education relating to the topic. This allowed me to have an open mind and accept information provided from the participants as if I had no past experiences with the research topic. Moustakas (1994) furthered the reinforcement of a transcendental study by requiring a natural environment, such as the environment the participant observations are occurring within, in order to support the phenomena of things that have occurred just as they are seen with no alterations or added information.

Information collected may affect future decisions that support the general and special education teachers and students. I was currently teaching special education and serving as a department chair within the school system of study. My position as a special education department chair consisted of providing support to special education teachers who were unsure of how to complete paperwork. Another large responsibility included helping special education teachers meet the needs of students academically and behaviorally through informal conversation and trainings. In this role, I also attended meetings held at the school-wide and county levels. At the conclusion of those meetings, I was required to present or reiterate information and processes shared with me at those meetings, that all special education teachers must implement. It was not my duty to follow-up with special education teachers to make sure they were implementing new processes correctly or effectively; that duty was reserved for the special education facilitator in the school building, that works as my superior. My role was not to evaluate special education teacher performance in the classroom, but rather serve as a resource for individuals who came to me personally requesting assistance with their daily tasks. I was similar to the special education teachers in my department, due to us both having the same teaching responsibilities and case management responsibilities on a day to day basis. Because of that, I was accepted by them as an equal rather than a superior, which supported individuals not

feeling pressed to participate within the study. I had potential biases due to my past experiences as a special education teacher for the past seven years. I also had potential biases due to my role as a trainer of novice paraeducators for the past two and a half years in the elementary school setting. My past training experiences with novice paraeducators and paraeducators who have worked in special education for more than two years also introduced potential bias into the study. I found that the experienced paraeducators whom I trained did not have the desire to learn the new academic skills and supports that needed to be imparted to the students. One preconception that I had is that most novice paraeducators come in with not only a lack of experience in the field, but a lack of background knowledge in the skill set required to think on the spot in unpredictable situations. I also had a preconception that older paraeducators who are considered novice who are working in the field as a second career sometimes do not like to take directions or listen to special education teachers who are younger they are. As a result, I was biased, in that I assumed that a novice, younger paraeducator may be more receptive to training help and advice than an older paraeducator would be. These potential biases and preconceptions were bracketed prior to the study.

The motivation for this study was based on the idea that special education students who have challenging behavioral and academic needs, are sometimes assigned to the most inexperienced personnel for the supports they need. These inexperienced paraeducators must be trained by experienced special education teachers. Unfortunately, some special education teachers to whom they are assigned may be just as inexperienced themselves, or may be overloaded with other teaching related responsibilities, which negatively impacts the quality of training provided to the paraeducators.

Data Collection

With a transcendental phenomenological approach, three sources of data were collected: interviews, observations, and focus group data. It was requested that the participants had 2+ years' experience as a special education teacher and were currently serving as a trainer of paraeducators in the inclusive setting. Interviews were conducted as the first method of data collection, in order for the researcher to build a rapport with the participant. Interviews were completed before the researcher stepped into the participant's workspace, to silently observe the participant and the novice paraeducator they train. Following the interviews, observations and focus groups took place. The intentionality behind the observation data collection will provide the researcher with many facets that in the end will come together to create an essence (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell and Poth (2018) stressed that for observations implemented as a type of data collection, the specific type of observation should be established by the researcher in addition to developing an observation protocol. Additionally, the observation data provided a physical context to the researcher, so that the researcher could accurately and thoroughly describe the setting and capture the true nature of the study (Moustakas, 1994). The background knowledge provided to the researcher during the observations allowed her to immerse herself in the study's setting to deliver the accurate and non-biased experience of the participant. Focus groups served as a way of collecting information that the researcher may later wish she had collected during a participant's interview. Since the focus groups served as the final source of data collection, focus group participants met together face-to-face in a neutral location to interact with one another in conversation over the questions the researcher provides. Triangulation was used to provide different sources of data that came together to create an essence, or common idea between the differing participant perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Interviews

A semi-structured interview was conducted as an initial step with each of the participants. As the first method of data collection, it helped bridge any relationship gaps that might have occurred between the researcher and participant, that the silent nature of an observation might not have initially addressed. The interview ensured that the next two forms of data collection (observation and focus groups) would allow the researcher to acquire the information that was both needed and required for credibility and triangulation. Olson (2016) stressed that interviews are the most important method of phenomenological data collection due to the extraordinary way in which individuals may share their thoughts as well as their emotions. Interviews provide an intimate way for individuals to interact and acquire knowledge about one another. The interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes. The interview, according to Van Manen (1990) is what captures a participants' lived experience through their descriptions, remembered experiences, as well bits and pieces of information that may not create an entire experience, which they remember while sharing. This leads to information being provided in real-life terms that provide details and descriptions (Adams & Van Manen, 2008).

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and provide your connection to special education. (CQ)
2. What is a typical day like when it comes to the specific interactions (or lack thereof) between yourself and the paraeducators in your department you are training? (SQ1)
3. Please share examples of times where you have depended upon the paraeducators you train. (SQ2)
4. Please share examples of times where you have worked independently from the paraeducators you train. (SQ2)

5. Please describe any behaviors you display that contributes to the relationship between you and the paraeducator. (SQ3)
6. Please describe the level of interaction you have with the paraeducators you train, and whether or not that plays a role within the skill level of the paraeducator. (SQ1)
7. In your opinion, what interactions between the paraeducator and special education teacher trainer help paraeducators become successful when it comes to supporting students with special needs in the inclusive setting? (SQ1)
8. Tell me about your satisfaction or dissatisfaction regarding the training of paraeducators within your department. (CQ)
9. Tell me about the struggles you may have experienced as a trainer of paraeducators within your department. (SQ3)
10. Please explain how your interactions help you relate or not relate to the paraeducators you train within your department? (SQ1)
11. Is there anything else you would like to share that is related to training paraeducators? (CQ & SQ1)

Question one was designed as an introduction to the interview. This question helped the researcher collect general information about the participant and help her obtain background knowledge about the participant. According to Rosenthal (2016), collecting information regarding one's background or demographics allows the researcher to characterize the participant and understand the type of representation the participant brings to the study. Question two served as a resource to help the researcher understand the many daily factors that may potentially serve as distress or eustress to the participant throughout the day, while they attempt to train paraeducators. Question two was designed for the researcher to gather an understanding of what

it is like for the participant to train a novice paraeducator daily and discover whether factors aside from work play into their working relationship or vice-versa. Conley and You (2017) found linkages to factors that special education teachers face within the workplace that lead to their commitment to their roles and their intentions to leave.

Question three gave the researcher an idea of what the participant experiences on a daily basis, in regard to why they depend upon paraeducators. Bettini et al. (2017) found that special education teachers with three or less years of experience felt their workloads were unmanageable. Factors contributing to the unmanageable workload were inadequate resources, paperwork/or administrative duties, and effort applied to their role. This question uncovered information about potential distractions or a potential unmanageable workload that leaves the special education teacher dependent upon the paraeducator for help with their daily tasks.

Question four was designed to gather detail regarding situations where the special education teacher has worked independently from the paraeducator. It was also designed to uncover whether or not the special education teacher ends up working independent of the paraeducator due to potential time constraints. Biggs et al. (2016) explained that special education teacher participants within their study that worked alongside paraeducators shared that it was a challenge to find shared time where they could communicate and collaborate with the paraeducator. Ledford et al. (2017) shared that special education teachers reported they were not prepared to engage with paraeducators and display behaviors conducive to training and supervising paraeducators. This question sought to uncover if special education teachers were working independently from paraeducators, and if so, why the independent behavior is occurring.

Question five provided information to the researcher as to whether collaboration occurs in order to meet minimum standards, or whether it occurs in a purposeful and prioritized way to create paraeducators who provide sufficient, rather than adequate or lacking support to students. Biggs et al. (2019) stressed that studies support the need for preparation to be provided to paraeducators, but little efforts have focused upon the skills teachers need to provide effective training or how those skills should be taught to paraeducators. Findings from this question allowed the researcher to uncover the specific job factors the special education teacher must acquire and pass along to the trainee. This question supported the researcher and their training paraeducators with fidelity. It also uncovered potential new or trending factors that had not yet been brought forth in the literature.

The sixth and seventh question sought to find or examples of specific training methods that had been provided to paraeducators, which had been applied by paraeducators with students and had helped students access the curriculum. Uncovering how specific skills are taught or re-taught to the paraeducator that are then passed along to the students will provide knowledge about the actual experiences of paraeducator trainers (Douglas et al. 2018).

The eighth question sought to uncover whether or not the special education teacher gains a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction or is left dissatisfied or defeated by the training efforts they have implemented with the novice paraeducator. Conley and You (2017) expressed that an indirect effect of a teacher's decision to leave or stay in the profession was related to job design and autonomy. Attempting to determine the participant's job satisfaction or dissatisfaction may lead to a further determination of whether paraeducator supervision plays a role in a special education teacher's satisfaction to stay, or dissatisfaction to potentially leave special education or the field of teaching altogether.

Questions nine and ten, related to the ups and downs of training paraeducators. This question attempted to uncover specifically what becomes frustrating to the special education teacher, or whether any specific instances make a special education teacher feel successful within their training endeavors. Both questions sought to discover if there were any specific factors that have helped the special educator as a trainer push through challenging situations, remain stagnant, or accomplish nothing in a situation that is outside the realm of an everyday situation or event. Biggs et al. (2016) shared that the voices of special education teachers were sparse in the literature and special education teachers have not had the opportunity to share any influences or struggles regarding the complexity of their roles. Educators making adjustments to their instruction is a fundamental and effective practice that allows for all students in the classroom to learn effectively (Davies, Elliott, & Cumming, 2017).

The final question was created to give the participant a chance to share information regarding their training experience that they did not have the opportunity to share. This was the participant's time to contribute information that did not correspond with, or compare with prompts one through 11 on the interview protocol.

Observations

Observations of participants were conducted as the second step of data collection, after the researcher had an opportunity to interview the participant and get to know them through a conversation-style manner. The researcher remained engaged with the participant while conducting the observation, so that the researcher could continue and strengthen rapport with the individual participant they were observing (Angrosino, 2007). Observations were conducted so that the researcher could observe interactions between the special education teacher trainer and paraeducator trainee. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a nonparticipant or observer as a

participant role may be taken as a researcher, where the researcher keeps a distance, does not participate physically within the research setting, but rather watches carefully in the distance while staying engaged, so that they are able to write a set of field notes. These field notes are recorded without them playing a direct role in the activities or the people within the observation setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With the researcher being able to observe the setting of the participant, she was able to take advantage of the opportunity to view exactly where the experience portrayed through words occurred. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research should focus upon the appearance of things within their original setting. The researcher can follow through with the steps of phenomenological research data analysis more thoroughly if she has examined the whole picture of the participants, using the context of setting to go along with the written and verbal experiences provided through later data collection methods. This allows the researcher to find meaning not only within a participant's words, but within the natural setting of their workplace in order to gain a well-rounded understanding and interpretation, which ultimately leads to an essence (Moustakas, 1994).

Observations took place at each of the two participating schools in the study upon obtaining administrative permission and signed permission from each participant. Each participant was observed for approximately 45 minutes, so that the researcher had a context for the data collection methods taking place before and after the observation (i.e., the one on one interviews and focus groups). The participant selected a period of time for the researcher to observe them within. The period of time selected was required to have a novice paraeducator present so that the researcher could observe the special education teacher and novice paraeducator alongside one another. The researcher took on the nonparticipant role during the observations. A protocol, which was created by the researcher and provided in appendix F, was

used by the researcher before and during the observation at each school site. Participants were introduced to the researcher upon arrival. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), this allowed the researcher to appear friendly and non-threatening, setting the tone for a successful observation for all involved in the observation setting. On one side of the observation protocol the researcher bracketed, and listed any inferences, personal experiences, or things they had previously learned about the setting that they were about to observe. On the opposite side of the protocol the researcher recorded the date, time of observation, participant's name, and the place of the observation. The researcher recorded what happened while she was observing, including a description of the setting, activities observed inferences made, interpretations made initially, and reactions to what was observed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Focus Groups

Focus groups have become a widespread and highly valued source of data for qualitative studies (Patton, 2015). The focus groups included five members since there were 10 participants in the study. They were selected by the researcher. Focus groups were done in order to support an accurate and rooted process of horizontalization. Incorporating the process of horizontalization was essential, as this was how meanings were traced back to the two prior methods of data collection (i.e., interviews and observations); all of which worked together to create a cohesive experience for each participant. Focus groups were conducted in-person at a location centralized to the participants and their work/or home locations. During the focus group sessions participants were engaged in a group discussion once given a question by the researcher. Upon answering questions initially posed to them, they responded to other participants' answers in an informal, conversational style. This data collection method provided an opportunity to share information that the participant may have thought of after the one-on-one interview. Valuable

information was created based on thoughts and ideas from participants' responses to one another. Questions answered by the participant that lead to additional inquiry by the researcher were addressed within the focus groups. The focus group questions provided participants are as follows:

1. Describe the amount and type of interaction you have with the novice paraeducators you train over the course of a school day. (SQ1)
2. What specific supports has your school/or school administration put in place for you, to support your role as a special education teacher who trains paraeducators in the inclusive setting? (CQ)
3. Describe any situations you have encountered that affect your level of dependence upon the paraeducator, or support your level of independence from the paraeducators in your department. (SQ2, SQ3)
4. What external factors contribute to the level of interaction or lack of interaction that occurs between yourself and the paraeducators in your department whom you train? (SQ1).

The first question allowed the focus group participants to provide information regarding the frequency, as well as a description of the interaction between the special education teacher and paraeducator. Brock and Carter (2015) shared that stand-alone training workshops leave special education teacher trainers and paraeducator trainees assuming that information shared within a single, short block of time will be implemented correctly, without any follow-up training or side-by-side support. Gee and Gonsier-Gerdin (2017), explained that when paraeducators were worked with on a daily basis, special education teachers were aware of areas considered to be strengths and needs improvement, or struggles.

Question two addressed the training requirements that special education teachers have, in addition to their teaching responsibilities, and sought to find out if any assistance or relief is provided to them. As a result of students with disabilities being educated in the least restrictive environment or inclusive setting, special education teachers have been given the additional responsibility of directing the work of paraeducators in the general education setting (Douglas et al., 201). This question was written to uncover whether the participants had or had not been professionally trained for the responsibility being federally placed upon them. McLeskey et al. (2014), shared one example of a systematic use of resources in a highly inclusive, effective elementary school. In this particular case study, special education teachers were provided with built-in planning time during the school day, to support collaboration with general education teachers in co-teaching scenarios between the special education teacher and general education teacher. Conley and You (2017) stressed that there are many factors within the workplace that relate to special education teacher attrition, such as support from administration, job design, and human conditions.

Question three related to specific situations and scenarios within the workplace that the participant encountered that may have required them to depend upon or remain independent from the paraeducator. McCleskey et al. (2014) shared from a case study they conducted that paraeducator staff had been trained and were depended upon to provide support to students in basic skill areas such as reading, math, and writing. This allowed special education teachers to oversee and support other students who were in need of explicit, small-group instruction. In another study, paraeducators were depended upon to provide instructional services to students in multiple classrooms throughout the course of the day, more specifically nearly every student in the school building with an IEP. The paraeducators in this study were depended upon to such a

great extent, that the paraeducators reported being spread thin in a situation that was not working (Nguyen, 2015).

Question four related to any external factors that were out of the participant's control that related to the apprenticeship relationship. Biggs et al. (2016) found that themes of teacher and paraeducator influence, administrator influence, and underlying influences all affected special education teacher and paraeducator relationships. This final question sought to find out whether there were other undiscovered external factors contributing to the relationship between the special education teacher and paraeducator.

Data Analysis

The transcendental phenomenological study carried out by the researcher was based upon the fundamentals of Moustakas' phenomenological reduction (1994). The first step taken by the researcher was to implement the process of Epoche, or bracketing, which means to see things exactly as they appear to the researcher. This step ensured that prejudgments or preconceptions of the researcher were not incorporated; prior experiences were kept out of the picture (Moustakas, 1994). To do this effectively, prejudgments held by the researcher were written out and completely listed before the data are analyzed. Moustakas (1994) explained that this list created by the researcher should be reviewed by the researcher until they have released all preconceived notions or ideas and are ready to view the data without his or her own habits and feelings becoming a part of the view. Husserl (1931) explained that for transcendental phenomenology to occur, the researcher should look at the data collected at alternate angles to perceive the information through a reflective process. This process carried out is definitive of transcendental phenomenology and should carry out the reflective process in order to create fresh perceptions, abandoning the researcher's background knowledge and preconceived notions.

Once the researcher has taken one angle of focus on a piece of information, he or she should analyze it from another angle and continue that process until the angles, or parts have been combined into a whole. After looking at all information from all possible vantage points, it is only then that an essence may be derived from the multiple participant experiences collected. The multiple vantage points guided the researcher to look at all phases of information provided by the participant. Being able to include all angles and phases of information provided by the participant provides a necessary textural description. From this, information was brought forth and viewed at all angles. With the researcher thoroughly describing what has appeared, a phenomenon was reached. This meant that a description of how the phenomenon is experienced from the multiple viewpoints of the participant was created (Moustakas, 1994).

Data transcription was completed by the researcher. Upon the completion of data transcription taken from the audio-recorded one-on-one interviews, the researcher applied manual precoding. Precoding helped the researcher identify any repetitive words or phrases that stand out (Saldana, 2015). To support counting the frequency of reoccurring codes, the researcher used frequency tables to keep tallies of repetitive statements during the data analysis phase. Counting the frequency of codes was a method of data organization that the researcher utilized, in order to organize large potential amounts of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Manual first cycle coding occurred next, which entailed the researcher pulling out significant statements from the sentences and removing thoughtless or insignificant words, such as um, or well. Saldana (2015) explained that significant statements should be placed on a separate list. This process of manual first cycle coding should be completed for each research participant. The coding step included the researcher implementing Saldana's second style coding method, or pattern coding. This was where the researcher compared the significant statements pulled for

each participant. While these statements may not have matched word for word, they had the same elemental meaning. Moustakas (1994) explained that the removal of repeating irrelevant statements that overlap creates room for significant statements that provide textural meaning, or the horizons to be brought forth. From there, the researcher took the significant statements, or horizons that stood out and had the same underlying meaning, and created themes. From there, the researcher created sub-themes. This was accomplished by the researcher taking significant statements and readjusting them to create smaller categories within the statements, or sub-themes (Saldana, 2015). Moustakas (1994) defined the process of horizontalization as collecting each phenomenon from the data with equal value, while the researcher explores to uncover its description, or essence. The researcher went through the transcriptions and highlighted significant statements or phrases that emphasized the participants' experiences of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) explained that horizontalization should treat all statements as having an equivalent value initially. Possible meanings are sought by the researcher through imaginative variation, which explains how certain conditions were able to highlight the experience to create what is seen by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). At this point in the data analysis, the goal was to reach a commonality amongst the textural and structural descriptions brought to the horizon. This allowed for an explanation of how conditions occur and end up supporting what actually occurred within the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Whenever the relationships between the textural and structural descriptions were brought forward, (known as intuitive integration), the descriptions then moved into the conclusion or the total picture of what was experienced.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established as a necessary step required by the researcher. In addition, trustworthiness helped the researcher gain the participant's confidence. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are all aspects of trustworthiness that must be attained by the researcher and is essential for the strength of this study. This study yielded options and could potentially be replicated in the future by those reading the study. One wishing to replicate the study could place their trust within it based upon the details of transferability. The researcher's commitment to trustworthiness was backed up through the process of transferability. By using different data collection methods that overlap, the researcher was able to apply information gathered for future situations. Another additional method of trustworthiness within the study was member checking. After data analysis steps were implemented, making sure that the research participant was able to confirm that the information matched what he or she intended to share, was step of trust. This not only supports the credibility of the study but gives the respect to the research participant that he/she is due (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Credibility

The first step toward credibility included the process of triangulation, which occurred through multiple data sources including face-to-face interviews, observations, and focus groups. This step ensured that constructs existed and were validated through more than one data collection method (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation helps the researcher make sure that there is consistency across the different methods of data collection (Patton, 2015).

Dependability

To address dependability, the researcher ensured that the interview questions, observations, and focus group questions were fair and did not lead the participant to think in a misleading way. The researcher created a log before beginning to collect research, which was updated along the way as the researcher completes data collection. Creswell and Poth (2018) described the log as being similar to a journal that outlines the researcher's thoughts or thought processes as he or she collects and codes research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to this process as an audit trail, which supports dependability and credibility. Triangulation occurred as a support for dependability, through the three data sources previously mentioned. Additional triangulation supports occurred within the study. Member checking was utilized in order to validate and accurately describe the research participants' experiences. Member checking ensured the researcher did not inadvertently change the perspectives shared by the participants. According to Patton (2015), a member check helps ensure that bias is minimized. It also makes sure that the information the participant provided was reported by the researcher with accuracy. Since the researcher implemented Imaginative Variation to seek potential meanings or explain how participant experiences occurred, a member check was conducted to ensure the researcher did not alter the meaning through the Imaginative Variation process (Moustakas, 1994). This gave the participant the ability to verify that what the researcher has conveyed within the findings to truly be accurate and credible (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Confirmability

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the various sources used to collect the data not only support the evidence found in the study but provide the validity the study needs. By creating a detailed description for each participant based upon their transcribed interview data, observation, and transcribed focus group data, a combination of the participant's lived

experience was created. This process continued for each participant. This was done so that emerged themes could be derived, using horizontalization. Repetitive themes or themes that overlapped were removed, leaving only the textural descriptions that contribute to the common phenomenon amongst the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The observation template included in Appendix F supported the neutrality of the researcher.

Transferability

The researcher made sure the context of this study could be transferred to a new situation or case and be replicated. This provides the readers of the study with information that allows them to transfer the information to a new situation. It also proves that what occurred within the study was true and not embellished or fabricated by the researcher (Patton, 2015). This was carried out through the detailed, rich descriptions the researcher collected from the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher ensured that organization and generalizability for potential contributions and studies from other researchers was reached. This was done through the details and descriptions provided, in addition to using the exact wording of questions that were used within the study's data collection methods.

Ethical Considerations

Steps were taken to ensure participant confidentiality; this included the researcher seeking approval from the IRB to ensure the study was ethical. It also ensured the study followed necessary guidelines to conduct research that are both safe and ethical (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were assured that their participation is voluntary; they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without negative ramifications by simply letting the researcher know that they no longer wish to participate. Participants were treated as a valued participant due to a rapport being established between the participant and the researcher. The

role of the participant was treated as one whose role is to work alongside of the researcher during data collection. Patton (2015) shared that engaging participants as those who are invested in the study with a common interest will support valuable research, rather than a collection of words from those who feel like a research subject. Interviews were conducted in a place where participants knew that others within the building could not accidentally enter the room or overhear what was being shared regarding the open-ended questions being asked of them. Creswell and Poth (2018) highlighted that participant wishes regarding room entry and access during data collection should be considered. Data was be stored in secure locations; hard copies of data such as recordings and transcriptions were be stored in a secure, locked cabinet. Electronic data from focus groups, or information that had been transcribed by the researcher was stored on a computer where a passcode is required and kept confidential by the researcher. Creswell and Poth (2018) shared that data should be stored in a secure location where the researcher is attentive and aware regarding when and how the data will be used. Data collected from participants will be stored in a secure location for a minimum of three years before being shredded personally by the researcher with a paper shredder.

Summary

The experiences of special education teachers who serve as trainers of novice paraeducators within the elementary inclusive setting was examined through a transcendental phenomenological approach. This research design yielded information to be provided just as it was seen. This allowed the researcher to collectively place the experiences together to create an essence amongst the special education teacher participants (Moustakas, 1994). The research questions were framed by the situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and provided a lens through which to view the experiences of the participants. The purposeful sampling

intentionally provides information regarding the problem and phenomenon of special education teachers' experiences guiding the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Procedures were outlined and handled in an ethical manner. The empirical gap, or basis of why there was a need for the study, along with the researcher's desires to carry out the study are expressed. Upon receiving approval for the study from both the District A School System and the IRB, the data collection methods of face-to-face interviews, observations, and focus group discussions were put into place systematically. In order to establish trustworthiness within the study, the researcher collected an informed consent from each participant. The researcher took a straightforward approach with each participant. This was done by sharing with the participants their rights if they chose to participate in the study. Additionally, safeguards were taken by the researcher to ensure confidentiality was strictly maintained for each participant.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of elementary special education teachers who train paraeducators. According to Moustakas (1994) a transcendental phenomenological study analyzes the phenomena, or visual appearance of something exactly as the researcher sees it, in the researcher's awareness. This study presents the experiences of individual participants who have had the responsibility of training novice paraeducators in the elementary school inclusive setting. Since participants in the study were responsible for teaching students nearly all times of the day (except for lunch and planning periods), the training of novice paraeducators did not typically occur during the school day. Collectively, all 10 participants involved in the study found times outside of the school day to provide paraeducator training. Training of novice paraeducators within the study occurred before school and after school, as a part of special education department meetings. Another time training occurred was during specific days devoted to countywide professional development, where students did not attend school. These were specified at the county level. Training most typically occurred during informal times of day, such as in passing in the hallway (short conversations and questions), as well as during the trainer and trainee's lunch time if their assigned lunch times overlapped. Three participants shared that training may occasionally occur during the school day. In order for this to occur, a rearrangement of faculty/or staff would be made and approved by an administrator. A certified or classified staff member in the school building would temporarily take over the trainer's schedule, so that the trainer could go to the trainee's exact location where they were struggling to meet a student's needs, and provide on-the-job training to the trainee. This type of training did not typically occur due to the amount of

planning and inconvenience it caused to others in the school building. Typically, the person asked to cover a trainer's class or segment of their schedule was being pulled from a required spot in their own schedule, such as a planning time, or leaving the classroom they were removed from with only one teacher instead of the two assigned to it for a reason. One participant explained that whenever more critical or dire training scenarios were occurring, that was when the trainer and trainee would be in the same place at the same time working on a skill to support a student with needs.

From the information presented within the participant interviews, observations, and focus groups, Horizons (relevant and textural meanings) are brought forth within this chapter. The Horizons are then clustered as themes (or results) to describe the phenomenon within this chapter (Moustakas, 1994). Chapter Four is divided into five sections, as follows: Participants, Results, Theme Development, Research Question Responses, and Summary.

Participants

The participants in this study were selected based on purposeful criterion sampling. According to Creswell (2013) purposeful sampling is utilized in qualitative research whenever the researcher needs to recruit participants that understand both the problem and central phenomenon within a study. The participants in this study were selected from a school system in the metro-Atlanta area, all of whom had two or more years' experience teaching in the inclusive setting. Additionally, participants had to be currently training a novice paraeducator with three years or less experience. There were 10 participants total, which were all females. The ages of the participants ranged from 32 to 62 years old. The participants had anywhere from five to 23 years teaching experience in the inclusive, special education setting. Participant names were

kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms created by the researcher. In addition, pseudonyms were used to keep the name of the school system and schools confidential. Establishing credibility was accomplished by the researcher sending the participants a copy of their transcribed interview. Any themes developed by the researcher were derived from the interviews, observations, and focus groups.

Barbara

Barbara is a 48-year old female who decided to become a teacher later in her career. She has currently taught for 11 years. The first three were spent in the general education capacity. The past eight of those years have been spent working in the special education inclusive setting. While working as an inclusive special education teacher, she has taught alongside general education teachers, and has taught students in the small-group, resource setting during that time. Her 11 years working in inclusive special education have all been at the same elementary school. There, she originally served as a paraeducator in both the general and special education settings before becoming a certified teacher. She feels that one of the biggest interactions between the paraeducator and special education teacher that helps a paraeducator become successful is “treating them like they are one of the teachers.” Since she originally served as a paraeducator before becoming a certified teacher, she feels her paraeducator experience has really helped her know how to treat paraeducators. She stated, “Me being a para once before has really helped in situations; to know how I liked to be treated, so that is how I treat them. I do not ever want anyone to treat me any differently than how they would treat a para, or vice-versa.”

Ava

Ava is a 48-year old female who has been teaching for 23 years in special education. The majority of her career has been spent working in the special education inclusive setting. For all 23 years she has worked alongside and trained paraeducators in the inclusive setting. Her interactions have helped her relate to the paraeducators in her department, even those she does not directly train, who are trained by other inclusive special education teachers in the department. She shared, “It’s hard to build those relationships at first just because you don’t see each other as much. Over time we do build relationships because we are a tight team. You’ve got to find time to get with them and find out how things are going.”

Ensley

Ensley, a 35-year old female, has been teaching in the special education inclusive setting for 13 years. For all 13 years Ensley has worked with and trained paraeducators who serve her students in the inclusive setting. In her opinion, interactions between the paraeducator and special education teacher-trainer that help the novice paraeducators become successful, is communication “The communication piece, whether it be formal or informal communication is what helps them [the para] become successful and know what students need.” She did state that paraeducators not understanding the amount of documentation needed to track a student’s needs, was the biggest struggle she has experienced as a paraeducator. She stated, “It’s imperative that they track behavior so that we can get a picture of how that student is doing in the general education setting, because if I am not in there with the child, I don’t see it.”

Sarah

Sarah is a 62-year old female who made education her second career choice after leaving the corporate field. This is currently her 10th year teaching and training paraeducators in the

inclusive special education setting. She feels that the level of interaction she has with the novice paraeducators she trains plays a role. Bringing the training down to the paraeducator's level so that they can understand how to help the students is key. She stated that many paraeducators think that they are helping if they do the work for the student they are supporting. She shows the paraeducators she trains that they must scaffold, or break down the steps to an assignment so that children can do it themselves, rather than waiting for the paraeducator to do the assignment for them. "Basically, they felt that by help, they should do the child's the work. Instead, it's showing the children examples of what to do."

Esme

Esme is a 42-year old female who has been working in special education for the past 10 years. She has been at her present school for the past three years and has witnessed the value of retaining and supporting paraeducators who work in the inclusive settings. She stated that one way to retain and support paraeducators in her department is to "be very intentional and make sure they [paraeducators] feel supported. I'm a reflective listener with them." Esme makes sure that, "they [paraeducators] have a place. It's not all about just teachers; they are support staff which is classified, but they're just as important to the success of our students." Esme shared that everyone she works with is a valuable part of the special education team she is a part of within her school building.

Heidi

Heidi, a 37-year old participant, has taught special education for 15 years. Heidi has served as a special education teacher within several roles or settings, but is currently working in the inclusive setting, where the majority of her teaching experience has taken place. She feels that by always striving to set a good example and leading by example, that she builds a strong

relationship with the novice paraeducators she trains. She stated that all the paraeducators she currently trains are “hard workers” and “most of them are not afraid to ask questions.” When asked how her interactions help her relate to the paraeducators she trains, she responded by sharing that her personality is “very relaxed” and that her style of teaching, which includes modeling, also helps her relate to the paraeducators whom she trains.

Faith

Faith is a 47-year old female who is completing her 15th year in education. Ten of those years were spent as a special education paraeducator within the self-contained special education setting. This is currently Faith’s fifth year as a special education teacher working in inclusive education, who also trains experienced and novice paraeducators. Additionally, she serves as the special education department Chair in her building. Faith stated that she has maintained good relationships with the paraeducators in her department whom she has trained, by “giving them the option to have their own desk in my room that they can use before and after school, or at lunch.” She feels that by treating them professionally and honestly, and having informal conversations with them at the start, middle, and end of the day, the paraeducators she trains are delivering to students what is needed.

Tia

Tia is a 45-year old female who has been teaching in the special education inclusive setting for the past three years. Tia began her teaching career in the general education setting and decided to begin teaching special education because she wanted a challenge. She works with one novice paraeducator currently. She shared that encouragement is a behavior she tries to display in order to support the relationship she has with the paraeducators she trains. She shared, “I always try to encourage them. I let them know the good things they are doing, and if they are

disheartened and feel like what they are doing isn't helping a student, I assure them that we are all in this together; we are all learning as we go." Tia admitted that student needs change very quickly, and that it takes time to develop a bank of strategies to pull from, to help students in the moment, in the classroom.

Julia

Julia, a 40-year old female, began teaching special education in the inclusive setting 18 years ago. She has trained many paraeducators in her role throughout the years and currently trains two different paraeducators who serve students on her caseload, as well as other students participating in inclusive education within the building. One is considered a novice paraeducator, while the other paraeducator is an experienced paraeducator. Julia felt indifferent regarding the satisfaction or dissatisfaction regarding the training of paraeducators in her department. She also shared that she is "patient with them and readily available if they need clarification on an assignment that they are helping a student work on." She thinks of what she would do to specialize the instruction for the student, and passes that information along to the paraeducators she prepares in order to serve students at times when she is not working with them personally as their teacher.

Madison

Madison is a 26-year old female in her fifth year as a special education inclusion teacher. She has worked with three different novice, inclusive paraeducators within the past five years. Currently she trains one novice paraeducator. Madison explained that her interaction when training novice paraeducators, is having to "repeat the same thing to them over and over, but in a different way, because they have so many students they may forget or they didn't understand what I asked them to do the first time." Because the novice paraeducator she trains works very

hard and is working with students who have special needs, she feels that, “We need to appreciate them [novice paraeducators] and keep working with them.”

Results

The results of the study are based on the open-ended questions to participants, to not only learn the lived experiences of the participants, but to provide a non-biased opportunity to collect information. Open-ended questions were created by the researcher and were guided by the central research question and three sub-questions. The central research question guiding this study was: How do special education teachers describe their experience training novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting? The first sub-question guiding this study was: How do participants describe the interaction that occurs with their paraeducators? The second sub-question guiding this study was: How do participants describe the interdependence that occurs between them and the paraeducators? The third sub-question guiding this study was: How do participants describe the behaviors occurring between themselves and the paraeducators?

The information shared by participants based on the open-ended questions asked during the interviews and focus groups, was specific to each participant and their experience as a trainer of novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting. Once open-ended interviews were conducted, the researcher completed observations to collect and record detailed information. Through this process the researcher was able to see scenarios and collect information from the same trainers that provided verbal depictions during the interviews. To analyze the data, Moustaka's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach was used. Within this approach, Epoche, horizontalization, and synthesis were used to complete the investigation of the human experience of special education teachers serving as trainers of paraeducators.

Theme Development

Based on the findings, three major themes surfaced: trainer support to trainee, positive trainee actions, and factors out of the trainer's control. Over 60 codes were determined based on the observations, interviews, and focus groups (see Appendix I). During the manual precoding phase, repetitive and overlapping words and phrases were removed (Saldana, 2015). Frequency tables were used, in order for the researcher to keep an accurate tally of repetitive statements. The use of frequency tables also supported the organization of information. From there, manual first cycle coding was used to help the researcher pull significant statements, where words considered to be insignificant or irrelevant, were removed. The pulled significant statements were placed onto a separate list. These 60 codes were narrowed to 40 codes. This was accomplished by second style coding methods (Saldana, 2015). The researcher utilized the process of analyzing significant statements pulled during manual first cycle coding and compared the statements closely. Any significant statements that did not match word for word but still had the same meaning at the core, were combined. Overlapping or irrelevant statements were removed, which allowed the significant statements, or horizons to be seen (Moustakas, 1994). These significant statements were adjusted and incorporated to create the smaller categories, or themes. This synthesis of data was based on the research and the phenomena of which all participants were a part. Because the participants were all trainers under the same conditions, experiencing the same phenomenon, the researcher implemented imaginative variation. This was implemented due to the participants mutually sharing textural and structural descriptions. Once those commonalities within textual descriptions were brought forth, the researcher was able to reach a conclusion and see the total picture.

The first theme of trainer support to the trainee, came from trainers sharing their experiences and involvement with training novice paraeducators in the classroom, as well as training sessions that occurred outside of instructional time in the classroom. The researcher observed supportive interactions by the trainer toward the trainee, which also supported the first theme. The second theme of positive trainee actions, stems from observations, as well as the interviews and focus groups conducted by the researcher. Those three data sources combined to provide information for the second theme. During the interviews and focus group sessions, the participant trainers were able to provide descriptions of what their trainees did. These descriptions, paired with the researcher observing the same occurrences during the observations, helped make up the second theme. The third theme of factors out of the trainer's control, was primarily centered around information shared during interviews. Through the observations, some of the factors beyond the trainer and trainee's control were observed. For example, during one observation the researcher noted that a trainee entered the classroom after the lesson had already begun, and thus was unable to understand the teacher's entire goals and expectations in order to best support the students. This tardiness on the trainee's part was due to the trainee's and trainer's schedule not fully aligning. The final question of asking the trainer if there was anything else they would like to share regarding the training of paraeducators, served as a jumping off point for collecting information that led to this third theme. The information that the trainers shared during their interview and focus group sessions made up for factors the researcher was unable to see during the classroom observations. This is where the third theme of factors out of the trainer's control, was affirmed. Table 4.1 below lists the three themes that surfaced from this study, with corresponding descriptions for each theme.

Table 4.1

Description of Themes

Theme	Description
Trainer Support to Trainee	Things the trainer goes out of their way to do, that fosters skills and well-being of the trainee.
Positive Trainee Actions	Things the trainee does based off training provided to them, by the trainer.
Factors Out of the Trainers Control	Lack of resources, duty assignments, personality of individuals that affect paraeducator training.

Theme one: trainer support to the trainee. In Table 4.1, the support or actions provided by the trainer before, during, and after training scenarios occurring during the school day, was determined to be a theme. This theme describes the participants' first-hand experiences in training novice paraeducators. Eight out of 10 participants shared specific examples of support they provide to their trainee. Eighteen codes were derived from participant interviews, observations, and focus groups in order to explain the various types of support or actions provided by the trainer to support the trainee. All describe what the trainer did to help the trainee. These were all actions considered to have a positive nature, or foster the development of a novice trainee. The participants provided insight to the things they do that not only met their job requirements as a trainer but also helped encourage paraeducator growth within their role as trainee. One commonality amongst participants was that they all shared that building and fostering a relationship that included respect toward their trainee was necessary for the functioning of their special education department. They also shared that it was also necessary to meet the needs of the students requiring paraeducator support in special education. During the interview, Sarah stressed the importance of building relationships with the trainees she works with:

You have to have a relationship...it's like a marriage. You have to be able to speak your mind without offending, you have to be able to get things out, and talk about problems and solve problems. But you have to do that together, and communication is key with that. If you can't talk to them, and if you don't have the time to talk with them, maybe plan with them, it's going to fall apart.

Sarah further emphasized that the trainees must buy in, or believe in the skills you are training them to have. Because some trainees are set in their ways, you must develop a relationship, and develop the relationship in any way possible, to ultimately develop the skills within them that will support the students' needs.

Madison, an inclusive special education teacher of 23 years, felt that trying to work well and get along with trainees was necessary. Treating them in a professional way by talking to the trainee in a way that she would wish to be spoken to was a practice she uses to provide support to trainees. Barbara, a special education teacher trainer who began her career as a novice paraeducator in special education, provided her personal experience of at one time, being the novice paraeducator, or trainee, herself. She shared the empathy she has for her trainees:

Me being a para once before has really helped that situation; to know how I like to be treated, so that's how I treat them. I don't ever want anyone to treat me any differently than how they would treat a para, or vice-versa. I think that the way I have treated them helps us be on the same page, and we're both equals with helping the students in every way.

Madison speaks to trainees as she would like to be spoken to herself, before, during, and after the trainee goes through his/her daily schedule of working with students. While Madison's actions focused on how she speaks to trainees, Heidi's actions leaned toward leading by example

for trainees. Ensley also touched on communication in the way that Madison did. Ensley, in her own words, shared that trainees deserved communication, and that they were both needed and should be treated with respect by trainers. She stated,

I know we need them. We need them and we definitely appreciate them that's for sure. I do think that it's important that we train them more efficiently and that they are held as important as anyone else in the school, because they really are a major backbone for us. I think it's important for us to share that with them.

Esme, who has a great deal of experience as a special education teacher, stated that being a trainer means that you are also a reflective listener, and that collecting feedback from the trainees she works with has created positive changes from the county (school system) level. Esme shared,

I want to make sure....and that's with everybody and not just the paras. I want to make sure, and I think it's very important that they feel like they have, a place. It's not all about just teachers. They (trainees) are support staff which is classified, but they're just as important to the success of our students. The feedback that I've gotten from my paras, the sit down meetings that we have, they really appreciate that and it makes them feel very valued. I feel like that has been very positive. In my feedback with them, over the past two years they expressed that the PD (professional development) was not designed, our county PD was not designed to support them. We expressed that at the district level and so this year they have trainings. They've had two so far this school year and their voice has been heard and that makes them feel more valued and heard.

Faith keeps a similar outlook toward trainee communication. Faith mentioned that she has always given trainees the choice to have their own desk in her classroom that she is always assigned to share with a trainee. Faith explained,

I just try to treat them professionally and honestly. If they do a great job, I let them know and if they need to work on something, I also let them know in a professional way. I remind them that ultimately whatever I ask them to do, it's because one of our students needs it, and their IEP requires it.

Julia's way of ensuring that she provides respect toward trainees was to show them extra patience. She shared that she was not only patient, but also readily available if they had questions on what they were supposed to be supporting students with academically. Julia shared that she understood that trainees were moving between many different types of learners and subjects all day; for that reason, showing the trainee extra patience in helping them specialize instruction was something she felt was necessary to respect the trainee.

Along the same lines, Tia felt that trainees should be provided with verbal reinforcement. Tia stated, "Verbally reinforcing what they did, or asking them to try something else actually helps train them." Tia described that the verbal reinforcement may occur in tandem whenever a trainee is coming into a classroom to support students and the trainer is preparing to leave that classroom at the same time. Tia shared, "I'll stay for just a few extra moments so that I can model for them what I am doing for a student, and that way they can take over for me and do the exact same thing."

Heidi's supportive actions toward the trainee were similar in style to Tia's support through modeling of skills. Both Tia and Heidi leaned toward the application of visual supports being provided to the trainee in combination with verbal support. Heidi shared in her interview

that she always tries to set a good example for trainees by leading through the example she sets. She provided an example of this by continuing to share that whenever a trainee has had a home base in her classroom she would model to the trainee what the discipline or specialized academic instruction looked like, so that the trainee could see an example of what they are supposed to provide to students. Heidi explained further the idea of providing trainees with skill reinforcement by sharing how she leads by example:

One of the trainees shared my classroom with me. That was her home base, so she was in the room sometimes...I would try to set an example, and kind of model what maybe discipline looked like, or what it looks like to give a student accommodations such as read aloud or extended time, or repetition of directions and that kind of thing.

All 10 of the participant trainers shared the overarching belief that trainees should be treated the way they personally would want to be treated. Showing the trainees respect and communicating with them whenever possible were both actions that all trainers shared as being essential to the success of the trainee, which filters into the department and affects others around them with whom they work. While trainers each did individualized, unique things to show respect to the trainee, those things made the trainee feel respected. Examples included allowing the trainee to have a desk in their shared classroom with the trainer, and having one on one meetings where the trainee's feedback was taken and applied for further decisions. All participants agreed that the trainees were essential members of their special education teams, and that trainees should be treated in ways that made them feel respected. Table 4.2 below explains what the trainer specifically does to support the novice paraeducator in list format.

Table 4.2

Codes Used in Trainer Support to the Trainee Theme

Trainer Support to the Trainee	
Professionalism	Works/trains through lunch
Modeling/support strategies	Gets along with trainee
Discussion with trainee	Provide respect and patience
Interacts throughout the day	Provides encouragement
Builds Relationships	Provides concern and attention
Emails communications	Keeps confidentiality
Listens reflectively	Shares their classroom
Provides follow-up/debriefing	Follows a schedule
Comfortable/at ease with trainee	Respects differences

Theme two: positive trainee actions. The second theme identified was positive actions the trainee displayed. All 10 participants shared positive trainee actions that their trainee displayed. These were either observed by the researcher during the classroom observations, or were discussed by participants during the interviews or focus groups. Positive actions are defined as anything the researcher observed from the trainee, or was discussed by the trainer during an interview or a focus group, that was conducive to the trainee fulfilling their job requirements. To help with the identification of this theme, there were 20 codes elicited from the participants' interviews, observations, and focus groups.

Teachers shared their experiences that yielded positive actions from the trainees. Ensley revealed that whenever she is able to work one-on-one with the novice paraeducator she trains, the trainee will take the specific skill shown to them and then apply that same skill or intervention in various classrooms he/she is assigned to throughout the day. Barbara stated in her interview that the novice paraeducator she trains will help in a similar fashion. According to Barbara,

Most every day for social studies, they will take a group of kids and help them with their study guides for the week so that they can make sure they're caught upon everything, and make sure they have all the information they need for the test they're going to take.

Heidi shared that since she cannot be in the same room with the students on her caseload all day long, that she depended on the novice paraeducator she trains to make sure the students were receiving what they needed. For example, this may include changing the arrangement or presentation of an assignment in order for a student to be successful. This fell into the positive action category of things trainees do.

Julia stated in the focus group that there have been times when she was teaching independently but may have had to leave the classroom expectedly or unexpectedly. The novice paraeducator she trains has sometimes been called upon to come in and cover her classroom while she was gone. Julia explained that the trainee provided support during these times to students who were working in groups or working on a project. Once Julia was able to instruct her trainee on what students were working on, and specifically how they could be helped, she noted that the trainee got started working with students right away in the correct manner, even before Julia could leave the room. During the focus group, Julia agreed with Tia, in that both trainers felt that their trainees could provide the same supports that they would have given, as long as students were working independently and the trainee was given a few moments preparation beforehand. Tia stated,

Sometimes if a paraeducator is coming into a classroom and it's time for me to leave, I'll stay for just an extra moment or two, so that I can model for them what I am doing for a student. That way, they can take over for me and do the exact same thing.

On the other hand, Tia has had novice paraeducators not want to follow her lead or take directives from her. Tia shared, “While they are a new paraeducator, they are not new to life, so it is difficult for them taking directions from someone who is about 30 years younger than them.” She continued to share that whenever a trainee or a paraeducator has a personality that makes them set in their ways, it can negatively affect their lack of growth as a paraeducator. According to Tia,

I just try to treat them with kindness and if I need them to do something, I ask them to do it however I would want someone to ask me. Sometimes that still doesn't work, and I think they don't understand the ramifications of not providing services that need to be, based upon a legal document [child's IEP to be followed].”

Esme reiterated another positive aspect displayed by one of her trainees with whom she works. Esme shared that at times trainees are depended upon to cover classrooms, just as Julia mentioned previously. This allows teachers in the building to be able to leave their classrooms to attend an IEP meetings for a parent whose schedule does not allow them to meet with their child's IEP team before or after school. While the trainee is pulled from their usual place in time to cover a teacher's classroom, the trainees do so cheerfully and willingly, and sometimes on short notice. Esme shared, “There's been times of course when teachers will come in and say, ‘I need somebody right now, can you help me out?’” The trainees are willing to drop everything and go help where they are needed in covering a classroom, which is a positive, team player attitude displayed by the trainee. Esme also shared that her trainees exhibited the positive ability to advocate for themselves in a respectful way, and give her feedback she has asked them for as their trainer. Esme explained,

Over the past year they [trainees] expressed that the professional development was not designed to support them. I expressed that on their behalf at the district level, and so this year, they have paraprofessional trainings that are more relevant. They've had two so far this school year and their voice has been heard, and that makes them feel more valued and heard.

According to Faith, a positive action her trainee has always displayed was the ability to be counted upon, or relied upon in tough situations. Her trainee has always answered their walkie talkie whenever she calls them and leaves wherever they are to come help her when student behavioral needs have arisen and two people are required to be present. She shared that during other times her trainee displays a positive, team player attitude with a willingness to help her. Faith explained, "I have a student with behavioral needs, who becomes aggressive, and tries to hurt himself and others. I always call my para to come help whenever that student starts to escalate into physical behaviors that require two people." Sarah shared that her trainee's willingness to have a conversation with her was a positive step in the right direction of learning the role of what a paraeducator does to support students with special needs in the inclusive setting. Sarah's trainee is not housed in her office with her, but is still willing to make time to talk with her about the students she is serving. Sarah explained that the students her trainee serves, she also serves, except in other settings and subjects. Sarah elaborated further by sharing, "Those students are my students. So, we'll talk about data collection, we'll talk about behaviors and what we can do for behaviors and things like that. Other than that, we also speak at the end of the day." Madison explained that because of the positive habit developed by her trainee of having a daily conversation, that she was able to see the trainee grow in a positive way. Madison shared,

It's usually a hallway conversation; it's not a formal conversation that we have. They'll stop me in the hallway or I'll see them in the hall and ask, how's so and so, and they'll give me a little rundown of how something's happening in that gen ed class that they're going into, or coming out of, and then they will come to me and ask me for specifics if they have questions.

Heidi reiterated the positive on-the-job attitude her trainee displayed, despite the low pay her trainee and other paraeducators received. Her trainee and other paraeducators in the department are willing to informally touch base off the clock to make sure strategies they are trying with students are working across the school day in all settings. She also explained that her trainee was a hard worker, as well as others whom she has trained/or worked with throughout the years.

Heidi elaborated further by saying,

I think we've been very, very blessed...in special ed to have the paraprofessionals that are being paid so low. It seems like none of them really have that attitude of 'I don't get paid enough for that, or I don't get paid for that, at all'. I feel like we've been so blessed with some knowledgeable, hardworking ladies. They've never said they weren't going the extra mile because I don't get paid enough or anything like that.

Ava likes how her trainee is able to work with her in meetings before and after school, as well as how they talk together about how certain general education teachers provide instruction (ones the trainer and trainee both work with, at different times of the day). This gives her trainee an idea of how to work with specific students in the classroom. Ava provided more insight into observational learning or indirect modeling strategies from which her trainee learns on a regular basis. Ava explained,

It's modeling some of the ways of how to work with students with disabilities. Anything with behavior; it is just seeing it. It's not just me modeling strategies, but it's gen ed teachers as well. When they [trainees] go in those classes, they see the way those teachers interact with those students, and they pick up on things like that.

Ava went on to explain that another trainee with whom she works with, does need more direct and intentional training. Observational learning or indirect training does not work at all for this trainee. Ava stressed, "Some of them have that natural ability and they can just come in and pick things up, but, some of them do need more training and there's not time for it." Table 4.3 lists positive trainee actions that were shared by participants in interviews and focus groups, as well as observed by the researcher.

Table 4.3

Codes Used in Developing Positive Trainee Actions Theme

Positive Trainee Actions	
Help/repeat directions	Uses professional judgement
Provides small group support	Provides successful differentiation
Asks questions before/during/after training	Growth into skillset
Provides support to students	Clarification of directions to students
Heart for children	Shares voice and provides input
Emails communications	Keeps confidentiality
Completes data collection	Has natural abilities
Sets training goals	Belief/buy-in
Independently implements strategies	Provides instruction to students

Theme three: factors out of the trainer's control. The third theme was factors out of the trainer's control. This theme was identified by 18 codes (see Table 4.3). They were developed from participant interviews, observations, and focus groups. All 10 participants shared at least one factor out of their control during an interview or focus group. For one out of

the 10 total participants, the researcher observed a factor that was out of the trainer-participant's control. The trainer and trainee's schedule was one such factor observed by the researcher and discussed by the participants. Whenever Tia was being observed by the researcher, the trainee was not a part of the segment being observed for the first few minutes of the lesson. The trainee came in after the lesson had already begun. To no fault of their own, the trainee's schedule assigned to them, which was created and driven by the needs of the IEP, had the trainee supporting students in another classroom during the start of Tia's lesson. This meant the trainee was forced to arrive after the lesson started. Because the trainee was not in the classroom while Tia explained the skill, the trainee had to look closely at what was being worked on by the students, briefly ask Tia questions for clarification, and jump in knowing that they were not there when students received instructions.

Ensley stated that the biggest factor out of her control regarding the trainee she works with was that the trainee did not have the background knowledge in education to help them know what students need without being explicitly told by the trainer. Esme explained,

They don't necessarily have all of the background education that they need, to serve sometimes. I think it's important that we educate them as much as we can, even if it's not a formal education in special ed, so that they can understand a little bit better.

Heidi agreed with Ensley and shared,

I think that some of it just comes naturally, the knowledge of whatever the kid's eligibility is...some of them have to work a little bit harder. I don't want this to sound negative, but some of them may think that because they knew somebody outside of school, once upon a time that had a certain disability, that they know all about kids who

had that disability. They want to cookie cutter one disability and think that all children will act the same if they have that disability. Unfortunately, I've seen that.

Ensley continued the conversation in the focus group by explaining that the trainee she works with would get frustrated at times since the students they are assigned to support do not behave as other general education students. Sometimes the trainee is going into the general education setting to support a student with just behavioral needs and it has nothing to do with their academic skill level. With the trainee going into the large, general education classroom to support the students they are assigned to help with special needs, they also become familiar with the children in the classroom who do not have disabilities. They see those students following directions without prompting or redirection. Ensley elaborated, "They'll forget that the student has special needs and that they're not going to be able to do certain things that the general ed student can do." Sarah explained that her trainee gave the students she supported too much help. Sarah explained, "Basically, she felt that by help, she did. Instead, here's an example of how you can show them without doing it for them."

Madison also shared that at times, depending upon the situation, trainees may need the same level of support as a trainer would. Madison explained,

Sometimes they need support that we as case managers need support with too, and we're both in the same boat. When you get a student and we aren't used to their behaviors or academic levels. So we all just have to work together.

On a similar note, Barbara expressed that trainees and trainers sometimes help one another reciprocally. She elaborated by sharing,

If there's a lesson that we're working on in 4th or 5th grade that they (trainee) doesn't totally understand, I help them with it, and then there's times where they help me. So it's a win-win there. We just help each other.

Madison also expressed that the lack of time during the day to collaborate with paraeducators they are training is something that is a struggle and out of her control. Madison stated,

One big struggle is just a lack of time to collaborate with the paras. I think that even just an assigned few minutes a day for everyone in the department to meet together would be helpful to all, especially with helping support and train paras.

Heidi noted that she had to make time with her trainee for a periodic check in. Heidi agreed with Madison, in that there was not enough time to collaborate with her trainee or any of the paraeducators in their department by stating, "Because we run opposite schedules of each other, we don't interact with each other probably as much as we should." Tia explained that although there is a lack of interaction during the day with her trainee, whenever they do interact, it is meaningful. She stated,

I have a strong level of interaction with the paras whenever we do interact during the day. We are focused on the quick conversations we have and the interactions we have are serious; they just aren't as often of interactions as we'd like for them to be, and this is because we are both scheduled to be teaching students or support students at nearly every moment of the day, which is understandable.

Ava went on to discuss the lack of time to work with trainees as being something out of her control, making it difficult to build a relationship with her trainee since you do not see them as much. With trainees' schedules different from their trainers' schedules, Ava shared,

You don't have, or don't see each other as much. I'm grateful and thankful that I have one that is actually housed in my room, so that we have those interactions. For the other trainees and paraeducators, it's kind of hit and miss. You've got to find that time to kind of get with them and find out how things are going.

Heidi expressed that she had to make time with her trainee for a periodic check-in. Heidi agreed with Madison during a focus group by stating, "Because we run opposite schedules from each other, we don't interact with each other probably as much as we should." Faith also agreed within the same focus group and shared, "I feel that if we had more time to interact and model how to support instruction and behaviors for students, that the skill level of our paras would improve."

The factor of everyone having their own unique personality also plays into training a novice paraeducator, according to Esme. She shared,

When mindsets are different and the opinions about things are different, that sometimes is a struggle. For example, handling a student in a certain way, regarding tone and response, or giving them choices and wait time. Those classic behavior strategies have to be reiterated to trainees.

Julia shared within a focus group that sometimes everyone's unique personalities fit together well. She stated,

The paraeducator sometimes does not want to listen, and they want to do things their own way. They do not do things as to what is expected. For example, I wanted to give a written test because I felt like students working on the computer was enabling them to cheat. So I let the trainee who was pulling the students out for small group testing know

that they needed to take the written test, and she didn't think they should do it that way, probably because it would have required her to read the questions aloud to the students. Sarah shared in the same focus group, that in order to bridge the gap that different personalities may bring, you must make time to build a relationship. She explained,

Sometimes instead of a training piece, we would have a better together time. We would just get together and socialize and get to know each other on a more personal level, to build a relationship. It would be in the school environment, but it might be lunch together one day to talk about something. Everyone could have their input, where we could gripe and say anything we needed to say.

Sometimes different personalities naturally fit together without the trainer having to make an effort to cultivate the relationship. Barbara shared, "We all get along very well and we mesh. It works very good." Heidi explained that because there were so many different personalities of people and teachers in the classroom, it is difficult to know if you are bothering your trainee or not. According to Heidi,

There's so many different styles of teaching and so many personalities that what bothers one person might not bother another. I do feel like sometimes even if it's not ever spoken out loud by the paraeducator I'm training, that maybe they had an issue with how I handled a kid.

Table 4.4 shares various factors participants described that were beyond their control, in list format.

Table 4.4

Codes Used in Factors Out of the Trainer's Control Theme

Factors out of the Trainer's Control

Inadequately trained	System-wide led trainings
Unpredictable students	Special education team members
Student IEP creates trainer/trainee schedules	Personality types
Student behavior de-escalation	Lack of time
Asks questions before/during/after training	Growth into skillset
Hallway conversations	Paperwork/data collection
Sharing classroom with trainee	Lack of interaction with trainee
Paperwork/data collection amount	Lack of downtime for communication
Communication through email	Trainer/trainee with different schedules
Confidentiality of student info.	Different mindsets

Research Question Responses

This study's purpose was to understand the perspectives of special education teacher trainers of novice paraeducators in the elementary inclusive setting. The interview questions and focus group questions were rooted in the research questions. The research questions were created to bring forth participant perspectives on training a novice paraeducator.

Central question. Three themes evolved from the data collected within this study. The themes revealed the experiences of special education teachers who train novice paraeducators in the inclusive, elementary setting. This section reveals the themes that were developed by the researcher, which are linked to three guiding sub-questions within this study. For this study, the central question was: How do special education teachers describe their experience training novice paraeducators within the inclusive setting?

The first theme of support or actions provided by the trainer explains exactly what the trainer does daily within their role just as a trainer. This does not include the other duties they are required to fulfill as an inclusive special educator, but simply within their facet as a trainer of a novice paraeducator(s). The trainers' experience ranged from three years to 23 years teaching in the special education, inclusive setting. Participants revealed exactly how they found ways to train paraeducators during the school day with various factors out of their control, making it

difficult for them to provide the level of training needed by some of their trainees. Some participants shared that their trainees needed as much training as possible. Since some trainees had no background working in education, let alone with students who have special needs, they had to work harder than other paraeducators to help perfect their roles. Other participants worked with trainees who came in with a natural ability to see them as the trainer, as well as other teachers working with students. This modeling allowed them to pick up on how to work with students quickly. The overarching experience that all participants shared was the importance of treating their trainee with respect, exactly how they would like to be treated themselves. Sarah emphasized,

You need time to train paraeducators...you're still a teacher, so it's trying to get that schedule arranged so that you can do those kinds of things. It's trying to get the para's buy-in. You have to develop that relationship and you do that in any way you possibly can.

The participants felt that treating the trainees as if they were one of the teachers and one of the team was extremely important. This was not only to build camaraderie within the special education team, but to allow the students the novice paraeducators work with to see them as a person of importance who should be respected.

Theme two, which was positive actions from the trainee, revealed that the trainer works with another human being who is a novice in their profession. They may be able to influence their trainee, but ultimately are not in control of the trainee's choices and decisions. A part of the special education teacher's experience as a trainer was being connected to the trainee and the trainee's choices they made while on the job. Some of the participants shared that their trainees had a natural ability, while others had to work harder at becoming better within their roles.

Overall, the participants felt that what little interaction they did have during the day with the trainees due to differing schedules and lack of time was beneficial. Madison shared,

I think that my interactions help train them since I just try to show them what to do, like I would want for someone to show me. Our students can be unpredictable and I feel like I have to interact with the paras, so that they can tell me what strategies worked for them, and I can tell them what worked for the student and I, and then the para may be able to try the same thing.

Heidi explained,

I think that some of it just comes naturally...some of them have to work a little bit harder. I feel like they all do a really good job. Most of them are not afraid to ask questions, while some of them don't have to ask questions. With some, we could probably ask them questions; some are very skilled at what they do.

Heidi explained that some trainees bring with them a background knowledge for how to work with students. That sometimes is because they have spent extensive time in the school building as a substitute teacher, and know the students personally. They become an inclusive paraeducator because they want to work within the building in a consistent role each day. She shared that others come into the position more skilled because they have their own children who have special needs. That experience of having a son or daughter with a disability is helpful to them when working with other children they are assigned to support academically or behaviorally.

Theme three, factors out of the trainer's control, revealed not only things that become stressors to the trainer, but things that they are not able to change, but wish they could.

Participants shared that the overall factor out of their control was the lack of time during the day

to train novice paraeducators. The second factor was differing schedules between themselves and their trainee, making it difficult to find time to provide verbal support and modeling of how to work with students academically and behaviorally so that the trainee can see what they are supposed to be doing. All participants shared that their trainees were given a full schedule to follow comprised of different segments, or blocks of time devoted to certain students in various subjects, predominantly science and social studies. Participants shared that this gives the trainee a 30-minute break for lunch; therefore it was very difficult for trainers to find time for training, other than before and after school. While the participants all had a 30-minute duty-free lunch in their schedule as well as a 30 to 40-minute planning period, the trainees' lunch times and the participants' lunch times rarely overlapped. The participants unanimously agreed that more time was needed in their schedules for training and professional development, which could include brainstorming ideas, discussing teaching strategies, or consulting with other members of the special education team.

Sub-question one. The first sub-question for this study was: How do participants describe the interaction that occurs with their paraeducators? All participants described the level of interaction they had on a daily basis that occurred with their paraeducators. All participants shared that they had little to no interaction with the paraeducator they were training throughout the course of the school day. This was primarily due to the trainee, and all paraeducators within their department having schedules that do not align with one another. One of the participants explained that the student's needs delineated in the IEP drove the scheduling decisions. Two participants explained that students rarely received support from a paraeducator and a special education teacher at the same time, but rather at separate times based on the child's IEP. This was the primary reason the participant's schedule did not align with the schedule their trainee

had. The participants and trainees often worked with the same children, but at different times of the day and in different subjects. Heidi explained,

There's probably not enough interaction because of the way we're set up. At the beginning of the year we give them [trainee/paraeducator] a copy of the student's accommodations page, and we do a periodic check-in, but because we run opposite of each other, we don't interact with each other probably as much as we should.

Madison and Esme shared that they don't interact a lot with their trainees during the actual school day; the schedule given to them to follow to serve did not align with their trainee's or other paraeducators' schedules. The paraeducator's schedule provides supportive instruction segments to students (science and social studies support). Academic segments were provided by the special education teacher (math and English language arts specialized instruction). The two did not align, since each of the four subjects students receive are not combined, but presented at different times of the day.

Sub-question two. The second sub-question for this study was: How do participants describe the interdependence that occurs between themselves and their paraeducators? Overall, participants agreed that while they did not work alongside trainees and other paraeducators in their department during the school day, they still immensely depended upon them. Ensley shared, "I know that we need them. We need them and we appreciate them, that's for sure. They really are a major backbone for us, and I think it's important for us to share that with them." Ensley explained that trainees and experienced paraeducators collect behavioral data on students with whom they work, using the behavioral data collection forms correctly that she has provided them with and shown them how to use. Esme explained that she relies on all paraeducators in her department to provide verbal insight toward any data puzzles. She

explained further by saying that when there is a student being served in inclusive special education and the teacher is using their data to make educational decisions but is still not sure about what goals and supports the student may need, the paraeducator can provide further informal conversation. That gives the trainer and other special education teachers in the department insight about what they see and experience, whenever they are working with that same student.

Madison, Barbara, and Heidi all explained that they worked independently and ran different schedules than the trainees and other paraeducators in their departments, but that they depended upon them to make sure the students on their caseloads got the instructional accommodations in the subject areas of science and social studies, which were two classes where students in the inclusive setting often need supports due to the high amount of reading required. Because science and social studies were not subjects they as teachers were assigned to support, this required them to depend upon the paraeducator to support students with any reading assigned in those subjects. They depended upon the trainees and all paraeducators in the department to share how students in science and social studies were behaving, and also performing academically through formal data collection, or via informal conversation. They depended upon their trainees to read the assignments with the students in a smaller group within the large group classroom, help them with words they could not read, break the reading into chunks to keep students from becoming overwhelmed, and stop as they read the assignment and ask students questions along the way, to make sure students understood what they were reading. Barbara added, "When we're doing classwork, if there is someone that is not on task, they can help them back on task." Julia shared that she depended upon the paraeducator she trained to help students with whatever they were working on academically when she has had to leave the

room or was called to a meeting. She noted that a paraeducator from her department came to cover her classroom and fill in for her as a substitute.

Esmé explained that she depended upon her trainee or paraeducators in her department with de-escalation communication training or with helping a student who is in crisis with escalating behaviors. She explained that the de-escalation communication is when the paraeducator verbally de-escalates the student so that the behavior does not escalate to where the student is hurting themselves and others physically. Esmé elaborated, “A lot of times they have a relationship with the students. They’ve worked with them in the classroom in some capacity and so they help to de-escalate and manage behaviors.” Tia shared,

I’ve depended upon my trainee in situations where students have not been able to de-escalate their behaviors with verbal support. If they begin to hurt themselves or another staff member, I depend upon my paraeducator to serve as a second person in the room. If that student does begin to hurt themselves, I need my paraeducator to serve not only as a witness, but to ensure the child doesn’t kick one of us in the head, etc. while we are physically de-escalating him with strategies we’ve been trained to use to keep everyone safe.

Faith agreed with Tia and shared that in the past, she too had had students with behavioral needs. She explained that the paraeducator she was training or any paraeducator in her department would come and help her whenever that student’s behaviors would escalate and become physically unsafe for everyone.

Sub-question three. The third sub-question for this study was: How do participants describe the behaviors occurring between themselves and the paraeducators This question refers to times before or after school. It also includes times such as when a trainer or trainee may have

an overlapping lunch period and eat in the same room together, or a professional learning day where they are attending the same training, or if they are in the same setting. It may also include periods of time where they informally talk in passing in the hallway, or see one another as one is leaving a classroom and another is entering it. Julia explained that she tried to make sure she understands how the paraeducator she is training learns just as she would do with her students. Julia stated, “I try to understand how they learn themselves. I ask them questions and see if they are understanding the directives I am giving them on how to help the students.”

Julia, Barbara, Faith and Madison all felt that being respectful and interacting with the trainees in a way they would personally want to be worked with were the best behaviors to use as a trainer. Madison explained, “I try to work well and get along well with them. I treat them professionally and just talk to them how I would want to be spoken to.” Faith shared that by treating the trainee professionally and having a one-on-one discussion with them, where she was honest with them about what needs to change or continue on, was helpful to the trainee. Barbara shared that since she began her career as a paraeducator in inclusive special education, she knew how she wanted to be treated whenever she was in their position. Barbara stressed,

Me being a para once before has really helped to know how I liked to be treated, so that’s how I treat them. I don’t ever want anyone to treat me any differently than how they would treat a para, or vice-versa.

Julia shared that she was nice, friendly, and tried to be helpful. She explained,

If they have any needs, I will help. I understand that they do not always understand right away what is expected of them, so I will give them notes they can use with students, and I explain the topic in class, so that they can help [students].

Sarah stressed the behaviors, or specific things she did that helped cultivate a relationship and help the trainee develop a skillset for supporting students. She explained that she would bring her trainee and the paraeducators in the department lunch, and do whatever she had to do, to help cultivate and foster a relationship. She shared that she had to schedule meetings with the paraeducators after school or during her lunch period. She also explained that for paraeducators struggling with their role, she took a step back and figured out how to approach them effectively. Sarah explained, “That’s when you have to sit back and say, okay, let’s approach this from another angle. It’s just like teaching kids. You have to meet them where they’re at and scaffold their [trainee] instruction too.”

Much like Sarah would approach training paraeducators as she would approach working with students, Ensley shared that trainees struggling with their roles would get permission to leave the classroom they were scheduled to be in to come and observe her working with students. Ensley elaborated,

I’ve had paras come into the resource classroom and work with me, so that I can show them specific skills students and I working on, or model interventions. They will take those interventions and use them in those general ed [inclusive] classrooms they are going into.

Ensley stressed the behavior of communication, even if the communication you exhibit between you and your trainee is brief. Ensley welcomes trainees whenever they have questions and concerns since that cultivates verbal communication amongst her and the trainee. She elaborated,

We’re really good about communication pieces. We do a lot of emails back and forth, which is usually the quickest way that we communicate back and forth. We want to

make sure we have that communication so that they feel supported, not just kind of left to do whatever. They do take their direction from us, that way they don't just go into classrooms and do whatever they feel is appropriate. They take what we tell them, and go into the classroom and then provide that service to the student.

Heidi attributes her non-verbal behaviors to what helps her train paraeducators. Heidi explained, "I'm very relaxed. I don't necessarily mind if a student is standing up at their desk. There's so many personalities that what bothers one person might not bother another." Heidi explained further that she always strives to set a good example, lead by example, and model behaviors to trainees. Esme thinks that the sit-down meetings she has with paraeducators she trains is a behavior occurring between her and the paraeducators she trains, which helps. Esme shared, "The sit-down meetings that we have, they really appreciate that and it makes them feel very valued." Ava and Tia felt that sharing a classroom with the paraeducator they trained allowed them to communicate more with their trainee. Ava explained,

I think it's hard to build those relationships at first because you don't see each other as much. I'm grateful and thankful that I have one that is actually housed in my room, so that we can have those interactions.

Tia explained that being able to eat lunch with her paraeducator each day helps her relate to them. She stated,

I hear what they say to me (at lunch), I try to give them advice when they feel like they've failed, and I encourage them to try again tomorrow. The only thing we can do is reflect, ask ourselves how we can improve for the next day, and move forward.

All participants stressed that good communication was necessary between themselves and their trainees.

Summary

The experiences of special education teachers working in the elementary inclusive setting who train special education paraeducators were discussed in detail in this chapter. Three key themes were uncovered by examining the experiences of the 10 study participants. The themes established were as follows: trainer support to the trainee, positive trainee actions, and factors out of the trainer's control. These three themes were generated based upon the lived experiences of the study's participants. All of the participants had similar experiences, in having currently been working with a novice paraeducator or trainee in the inclusive setting. All of the participants were able to put into words the value they placed on and the appreciation they had toward the trainee they were guiding and mentoring this year. While some of the special education teacher trainers faced struggles in trying to teach trainees the skill of supporting students with special needs in the inclusive setting, others had trainees who seemed to have a natural ability for it. Those with a natural ability were able to observe practices and skills that were modeled for them, and then replicate those same skills for the students with whom they worked. All participants felt that their trainees were a needed asset within their department, despite their lack of experience (two years or less working as an inclusive paraeducator).

Some overall positive outcomes of training novice paraeducators were that some of those paraeducators quickly picked up on the skills being taught to them, bringing competency and practical support to the students they were assigned to assist in the inclusive setting. Another positive outcome as a whole was that trainers of novice paraeducators felt both appreciative of what the trainees did in the department and verbally admitted that they, as well as other special education teachers in the department, would not be able to do their jobs without them. Since the trainers cannot work with the same group of students for the entire school day and are assigned

different age groups and subjects with which to work, the trainers shared that they depend on the paraeducators to give them essential information about their students, such as behavior data or informal observations and discussion about how the students are doing in other classes. The trainers felt that since they are required to collect behavior data on some of the students on their caseloads with behavioral needs, it was impossible to get a complete picture of how those children were behaving throughout an entire school day without the trainee's or other paraeducator's help. Some trainees come in well-equipped to complete tasks such as data collection and providing one-on-one academic support to students. Other trainees are not prepared and need more informal training, reminders, conversations, and repeated clarification provided to them on a regular basis. Based on the study's findings, all trainers as a whole felt that lack of time to train and provide support to paraeducators was an issue out of their control. During the focus groups, the participating teachers agreed that there is not time during the day, or before and after school with assigned duties and meetings, to meet and discuss the needs of the students they both work with at different times during the day. They also agreed that because each child is unique, they must work together whenever a child comes in with behavioral needs that they are unfamiliar with or who may become unpredictable over time. Tia mentioned that sometimes they [trainers] are just as confused about how to support a child as their trainee is, explaining further that a child's exceptionality is not a one size fits all. Tia went on to give the example that one child with autism may exhibit completely different characteristics than another child with autism, just as each child without a disability is different. All participants believed they needed more time to train their trainees, but seemed to make do with the small amount of time they did have to work with their trainees. All mentioned that they were appreciative and

respectful of all that the trainees do to help them and the special education departments they work within.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe the data collected from the experiences of elementary inclusive special education teachers who train novice paraeducators. Participants had 2+ years' experience and worked in the inclusive special education setting. They shared their experiences by providing information detailing what it is like to train novice special educators with two or less years' experience. A summary and discussion of the study's findings is included in this chapter. The implications of the study are discussed and connected to pertinent literature. The study draws both theoretical and empirical conclusions prior to sharing the delimitations and limitations of the study.

Summary of Findings

Three themes were found based on the data collected from the lived experiences of the participants. The themes were: Trainer Support to the Trainee, Positive Trainee Actions, and Factors Out of the Trainer's Control. The central question guiding the study was: How do special education teachers describe their experiences training novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting? The participants not only shared their experiences in interviews and focus groups, but also through observations conducted by the researcher. Participants shared unanimously that finding time to provide on and off the job training was a challenge. This was primarily due to the trainer and trainee each working with students at nearly all parts of the school day. Both the trainer and trainee had a schedule to follow based on student needs, and their schedules did not align with one another. However, all participants explained that they found ways to train novice paraeducators that extended beyond the scope of their individual schedules, such as short discussions in the hallway or emailed communication. Additionally,

some participants shared that eating and working through lunch together; (those whose lunch overlapped with the trainee); in addition to brief meetings before and after school were ways that trainers found time to train their trainees. Another unanimous participant response relating to the experiences of training paraeducators was the action of treating the paraeducator both professionally and respectfully. All participants reported of showing respect to their trainees, but participants showed that respect in individual and various ways. Four participants informed the researcher that they shared their classroom with the paraeducator they trained, and made sure the paraeducator had their own desk and their own supplies. Three out of these same four participants explained that they provided verbal encouragement and told the paraeducator what they did correctly as often as possible. They reported doing this to reinforce the importance of their role and make the trainee feel included. Another participant provided encouragement to her trainee by planning meetings inside and outside the school day, during lunch, or briefly after school any time that could be found during the school day). During this time, this participant would provide snacks and discuss whatever the trainees wished to discuss. She shared that this effort helped her get to know the trainees better. The participant explained that she facilitated this informal time in order to strengthen their working relationship. The other five participants shared that their way of showing respect and making the paraeducator feel valued was to encourage and speak to them in a way that made them feel as if they were important and necessary to the special education department.

Sub-question one guiding the study was: How do participants describe the interactions that occur with their paraeducators? All participants explained or referred to the fact that they did not have the same schedule as the paraeducator they trained, due to the IEP needs of students driving the daily schedules created for them. Because of that, the interaction during the school

day between the trainers and trainees was minimal. Minimal interactions included: eating lunch together, emailing, and passing one another in the hallway and stopping to brief one another for a moment. These were the most common times the trainer and trainee were able to have interaction. One exception to this was when the trainer was required to leave their assigned classroom to assist in a crisis situation with a student where physical de-escalation was required. The trainer would leave their assigned classroom of students where they assisted a general education teacher to provide support to the trainee who was supporting a student in a crisis or an extreme behavioral situation. In that scenario, the trainer and trainee would work alongside one another to verbally/or physically de-escalate the student to avoid hurting themselves or others. After school interactions occurred whenever the trainer and trainee decided to meet informally to review the needs of students they both worked with but at different times during the day. After school interaction also occurred during special education department meetings where the team of special education teachers and paraeducators discussed student needs, reviewed potential strategies that would provide support for student needs, and modeled what implementing the strategies would look like.

Sub-question two was: How do participants describe the interdependence that occurs between themselves and their paraeducators? All participants reported that they did not work alongside the trainee during the day. They reported that they followed a schedule completely different from that of their counterpart, but had a strong reliance upon the paraeducator for several reasons. Reason one: participants did not serve students in the subjects of science and social studies. Because they reported not teaching their students in those subjects, they depended on the trainee to ensure the students who required special education support in those subjects received it. Reason two: the participant depended on the trainee to collect student behavior data

on those students with behavioral issues whenever the participant was not in the classroom.

Reason three: participants depended on trainees to implement behavioral strategies and supports for students, as they were not able to be with those students requiring behavioral support each moment of the day. Reason four: all of the participants relied upon the trainees to provide informal and formal conversations regarding the academics and behaviors of students on their caseload with whom the trainees worked during various segments of the school day.

Sub-question three was: How do participants describe the behaviors occurring between themselves and the paraeducators? The behaviors that occurred between all participants and their trainees consisted of various behaviors of support toward one another. Supportive behaviors shown by both the trainer and trainee were a combination of verbal and/or visual supports shown to one another. These behaviors occurred during various times of the school day, and outside of student instruction provided by the trainer and trainee. The one exception to this was on the rare occasion that a student with special needs displayed more severe behaviors, and there was a need for the trainer to work alongside a trainee in the classroom, in order to provide on the job training. Trainer behaviors of informal communication in various forms, as well as other actions that supported the development of a relationship between the trainer and trainee, were described by all participants. Words of encouragement, affirmation, reflective listening, outlining and reiterating expectations, as well as patience were all behaviors described by the participants that helped them develop a relationship with their trainee. All participants agreed that the behavior of communication between the trainer and trainee was used to help the trainee grow. The behavior of communication strengthened the trainee's skillset and ability to support students in fast-paced, constantly changing classroom environment. Face-to-face communication when the trainer and trainee could fit it in, such as in passing in the hallway, or eating lunch together, was described.

Making time for quick conversations before and after school was also an example of face-to-face communication shared by participants. Emailing was also described as a communication used by participants. Trainers and trainees found time to communicate so that the students they served at different times of the day received consistency in services. Ultimately, this promoted student learning, and allowed students to receive the supports and services necessary from the trainee that the students were required to receive.

Discussion

Research is limited regarding the experiences of elementary special education teachers who train novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting. This research study was conducted to describe the experiences of elementary special education teachers who train novice paraeducators. This study emphasized the requirements of training a novice paraeducator in detail. The findings of this study are related to the empirical and theoretical contexts to support transferability. Previous research is linked to the findings of this study and is confirmed and extended by this study and its results.

Empirical

There results of this study were similar to other studies found within previously written literature. Information from this study that overlapped with previously conducted studies included supportive training methods, working within inclusive settings, and creating effective teams through the use of paraeducator training.

Supportive methods. One study conducted by Douglas et al. (2016) qualitatively examined the experiences of elementary special education teachers who train paraeducators in the inclusive setting. There were two similarities between the study conducted by Douglas et al. and the current study. Both studies examined the types of teacher support provided to the trainee.

Douglas et al. found supportive methods trainers used in their study to be a theme, and theme one of the current study was found to be trainer support provided to the trainee.

Inclusive settings. A second similarity between this study and the study conducted by Douglas et al. was that the students the paraeducators were being trained to serve participated in the inclusive setting for the half the school day or more. Additionally, in a study conducted by Sobel et al. (2015) it was explained that more and more, students with low-incidence disabilities are being taught within inclusive settings, correlating with the setting of this study.

Effective teams and training. Douglas et al. confirmed that effective special education teams and appropriate paraeducator training were necessary for special education personnel. The current study's findings reaffirmed that effective special education teams are necessary to provide support to students in the inclusive special education setting. All participants in the current study shared that developing a relationship and collecting the paraeducator's input were both essential in order to create an effective team. The findings of the current study suggest that the participants had little to no preparation as preservice teachers, nor as current teachers regarding the training of paraeducators. This finding is based on the responses provided by the participants in both interview and focus group sessions. The participants shared that one type of training they did receive prior to becoming a special education teacher was through experience in jobs with transferrable skills, which helped them as a trainer. These participants served as a paraeducator themselves before becoming a special education teacher or worked in a leadership role outside of education. Biggs et al. (2016) found that one necessary component of a teacher preparatory program was training preservice teachers to work side-by-side with paraeducators. In the same study, it was found that special education teachers needed to continue their own professional development after becoming a teacher in order to support working with

paraeducators. This allowed special education teachers to create an effective team for students being served. In the current study effective special education teams were created through the support the trainer provided to the trainee, as well as by the positive actions displayed by the trainee.

Psychological needs of trainers and trainees. Positive actions displayed by trainees could help to create an effective special education team. This is due to the potential of the training team realizing that certain training aspects may need to continue or be reinforced. The mentee (trainee) and mentor (trainer) may decide to continue or improve positive actions on the job, which not only improves their working relationship, but ultimately improve the quality of support being provided to students through their change in actions. Bozgeyikli (2018) found that special education teachers have psychological needs for functional and emotional well-being. As psychological needs of success, relationships, autonomy, and dominance grew within teachers' lives, so did their job satisfaction. While participants in the current study did not describe needs of success, relationships, autonomy, or dominance based upon job satisfaction, they did describe their satisfaction or lack of satisfaction regarding the training of paraeducators. Participants in the current study were found to be satisfied, dissatisfied, and indifferent. Gersten et al. (2001) outlined within their study that special education teacher attrition improves whenever administrative support is provided. Gersten et al. also stressed that special education teachers nationwide need to have their daily schedules redesigned due to the complexity of duties and responsibilities that exist in their jobs. While participants in the current study did not share any information regarding support from their administration, they did describe the misaligned schedules of the special education teacher trainer and novice paraeducator trainee. With little to no schedule overlap of the trainer and trainee, it made training paraeducators more complex and

less frequent. This meant that instead of the trainer and trainee working alongside one another in the classroom on a regular basis, they had to think outside of the box and train during smaller blocks of time during the day and outside of school hours. Barnes, Bertoli, Flynn, and Rivers (2016) found that the outcomes for both students and special education teachers who worked within self-contained classrooms improved as a result of regularly interacting and partnering with a paraeducator. While participants within the current study did not partner with a paraeducator during student instructional times on a regular basis as they would have in a self-contained classroom, all displayed and described characteristics of partnering with their trainee. Before school, after school, email communication, and in-passing in the hallway were all times of the day where participants shared that they would touch base, as a whole. During these times they would fit in conversations with their trainee and ask one another questions or share information regarding students and the supports necessary for these students. Other times included special education department meetings, where training needs and practices could be discussed and modeled between the entire special education team. Participants shared that they ate lunch with their paraeducator and used that personal time to support their working partnership. They used lunch as a time to update one another about the students, share strategies to try with students that day, and also discuss what did not work, and why.

Theoretical

This research study explored the lived experiences of elementary special education teachers who train novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting. Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory addressed the significance of this study. The situated learning theory's main precept describes two individuals actively working in a mentor/mentee type apprenticeship relationship, which in the current study was the special education teacher and novice

paraeducator. With the situated learning theory, the mentee eventually reaches what is known as full-participation phase. This is where the mentee can carry out all processes and job expectations with competency and efficiency. The situated learning theory looks closely at practices, as well as teaching and learning processes occurring between two individuals who have a relationship. With all participants sharing that it was necessary to develop a relationship with their trainee, the situated learning theory aligns with the current study. The first theme of the trainer providing support to the trainee relates directly to the situated learning theory, as it looks closely at the behaviors between two individuals. The second theme of this study, positive trainee actions, outlines the behaviors displayed by the trainee. The third theme of this study consisted of factors out of the trainers' control. This relates to the environmental factors that play a role within a mentor and mentee relationship (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The special education teacher and novice paraeducator are working within the elementary school community and the structure of the community and the environmental factors the pair faces while they are training connects the two. The behaviors of the trainer and trainee in both themes one and two emphasize the overlying system of interaction, interdependence, and behaviors that is stressed as the basis of the situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The current study included observations, as well as verbal information shared by the participants during interviews and focus groups. The researcher observed the mentor (trainer) and mentee (trainee) working together. Just as the situated learning theory supports an apprenticeship learning scenario in authentic context, the mentee was learning and applying a skill from the mentor in the authentic context. The specific authentic context was an elementary classroom, or professional development meeting. The verbal information shared by the participant in interviews and focus groups reinforced the specific behaviors that transition a mentee from entry level participation

toward an expert level, or full-participation phase of job understanding (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This is displayed whenever they are in an apprenticeship scenario that is preparing to move toward a close-knit practice together. Additionally, the current study contributes specific environmental factors that are out of the trainers' control. Some of these factors include: trainers being inadequately prepared to train novice paraeducators, lack of countywide training and/or irrelevant training, unpredictable students, and having a schedule that does not align with their trainee to support communication throughout the school day. These are factors the trainer and trainee face in an apprenticeship. These specific behaviors could prepare and alert special education teachers and novice paraeducators involved in training, of what they should or should not do. It could prepare the trainer to cultivate a positive training relationship. It also alerts trainers to environmental factors that they could in the future either attempt to change or avoid.

Implications

The results of this study share information relating to the theoretical, empirical, and practical experiences of elementary special education teachers who train novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting. The results of this study may support other professionals in the field by providing training information that could be applied in both mock and on-the-job scenarios with students. Special education leaders, teachers, administrators, and learning coaches within schools can use the information from this study to support future paraeducator training decisions. The positive actions trainers and trainees display that were noted within this study's results could be shared both verbally and visually with future and current trainers and trainees. The key findings could also be turned into a checklist given to those involved in training scenarios on a day to day basis, which could help serve as a reference tool for those in training to ensure they are remaining consistent. Individuals who are considering becoming a paraeducator in

elementary inclusive special education may find the information forthcoming, which could play a role in their decision to become a paraeducator. A preservice special education teacher may find it helpful to understand ahead of time the behaviors they may need to duplicate that have been useful and practical to other trainers. The positive actions that a special education teacher trainer should engage in to enhance training may be time-saving or create a more efficient training scenario.

Theoretical Implications

Results of this study affirmed Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory are aligned and relevant to training scenarios between special education teachers and novice paraeducators. The apprenticeship scenario between the special education teacher and novice paraeducator was comprised of behaviors from both the trainer and trainee. These behaviors were positive. The apprenticeship was also made up of inseparable aspects and combinations of environmental factors. One example of a combination of inseparable aspects from theme three of this study, includes the trainer and trainee having differing personalities or mindsets. A second example of inseparable aspects from theme three would be the heart, or love for children the novice paraeducator brings to their job every day. Once the trainer and trainee begin working together, their natural thoughts, feelings, and behavior patterns begin to synchronize, which is a natural occurrence, according to the situated learning theory. For example, the trainer may share with their trainee in passing in the hallway something they tried earlier in the day to support a student in need. If the strategy they tried was unsuccessful, the trainee would know to try something different or find out why the strategy did not help the student in need. Another example of inseparable aspects within the training environment from theme three is the level of individual student need. The reason the trainer is working with the trainee is to ensure

that the level of support provided to students with special needs is appropriate. The student's individual personality, combined with his/her academic and/or behavioral needs are out of the trainer and trainee's control. Students evolve and change within the learning environment, and so do their academic and behavioral needs. A student at the start of the school year may be different by mid-year. For example, certain research-based academic strategies that the trainer and trainee use to help a student's deficit may work well for a student. The student may be able to remember the learning strategy on their own and apply it with minimal support, making their level of need decline compared to where they began at the start of the year. Oppositely, a student with an emotional and behavioral disorder may be successful for the first half of the school year, but then something traumatic may happen that impacts the child's home environment. This may affect their academic or behavioral performance at school in a negative way, requiring the trainer and/or trainee to provide additional or maximized supports to the student mid-year. This is an example of an environmental factor to which the situated learning theory refers, and is out of the trainer and trainee's control.

The situated learning theory is not based upon a simple transfer of information from one person to another, nor is it based upon the trainee naturally replicating what they see on their own. The situated learning theory is a series of transformations and changes that occur over time as two individuals work together and cultivate their relationship (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Based on the situated learning theory, this study showed that all 10 participants felt building and fostering a relationship with the trainee was necessary for the functioning of the community to which they belonged (i.e., the special education department), as well as for the needs of the students.

Three themes were found within this study. These themes align with the situated learning theory's basis of two individuals working together in an apprentice style relationship, where skills are being learned by the mentee. The situated learning theory is driven by the complexity of transformation of individuals. It is also driven by change, and opposing and overlapping supports provided by the trainer. Positive actions by the trainee, and factors out of the trainer's control also drive the learning theory aligned to this study. For example, the theory's basis of transformation and change within individuals is that it cannot occur by simply transferring new information to another person by telling, or by showing them and then expecting them to transfer the skill immediately without practice. Just as one participant in this study shared, all novice paraeducators have a natural ability when they take on the role, even though some of them have to work a little bit harder. This means they need to see the strategies modeled more often by their trainer, and also need opportunities to practice the strategies in mock situations before and after school. The situated learning theory is a complex relationship made up of inseparable aspects in the working environment, just as a special education teacher and novice paraeducator training scenario is. Educational leaders responsible for professional development opportunities should consider the complexity that goes into training a novice paraeducator, which would help them determine how the apprenticeship efforts between a trainer and trainee could be better supported through additional learning opportunities. Additional learning opportunities may include school-based professional development sessions, or perhaps traveling to another location within the school district with other personnel who have like-minded needs to receive training.

Empirical Implications

Research on the experiences of elementary special education teachers who train novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting is limited. This study provides professional literature and

corroborates with one prior study conducted by Douglas et al. (2016) concerning paraeducator training and its phenomena. Both studies found that showing respect to paraeducators and using empathy (i.e., talking to a paraeducator the way they would wish to be spoken to) were effective strategies in the training process. The study conducted by Douglas et al. contributed qualitative findings regarding the experiences of successful, nominated special education teachers who train paraeducators who support students in the general education setting. Aside from Douglas et al.'s study, no research was found regarding the phenomenon of elementary special education teachers who train novice paraeducators in the elementary inclusive setting, thus the information yielded from the current study may be beneficial to many educators. Both preservice and in-service special education teachers will have information that will help them understand how to serve as a trainer of paraeducators and become more aware of what actions support or do not support working with students in inclusive special education. School district level professionals or administrators of schools will be more informed and thus be able to make a conscious effort regarding what special education topics related to training should be addressed. On non-student days where training is provided, educational leadership will know what topics should be addressed and decide which personnel from within may model and support training needs. Universities or college preparatory programs may also find the information beneficial. It allows preservice special education teachers to become more cognizant of the actions they should take when working with a novice paraeducator to support their training and build a working relationship.

This study gives elementary special education teachers a voice regarding what they have experienced in training novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting. Aside from Douglas et al. (2016), previous literature discussed the types of training methods for special education

paraeducators, as well as various types of skill levels paraeducators possess (Andzik & Cannella-Malone, 2017; Brock & Carter, 2015; Chopra, Banjeree, DiPalma, Merrill, and Ferguson, 2013; Douglas, Uitto, Reinfelds, and D'Agostino, 2018; Eichelberger, 2015; Kim, Koegel, & Koegel, 2017; Lee et al., 2015; Mason et al., 2015; McLeskey et al., 2014; Stockall, 2014). Previous literature also discussed special education teacher demand and attrition, as well as administrative support to special education teachers (Argon, 2016; Bettini, Cheyney, Wang, & Leko, 2015; Conley & You, 2017; Hagaman & Casey, 2017; Pazey & Cole, 2013; Radford et al., 2015). Research providing elementary special education teachers with a voice regarding their experiences with training novice paraeducators is limited. One recommendation is for universities or college preparation programs to create a course for pre-service special education teachers that supports their becoming a trainer of novice paraeducators in special education. While the heavy emphasis is typically placed on teaching pedagogies for students, an emphasis on their role as a potential paraeducator trainer needs to be addressed in teacher preparation programs with emphasis and undivided attention. An additional recommendation would be for school systems to provide training to potential special education paraeducators as a part of their hiring process. Much like substitute teachers attend preparatory classes and trainings before serving as a substitute teacher for the first time, potential paraeducators should receive training beforehand from the school system they are applying within. These trainings would be supported by leaders within the special education or human resources departments within the school systems.

Practical Implications

This study yielded several practical implications for various educational personnel at different levels. The three practical implications included: different approaches to training

novice paraeducators, job efficiency, and proactive measures. These practical implications are for educational leaders, administrators, special education departments, and teachers. They are also applicable to college preparatory administration and post-secondary leaders, as they plan and make decisions as to what pre-service teachers should experience regarding training approaches in teacher education programs.

The first practical implication this study yielded, were the various approaches that could be used when training a novice paraeducator. Specific types of support include: the trainer giving concern and attention to the trainee, communication with the trainee through email, and sharing their classroom with the trainee. The trainer listening to the trainee reflectively during a follow-up or debriefing time together was another approach to training. Additional types of support approaches include the trainer providing verbal encouragement to the trainee or working with the trainee during their lunch, to provide support and answer questions. Educational personnel may preview with trainers these actions, or types of support that should be done to support their trainee before the training period actually begins.. In theme one, specific examples of support the trainer should provide to the trainee were revealed to include: explaining expectations to trainees, providing concern and attentiveness, modeling strategies to use with students, and treating the trainee how they wish to be treated. Whether the special education teacher trainers are preservice, novice or veteran teachers, it is important to share beforehand the actions they can take, to specifically support a trainee. Along with sharing those verbal and visual actions of support that build trainee capacity, the strategies should be modeled by those providing the training. This would allow for the teachers attending the training to hear and see what they should do. After that, they would be allotted the opportunity to practice those strategies of support in mock-style scenarios as a part of training.

The second practical implication of this study, was job efficiency. Before trainees apply for the position, or during their work as a trainer, they could be informed of what they should strive to do or not do. Trainers being aware of information in advance may impact their training of novice paraeducators. Knowing ahead of time what supports job efficiency in novice paraeducator training, is practical information. It may support decisions made by educational leaders of school systems, school building administrators, or special education teachers who hire/ or work with novice paraeducators. It allows these leaders to see what information (positive actions of trainees) should be shared with those involved in the training process. It is also practical information for the individual who is considering taking on the role of paraeducator in elementary inclusive special education. It allows the potential special education paraeducator to know what they should expect and understand what their role will entail if hired. The information revealed from theme two of positive trainee actions would allow for novice paraeducators to see what actions are most effective. This information could be presented in either an informal or formal workshop or applied in mock scenarios.

The third practical approach yielded from this study includes the trainer being able to take proactive measures to mentally prepare for the factors out of their control. Some of these factors include differing personalities of co-workers, unpredictable students, following a schedule that does not align with their trainee's schedule, and abandoning their daily schedule to de-escalate student behaviors. This mental preparation allows the trainer to take on an appropriate mindset ahead of time, which prevents them from fixating on issues. Knowing information ahead of time allows the trainer to focus on things they can control. This may include their personal outlook, or remaining conscientious about what to ignore. Discussing and exposing potential difficulties to preservice and in-service teachers ahead of time, may be helpful

to the training process once it begins. Just as teachers in the elementary classroom use pre-teaching of information as a research-based strategy (to support students with exposure and memory retention needs), a pre-teaching of these implications in university classrooms could also be done. This might provide a practical method of support that preservice teachers could apply once working in the field, or if called upon to train a paraeducator. Trainers and trainees must accept and be ready to adapt at any time, in order to support the needs of the students. Many things occur during the school day that are out of the trainer and trainee's control. Examples may include a lack of resources or conflicting schedules. Another example would be personality conflicts between the trainer and trainee, which may affect the amount or quality of training that occurs. This information is practical for special education teachers who have been asked to train novice paraeducators, or those who are considering training paraeducators. This information also allows the special education teacher to know what to expect whenever they commit to becoming a trainer, in addition to keeping up with their other responsibilities as a teacher. By knowing what may or may not occur out of their control, special education teachers are able to generate a list of things they are able to control and focus on those factors. It is also practical for school administrators who have special education teachers training novice paraeducators within their building. The administrator will be able to see what the trainer faces each day as a whole. This may prompt him/her to possibly ease up requirements at certain times of the day, or prevent the trainer from taking on more responsibilities within the school. It will better enable the administrator to be more aware of the special educators' schedules, which would not only impact their schedules, but would also provide the administrator with an understanding of the professional development needs of special educators.

For all involved in the novice paraeducator training process, being able to understand the specific types of support the trainer should provide to the trainee is helpful, which will ultimately affect the level of effective support students receive. These different implications for training that have not been attempted before, may allow for a different and/or positive training experience for both special education teachers and novice paraeducators. Having this additional information may also support the decision-making educational leaders complete. Those leaders who plan professional development opportunities for special education teachers may be able to make more informed decisions or include new information within their training presentations. One recommendation for special education coordinators in school systems, is to take the specific types of support trainers can provide to trainees, and then emphasize those specific pieces of support during in-person, district wide trainings. Specific types of support that could be shared and modeled in trainings include: trainer giving concern and attention to the trainee, communicating with the trainee through email or when in passing in the hallway, respecting the trainee's differences, providing words of encouragement, and giving up their lunch break to work with the trainee. Special education teachers who have been asked to attend the training due to their being assigned a novice paraeducator, will be able to watch the supportive actions modeled by either a coordinator or expert trainer, then practice those supportive actions within the simulated workshop. This will prepare special education teachers to provide the support novice paraeducators need to be successful. An additional recommendation would be positive self-talk that a school administrator can emphasize or model, to their personnel involved in the training process. By knowing ahead of time all the things that may or may not occur during the school day that are out of their control, positive self-talk may encourage both flexibility and adaptation to occur within a situation that could possibly turn in a negative direction. By

learning to think or whisper phrases to oneself that help a person overcome and adapt, the special education teacher and novice paraeducator are able to continue their work of serving students regardless of any negative or unexpected situations they encounter.

Delimitations and Limitations

This phenomenological study was delimited to participants who were elementary special education teachers in the inclusive setting with two or more years' experience. Participants also had to be training a novice paraeducator in the elementary inclusive, special education setting. By delimiting this study to teachers with these specifications, it allowed the phenomenon of elementary special education teachers who train novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting to be researched. This was done so that teachers who chose to participate would be able to provide information on the specific research topic, rather than information somewhat related or unrelated. In this study novice was defined as having worked as an inclusive paraeducator for two years or less, adding another delimitation to this study. The participants in this study all taught in the same school district in two different elementary schools.

One limitation of this study was that the majority of the participants had only trained one novice paraeducator, which limited the breadth of experience. One participant had trained two novice paraeducators, while the other nine participants trained one novice paraeducator. An additional limitation was that all participants were female. No male participants chose to be a part of the study, and the total pool of potential male participants was two.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future research based upon this study's findings. The first recommendation is to re-create the same study at an elementary school, with participants who had received preservice paraeducator training within a university or teacher

preparatory program. This preservice training would be provided to support their potential role as a trainer of novice paraeducators in the special education inclusive setting. This preservice training allows special education teachers to be exposed to a leadership role ahead of time, rather than taking on the trainer role without any background knowledge or preparation.

The second recommendation would be for the same study to be replicated where additional training time was allotted to the trainer and trainee during the school day. This would be important so that educational leaders could decide if spending money on additional training would produce effective carryover of skills from the additional time spent on training.

The third recommendation would be to replicate the same study in either the middle or high school setting. This would allow educational leaders to see whether or not the lack of time during the day to train paraeducators in the special education inclusive setting is unique to the scheduling and conditions of elementary school. It would also allow educational leaders to see whether or not training paraeducators is specific to primary education, or both primary and intermediate education.

The fourth recommendation would be to conduct the study in a different school district. This would reveal information regarding whether training paraeducators in the inclusive setting is a practice that requires refinement across school districts. Oppositely, it could reveal that paraeducator training is a well-integrated and refined process in exemplar school systems, from which other systems needing support for training could learn.

The fifth and final recommendation would be to re-create the study where novice paraeducators would be the participants, rather than elementary special education teachers in the inclusive elementary setting. Examining the experiences of paraeducators would provide a basis for comparison to their special education teacher trainers. This would allow educational leaders

to compare the perspectives of their special education certified and non-certified staff.

Educational leaders might then make more informed decisions about professional development.

Summary

The findings of this study revealed that elementary special education teachers who serve as trainers of novice paraeducators are willing to work to provide supports to their paraeducator trainees. By supporting trainees in specific ways, such as treating their trainees in a professional manner, and communicating/modeling strategies, the participants felt the special education team was strengthened. All 10 participants shared that it was essential to develop a relationship with the trainee. While all participants in the study struggled to find time to communicate with their trainees due to differing schedules during the day, they made time outside of the school day to communicate. If they were not able to communicate outside of the school day, they made sure to have informal, but short and frequent conversations in passing in the hallway. Some participants also used methods of emailed communication, or verbally spoke with one another during lunchtime, if the trainer and trainee's lunch blocks overlapped. The communication that trainers found time to make helped strengthen the relationship between the trainer and trainee, in the trainers' opinions. It also helped improve the level of academic and behavioral support being provided to students, due to the informal discussions being centered around the needs of students. For example, the trainer and trainee would discuss the strategies that had been tried that day for students who had either ongoing or occasional behavioral needs. The trainer and trainee would touch base and come up with possible strategies to be utilized next.

Through observations of the trainers and trainees, as well interviews and focus groups, positive actions of the trainees were revealed. These actions revealed whether or not the trainee

had a natural ability for the role or ended up working harder to meet the demands of the job. The positive actions displayed by the trainee also served as feedback to the trainer. It helped them determine what needed to be addressed within their mentor-mentee relationship.

The study also revealed factors that were out of the trainer's control. While those factors were present daily within the trainer-trainee relationship, trainers continued to communicate whenever possible. They provided training opportunities briefly during the day, or outside of the school day, for trainees whom they depended upon to support students on their caseloads.

There are three important implications aligned to this study. The first implication is the need for specific types of support that the trainer should provide to the trainee. Specific types of support include the following: building a relationship with the trainee, listening reflectively to what the trainee shares with them, providing encouragement, modeling strategies to the trainee (that the trainee could use with students), interacting with the trainee throughout the day, being professional toward the trainee, and sharing their classroom with the trainee (providing the trainee with a desk/or a space of their own within the room). This supports the apprentice-style scenario based on the situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It also attends to the scenario of elementary inclusive paraeducators who have little to no experience who are assigned to work with challenging learners (Nguyen, 2015). By working together as a mentor (trainer) and mentee (trainee), the two individuals are able to work through various environmental factors, which in the current study were the factors out of the trainer's control. The views of both professionals in the working relationship begin to synchronize, and the trainee moves out of the novice phase into the full-participation phase, where the trainee eventually works independently from the trainer. The second essential implication is the contribution of information to support job efficiency. This study provides information for school personnel making training decisions

that not only support, but encourage productivity and effectiveness with students who have special needs in the inclusive setting. While Douglas et al. (2016) was one study found in the review of literature that examined the experiences of special education teachers who support and supervise paraeducators in general education settings, there is a lack of research on this topic. This study provides information regarding what measures trainers should take to support their trainee. One example of a measure trainers should take to support their trainee, is to make sacrifices and think creatively, which coincides with the specific trainer support of concern and attention given to the trainee. A trainer may be able to skip their lunch break periodically and instead, work with their trainee during that time in a classroom. This would allow the trainer to provide the trainee with one-on-one scaffolding not built into the trainer and trainee's schedules on a daily basis. The trainer could have their lunch block during their planning time (separate from their assigned lunch block), so that they are able to support the trainee and not miss their scheduled lunch break. Another measure that trainers should take to support their trainee, is to debrief with the trainee whenever possible. This could specifically be done when the two see one another in passing in the hallway. It could also be done whenever the trainer goes into a classroom to relieve the trainee of their duties within that room, or vice-versa. Not only could concise debriefing occur within those times, but an additional measure of providing encouragement to the trainee could be shared. This study also provides information that supports job efficiency, and outlines why trainers and trainees should be ready to adapt and accept that certain things will occur on the job that are out of their control, which points to the third theme. Because students require specific types of specialized support and instruction, their needs do not stop simply because things that affect the trainer and trainee are occurring. Students are depending upon their support, to access the curriculum and complete their work just as their

peers do. It is not fair to students for the trainer and/or trainee to be hesitant or withhold instruction because they are impacted by things occurring around them out of their control. The findings will also help special educators who are hiring inexperienced paraeducators to make informed decisions about their future training and support, which will ultimately affect the quality of support and services the students receive in inclusive special education settings. All 10 participants in this study emphasized that the paraeducators they train are valued and are an essential part of the special education team.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 20, 2019

Rachel L. Wilbur-Carlyle

IRB Exemption 3921.112019: Experiences of Special Education Teachers Responsible for Training Novice Paraeducators in Inclusive Settings: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Rachel L. Wilbur-Carlyle,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if...the following criteria is met:

(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP *Administrative Chair of Institutional Research* **Research Ethics Office**
Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX B: SUPERINTENDENT LEVEL PERMISSION

Date

[School District]

[Address Line 1]

[Address Line 2]

Dear Superintendent:

As a graduate student in the Education Department of Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree in Curriculum and Instruction: Special Education. The title of my research project is “Experiences of Special Education Teachers Responsible for Training Novice Paraeducators in Inclusive Settings: A Phenomenological Study,” and the purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of special education teachers who train novice paraeducators.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research with teachers in the (School). Participants will be asked to give a personal interview, participate in a session where they are observed by the researcher, and participate in a focus group. These will be used to describe the phenomenon of interest. The data will be used to understand the experiences of special education teachers who train novice paraeducators. It will also be used to help identify professional development processes that lead and inform educators and educational leaders in the selection of professional development programs, which will lead to future improvements in special education training. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by emailing signed approval on district letterhead to rwilburcarlyle@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Rachel L. Wilbur-Carlyle

Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION FORM FOR PRINCIPALS

Date:

Dear (Principal):

As a graduate student in the education department at Liberty University, I have recently been granted permission through the District A Superintendents' office to conduct research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The title of my research project is "Experiences of Special Education Teachers Responsible for Training Novice Paraeducators in Inclusive Settings: A Phenomenological Study," and the purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of special education teachers who train novice paraeducators.

I am writing to request your permission to identify qualified participants in your school. Participant requirements are: (1) the teacher must have completed 2+ years as a teacher in the field of special education; (2) the teacher must train at least one paraeducator working in special education that has three or less years' experience in this role.

Participants will be asked to give a personal interview, participate in a session where they are observed by the researcher, and participate in a focus group. These will be used to describe the phenomenon of interest. The data will be used to understand the experiences of special education teachers who train novice paraeducators. It will also be used to help identify professional development processes that lead and inform educators and educational leaders in the selection of professional development programs, which will lead to future improvements in special education training. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by emailing signed approval on district letterhead to rwilburcarlyle@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Rachel L. Wilbur-Carlyle
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear (Teacher),

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my study is to understand the experiences of special education teachers who serve as trainers of novice paraeducators in inclusive settings. I am writing you to invite you to participate in my study.

If you agree to participate in this study, you would be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form confirming that you are willing to participate, and also confirming that you are currently or recently taught special education in the elementary inclusive setting for 2+ years, and have trained at least one novice paraeducator (paraeducator working in the special education inclusive setting for three years or less). I will then ask you to do the following:

(1) Participate in an interview session where I will ask 11 questions related to your experiences of training novice paraeducators; and (2) Participate in an observation session where I observe you working with the paraeducator you train during a time of day selected by you; and (3) Participate in a focus group discussion regarding these same topics. I will audio record all interviews and focus group discussions for transcription purposes.

The interview and focus group session should last between 30-40 minutes. Interviews and observations can take place at your school, and no travel is required except for the focus group meeting that will be scheduled after school at a mutually chosen, convenient location. All procedures will be conducted within a two-week period.

Participant information will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and codes, and no personal identifying information will be required. There will be no compensation for participating in this study, and participation in this study is voluntary. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time. All recorded information will be deleted at the time of withdrawal.

The Informed Consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research.

If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact me by email at rwilburcarlyle@liberty.edu. Thank you for your consideration. Please reply to this email indicating your willingness to participate and you will be contacted soon to schedule the interview.

Sincerely,

Rachel L. Wilbur-Carlyle
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS
EXPERIENCES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS RESPONSIBLE FOR TRAINING
NOVICE PARAEDUCATORS IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Rachel L. Wilbur-Carlyle
 Liberty University
 School of Education

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in a research study concerning understanding the experiences of special education teachers serving as trainers of novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting. You were selected because you teach special education at the elementary school level in the inclusive setting for 2+ years, in addition to currently training a novice paraeducator (paraeducator with three years or less experience). I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Rachel L. Wilbur-Carlyle, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of special education teachers serving as trainers of novice paraeducators in the inclusive setting.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, I would ask you to sign this Informed Consent Form confirming that you are willing to participate and are currently or have recently taught elementary special education for 2+ years, and have trained/or are currently training a paraeducator in the inclusive special education department with three or less years' experience. I will then ask you to do the following:

(1) Participate in an interview session where I will ask 11 questions related to your experiences of creating middle school social studies personalized learning classrooms; and (2) participate in a session where I observe you working with the paraeducator (3) Participate in a focus group discussion regarding these same topics. I will audio record all interviews and focus group discussions for transcription purposes.

The interview and focus group session should last between 30-40 minutes. All procedures will be conducted within a two-week period.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

Risks associated with this study are minimal in that participants will not encounter any other risk than they would during everyday life. There are no direct benefits to participants, but the results of this study will provide a deeper understanding of teacher experiences, as educational leaders move forward in developing future professional development strategies, and successful pedagogies.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be stored securely on a flash drive in my home, and only I will have access to the records. Audio recording will be stored in a secure file cabinet at my residence, thereby limiting access to anyone but me.

At the end of three years, all related documents and recordings will be destroyed.

Confidentiality related to information shared (i.e., the use of pseudonyms, securely filing data and recordings, etc.) will be adhered to; however, when conducting the focus group, I will not be able to ensure that other participants will maintain subject confidentiality and privacy during this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. The districts' and participants' decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the researcher or with Liberty University. If you decide for the district to participate, participants will be free to not answer any question or to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Rachel L. Wiblur-Carlyle. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me by email at rwilburcarlyle@liberty.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or by email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to [audio-record/video-record/photograph] me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX F: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observation Protocol: Interactions Between Trainer (Special Education Teacher) and Trainee (Paraeducator)

<u>Central Question:</u> <u>Sub-Questions:</u>	<u>School:</u> <u>Trainer:</u> <u>Trainee:</u> <u>Classroom Type/Number:</u>
<u>Start Time:</u>	<u>End Time:</u>
<u>Length of Training:</u> <u>Activity:</u>	<u>Description of Classroom:</u> (Include students, teachers, or other adults)

Sketch of Classroom/Observation Site:

Description of Classroom Layout:

<u>Observation (Look Fors)</u>	<u>Observed</u> (check for yes)	<u>Examples or Non-Ex.</u>
<i>Trainer Characteristics</i>		
Trainer Modeling of Skills		
Support with Scaffolding		
Listened to Trainee		
Organization		
Encouraging to Trainee		

Reiterated Goal(s) to Trainee

Analyzed Actions with Trainee

Provided Trainee with tools

Trainee Characteristics

Actively Engaged

Asked Questions/Seek Clarification

Discussion of Directives

Skill Application after Modeling

Receptive to Trainer Support

Descriptive Notes (During Observation)	Reflective Notes (After Observation)
Time:	Time:
Time:	Time:
Time:	Time:
Time:	Time:
Time:	Time:

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please introduce yourself and provide your connection to special education. (CQ)
2. What is a typical day like when it comes to the specific interactions (or lack thereof) between yourself and the paraeducators in your department you are training? (SQ1)
3. Please share examples of times where you have depended upon the paraeducators you train. (SQ2)
4. Please share examples of times where you have worked independently from the paraeducators you train. (SQ2)
5. Please describe any behaviors you display that contributes to the relationship between you and the paraeducator. (SQ3)
6. Please describe the level of interaction you have with the paraeducators you train, and whether or not that plays a role within the skill level of the paraeducator. (SQ1)
7. In your opinion, what interactions between the paraeducator and special education teacher trainer help paraeducators become successful when it comes to supporting students with special needs in the inclusive setting? (SQ1)
8. Tell me about your satisfaction or dissatisfaction regarding the training of paraeducators within your department. (CQ)
9. Tell me about the struggles you may have experienced as a trainer of paraeducators within your department. (SQ3)
10. Please explain how your interactions help you relate or not relate to the paraeducators you train within your department? (SQ1)
11. Is there anything else you would like to share that is related to training paraeducators? (CQ)

APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Describe the amount and type of interaction you have with the novice paraeducators you train over the course of a school day. (SQ1)
2. What specific supports has your school/or school administration put in place for you, to support your role as a special education teacher who trains paraeducators in the inclusive setting? (CQ)
3. Describe any situations you have encountered that affect your level of dependence upon the paraeducator, or support your level of independence from the paraeducators in your department. (SQ2)
4. What external factors contribute to the level of interaction or lack of interaction that occurs between yourself and the paraeducators in your department whom you train? (SQ1).

**APPENDIX I: INITIAL CODES WITH SOURCE OF DATA IN WHICH IT WAS
FOUND (OBSERVATIONS, INTERVIEWS, FOCUS GROUPS)**

Codes	Interviews	Observations	Focus Groups
Trainee Will Help/Repeat Directions	X	X	X
Trainee Provides Testing Supports for Students	X		X
Trainer gets Along With Trainee	X	X	X
Discussion With Trainee	X	X	X
Respect and Patience for Trainee	X	X	
Trainers Working/training Through Lunch	X	X	X
Trainee Completes Daily Tasks	X	X	
Trainees are Inadequately Trained	X		X
Trainees Use Professional Judgement	X		
Lack of Providing Resources	X	X	X
Trainee Completes Data Collection	X		
Trainee Works With Small Groups	X	X	X
Trainee Provides Successful differentiation	X	X	X
Interaction Throughout the Day by Trainer	X		X

Trainer Provides Training: Modeling of Strategies	X	X	
County Led Trainings	X		
Lack of Time for Training	X		X
Natural Ability of Trainee	X	X	X
Support and encouragement Given by Trainer	X	X	
Unpredictable Students	X	X	
Trainer Relationships Built With Trainees	X	X	X
Questions Before, During, and After Training, asked by Trainee	X	X	
Trainee is Proactive Instead of Reactive	X		X
Trainee Appreciation Shown by Trainer	X		
Comfort/Physical Ease with Trainee	X	X	X
Special Education Team	X		X
Student Behavior De-escalation	X		X
Trainee Is Set In Their Ways/Non-Cooperative	X	X	X
Growth Into A Strong Skillset	X		X
Sharing Classrooms	X	X	
Classroom Locations	X		

Training Goals	X		X
Paperwork/Data Collection	X		X
Academic Support to Students	X	X	X
Independently Implement Strategies	X	X	
Fair is not equal	X		
Reading Support	X	X	X
Language Arts Support	X	X	X
Personality Types	X		X
Concern and Attentiveness of Trainer	X	X	
Trainer and Trainee Following a Schedule	X	X	X
Trainee Provides Clarity or Reiteration of Directions to Students	X	X	
Trainee: Hard Workers and Positive Attitude	X	X	
Email Communication Between Trainer and Trainee	X		
Lack of Down Time	X	X	
Trainee's Have a Heart for Children	X	X	
Reflective Listening and Feedback	X	X	

Lack of Interaction/Different Schedules	X	X	X
Trainer Professionalism	X	X	
Expectations of Trainees	X		X
Interventions Trainee's Provide To Students	X	X	X
Trainer and Trainee Duties	X		X
Trainee Belief/Buy-in	X		
Confidentiality	X		
Trainee Voice and Input	X	X	
Follow-Up/Debriefing	X		
Trainer Lack of Communication	X	X	X
Different Mindsets	X		X

APPENDIX J: NARROWED CODES WITH SOURCE OF DATA IN WHICH IT WAS FOUND (OBSERVATIONS, INTERVIEWS, FOCUS GROUPS)

Codes	Interviews	Observations	Focus Groups
Professionalism of Trainer	X	X	X
Trainer listens reflectively	X	X	X

Trainer builds relationships	X	X	X
Physical and Mental Health of Trainee	X	X	X
Supports and Training Strategies Provided by Trainer	X	X	X
Content knowledge held by trainee	X	X	X
Trainee communication skills	X	X	
Trainee's calmness and ability to react appropriately	X	X	
Trainee communication skills	X	X	X
Instructional practices and skills implemented to students by trainee	X		X
Trainee requirements unrelated to working with students	X	X	
Trainee sets the example for others in the workplace	X		X
Poor communication amongst trainer and trainee	X	X	X
Inadequate training for trainees	X	X	X
Responsive leadership by trainee	X	X	X
Physical location of trainer and trainee	X		X