DEVELOPING STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE COLLABORATION BETWEEN SPECIAL

EDUCATION TEACHERS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS: AN APPLIED STUDY

by

Brianna Noel Wilbanks

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

Daniel Baer, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Meredith Park, Ed. D., Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this applied study is to find ways to increase collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals in Title I, K-2 schools, and to find strategies to best train teachers and paraprofessionals to address this problem. This research study seeks to answer the following questions: Central Question: How can the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals be solved at Mountain Elementary School (a pseudonym) in North Georgia? To answer this question, interviews, focus groups, and a survey were used to collect data. Next, the data were transcribed and analyzed for themes. Finally, based on this analysis, suggestions include developing professional development opportunities for teachers and paraprofessionals, providing time for planning and collaborating, adequately compensating special education paraprofessionals, and considering personality traits when creating teacher-paraprofessional teams. The study concludes by offering suggestions regarding the resources and funds needed to solve the problem, stakeholder responsibilities, a timeline of solving the problem, and an evaluation plan.

Keywords: special education, collaboration, inclusion, teachers, paraprofessionals

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who has selflessly supported me throughout my journey. My husband, Matthew, stepped up and took care of our family and household needs while I was busy working on my research and writing. Our children Chyenne, Riley, and Anna, have all been major encouragements and a constant reminder of the importance of seeing something through to the end. Additionally, my family has been a constant reminder that no matter how much work there is to be done, it's important to also play, take vacations, and value those I love most.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank God for providing me with the skills, mindset, endurance, and passion needed to conduct my study. I am thankful for the opportunity to complete this study and I have been blessed beyond words.

I would also like to thank my parents, Teresa and Tom Cox, and my in-laws, Debbie and Tim Wilbanks, for continually supporting me, encouraging me, watching my children for me, and pushing me to finish.

Additionally, I would like to thank the special education teachers and paraprofessionals that I have worked closely with over the past eight years and that inspired me to carry out a study that would benefit us and the students we serve. Thank you for all you do and especially to those who participated in my study to help benefit our school.

The chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Daniel Baer, and committee member Dr. Meredith Park, have continually encouraged me throughout this journey and encouraged me to put forth my best effort. They have helped shape me into a critical thinker and better researcher. Without the excellent feedback they have shared with me, I would not have been able to complete my study. I will forever be thankful for the help they provided me with.

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List of Abbreviations

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this applied study is to find ways to increase collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals in Title I, K-2 schools and to find strategies to best train teachers and paraprofessionals to address this problem of limited collaboration. Further research is needed regarding K-5 paraprofessionals working with special education students to determine the best strategies and practices for collaboration. The specific stakeholders for this study are educational professionals, including teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators working in K-2, rural settings. The following section contains the background, historical context, social context, theoretical context, learning theory, problem statement, purpose statement, the significance of the study, research questions, definitions, and summary. The central question driving this study involves the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals being solved in Title I, K-2 special education classrooms in North Georgia.

Background

This research seeks to use interviews, a focus group, and a survey to determine ways paraprofessionals and teachers can be adequately trained on how to effectively collaborate to meet the needs of their students with disabilities. Paraprofessionals are individuals working in school systems to help meet the needs of diverse learners. Often, paraprofessionals work in younger grade classrooms as well as with students with disabilities in general education classrooms and special education classrooms. Sometimes, paraprofessionals have limited experience and education regarding working with students (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2017). Furthermore, teachers are not always adequately trained to enter the field, ready to supervise, and train paraprofessionals to be effective (Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2016). At times, this lack of

training impacts the ability of teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate effectively (Brown and Stanton-Chapman, 2017).

Historical Context

Before 1975 public schools in America did not always provide students with disabilities the same education as their non-disabled peers (Wright & Wright, 2020). In 1975, Congress implemented the Education of All Handicapped Children Act. This act ensured that students with disabilities were instructed in their least restrictive and received a free appropriate public education and that students with disabilities and their parents received procedural safeguards that helped protect them (Wright & Wright, 2020). Then in 1990, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act became the Individuals with Disabilities Act and gave students with disabilities the right to have access to the general curriculum in their least restrictive environments as determined by their IEP teams.

Since IDEA has been implemented, the rights of students with disabilities have evolved to provide students with more rights. School systems have started protecting the rights of students with disabilities, providing them with individualized instruction, and improving their education (Wright & Wright, 2020). Furthermore, more recently, students have been included in general education classrooms. Currently, 62% of children with disabilities are instructed in the general education classroom for the majority of the day. With the increase of students being instructed in the general education classroom more often, the service models have also evolved. Students with disabilities often receive services from either a co-teacher or paraprofessional in conjunction with a general education teacher in the general education classroom. While co-teachers are required to have an education degree, paraprofessionals are not.

Instead, paraprofessionals, also known as teacher aides, teaching assistants, or paraeducators, work with the teacher under the teachers' supervision to help provide instruction to the students in their classrooms (Douglas et al., 2016). Historically, paraprofessionals' duties involved preparing materials for lessons, helping keep up with basic paperwork, and fulfilling duties in other areas of the school. More recently, their duties have evolved. They are now expected to be involved with direct instruction and classroom management while also fulfilling the obligations they had in the past. Paraprofessionals are now one of the primary supports for students with disabilities (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012). Often, paraprofessionals and teachers struggle to collaborate as expected effectively.

Social Context

This research seeks to use interviews, a focus group, and a survey to determine ways paraprofessionals and teachers can be adequately trained on how to effectively collaborate to meet the needs of their students with disabilities. Teachers attend college and earn degrees and certifications to enter the workforce; however, paraprofessionals are not required to have this same education. Paraprofessionals have little to no experience working with students with disabilities, and paraprofessionals do not feel prepared to teach students (Brown and Stanton-Chapman, 2017). Studies show that paraprofessionals can be trained using modeling and coaching from their supervising teachers (Mason, Schnnitz, Gerow, An, & Wills, 2019; Scheelr, Morano, & Lee, 2018). Paraprofessionals have many responsibilities and are often working in classrooms where they are unaware of what their expectations are (Clarke & Visser, 2016). Therefore, teachers and paraprofessionals need to continue to find ways to build their relationships and continue strengthening their skills to meet their students' needs.

Theoretical Context

The social learning theory and adult learning theory can both be used to help describe ways in which paraprofessionals need to be taught to learn the best way to instruct students (Bandura, 1977; Knowles, 1973). Providing a theoretical framework when creating qualitative research is vital to be able to guide the research and explain why individuals may behave in a specific way. By connecting research to theory, researchers can explain why things occur based on theories that have been previously developed. When looking into special education paraprofessionals and teachers and their ability to collaborate and learn from one another, two theories can help explain the process. These theories include the social cognitive theory and the adult learning theory.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's social learning theory is based on people observing one another and learning from their actions (Bandura, 1977; Wood & Bandura, 1989). More specifically, individuals learn from each other's cognitive, behavioral, and environmental stimuli. For effective modeling to occur, the social learning theory states that attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation must be present (Bandura, 1977). Additionally, the social cognitive theory, which was later developed by Albert Bandura and is closely related to the social learning theory, discusses self-efficacy, or one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or to accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1986).

As paraprofessionals and teachers work together, they can learn from one another as they observe how to interact and teach the students they serve. While frequently paraprofessionals enter the field with skills and knowledge to add to the classroom, they lack prior training and ongoing professional development to help them in the classroom (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016). On the other hand, teachers enter the field with a minimum four-year college degree but

can learn from the skills and knowledge that their paraprofessionals exhibit. Based on Bandura's social learning theory teachers and paraprofessionals may learn for each other.

Supervising teachers must collaborate with other teachers to help build their self-efficacy in terms of training paraprofessionals. Additionally, supervising teachers should work with paraprofessionals and help them build self-efficacy (Wermer, Brock, & Seaman, 2018). Paraprofessionals and teachers can learn a lot from one another through observations as described in the social learning theory as they observe and encourage each other in the classroom.

Adult Learning Theory

Malcom Knowles (1973) described the adult learning theory using the andragogical theory with four major assumptions that apply to this study. The andragogical theory describes the methods and practice of teaching adults (Knowles, 1973; Knowles, Elwood, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). The four main assumptions that were originally described were self-concept, the role of experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning. Later, motivation was also added. Furthermore, Knowles discussed three types of learners: the goal-oriented learners, the activity-oriented learners, and the learning-oriented learners (Knowles 1973; Knowles, Elwood, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

As teachers prepare to train paraprofessionals to be more effective with collaboration, they must consider the adult learning theory and the most effective ways to teach adults. When looking at how to train teachers and paraprofessionals based on the adult learning theory, teachers and paraprofessionals will have to believe they can be successful with collaboration, they will have to experience collaboration to learn from it, they must be ready and willing to

learn, they must be given time to learn and grow, and they must have the motivation to want to learn how to effectively collaborate.

Problem Statement

The problem is that special education teachers and paraprofessionals are struggling to collaborate to meet the needs of their students at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia. Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2016) concluded that teachers and paraprofessionals need to build and maintain their relationships to work with one another. Additionally, several studies mention the importance of teachers and paraprofessionals, creating effective teams (Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2015; Biggs et al., 2016).

While teachers have certifications, many paraprofessionals lack these similar college degrees. In the state of Georgia, paraprofessionals must hold a state license from the Georgia Professionals Standards Commissions, which requires an individual to be employed as a paraprofessional and hold an associate's degree or higher, have completed two years of college, or have a high school diploma or GED and pass the paraprofessionals GACE assessment. Brown and Chapman (2017) found that paraprofessionals did not feel like they had received enough training to support special education students. However, Brock and Carter (2016) found that paraprofessionals were able to implement programs with fidelity after being trained by a teacher. Furthermore, Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2019) concluded that teachers must have assertive communication skills and the ability to collaborate, coach, organize and manage conflicts while being open-minded, respectful, and personable. Therefore, an applied, multimethod research study may help identify ways for Mountain Elementary School to better train teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of the lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School and to find strategies to best train teachers and paraprofessionals on collaboration practices. The theory guiding this study is Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory as the theory connects with paraprofessionals and their self-efficacy to be able to collaborate with teachers. In conjunction with the Social Learning Theory, the Adult Learning Theory discusses how these individuals might best learn how to collaborate. A multimethod design will be used, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The first approach used consisted of semi-structured interviews with special education teachers and paraprofessionals. The second approach used was surveys with special education teachers and paraprofessionals using a web-based instrument. The third approach consisted of observations of special education teachers and paraprofessionals.

Significance of the Study

Special Education teachers and paraprofessionals are required to collaborate now, more than ever, to meet the needs of students with disabilities. As teachers and paraprofessionals continue to work together to meet the needs of diverse learners, researchers must conduct studies that involve multiple stakeholders to provide more information about the experiences of the stakeholders (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2017). Continued research needs to be conducted, using member checks and triangulation of data, to determine how schools can better prepare teachers and paraprofessionals to work together to meet the needs of their students (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016). Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2018) suggest future studies be conducted on teachers and paraprofessionals working with students with mild and moderate disabilities. Furthermore, Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2016) suggest researching teacher-paraprofessional collaboration from other regions. Several stakeholders need to be informed regarding what

teachers and paraprofessionals need to be able to collaborate, including preservice programs, administrators, and teachers (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2018). By gaining more insight regarding what teachers and paraprofessionals need to do to be able to better collaborate, school systems can begin implementing strategies to help strengthen collaboration.

This study provides school systems, administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals with the information they need to foster collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals by taking into account the perceptions of both teachers and paraprofessionals. This study will not only identify why teachers and paraprofessionals are struggling to collaborate but will also identify what these individuals need to do to be able to improve collaboration. This includes working to strengthen specific dispositions that are identified in the study as being important for special education teachers and paraprofessionals to possess. While this study focuses specifically on K-2, Title I schools in North Georgia, the information discovered can be used to help stakeholders better prepare teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate better. Additionally, future researchers will be able to compare their studies regarding teachers and paraprofessionals to this study. The current study may add new information regarding the support teachers, and paraprofessionals need to the body of existing literature.

Research Questions

Central Question: How can the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals be solved at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?

Sub-question 1: How would special education teachers and paraprofessionals in interviews describe ways to solve the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals in Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?

Sub-question 2: How would educators in a focus group solve the problem of lack of collaboration between paraprofessionals and teachers at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?

Sub-question 3: How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of a lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals?

Definitions

1. *Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)* - IDEA was passed in 1975 and is focused on providing students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities and giving parents a say in decisions being made for their child (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

2. *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)* - Least restrictive environment is a part of IDEA and states that students with disabilities should be instructed with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

3. *Paraprofessionals*- Paraprofessionals are individuals with or without professional-level certifications that work under the supervision of professionals, or teachers, to provide support to students (Georgia Code Title 20, 2018)

4. *Co-teaching*- When two or more certified teachers work together to provide varied knowledge and skills to instruct a diverse group of learners (Georgia Department of Education).

Summary

Special education teachers and paraprofessionals struggle to collaborate effectively. Teachers tend to feel that paraprofessionals are not equipped to complete the tasks assigned to them (Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2015), and paraprofessionals feel underappreciated (Brown &

Chapman, 2017). Stakeholders need to find ways to help teachers and paraprofessionals strengthen their collaborative efforts. The adult learning theory and the social learning theory may help describe ways stakeholders can prepare teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate. The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals in Title I, K-5 schools and to find strategies to best train teachers and paraprofessionals to aid in collaboration.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This research seeks to identify strategies that a rural North Georgia elementary school can implement to help special education teachers and paraprofessionals collaborate to meet the needs of diverse learners. Special education teachers and paraprofessionals are required to work together to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the classroom; however, they often neglect to use research-based strategies to effectively collaborate to use best practices to meet the needs of their students. Many factors found in the classroom lead to tension rising between teachers and paraprofessionals as they fail to collaborate to meet the needs of the students they serve. Research shows that this is due to the weaknesses of both teachers and paraprofessionals, and each group of individuals needs to work to improve the collaborative efforts of teacher-paraprofessional teams. When teams negate collaborating, this may negatively impact students. Research must be conducted to develop strategies to best train teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate better, so they can better meet the needs of their students. The following chapter contains a theoretical framework related to the social learning theory and the adult learning theory, related literature to collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals, and a summary related to the purpose and problem that will be identified in this study.

Theoretical Framework

Teachers and paraprofessionals struggle to collaborate to meet the needs of diverse learners. As strategies are developed to help improve collaboration, educators must consider important theories that could help explain the research and strategies that are identified in themes found throughout the study. Two of the theories that may help determine best training practices for teachers and paraprofessionals are Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and

Malcom Knowles' (1973) adult learning theory. These theories can help stakeholders when determining how to best train teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate. More specifically, the social learning theory can help explain how individuals can learn from watching each other (Bandura, 1977), and the adult learning theory can help when teaching adults by considering what adults need to be able to learn effectively (Knowles', 1973). Furthermore, each theory contains specific details that may be beneficial for stakeholders to consider as they develop training programs for teachers and paraprofessionals. When the research data are analyzed to develop themes, ideas are suggested related to the topic, and conclusions are made. These theories will be used to guide major aspects of the study to describe how training practices need to be implemented for teachers and paraprofessionals to learn best practices to teach students with a variety of needs.

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's social learning theory was first described as people learning from one another by observing each other (Bandura, 1977; Wood & Bandura, 1989). If individuals see a specific behavior gain the desired outcome, they are likely to exhibit the behavior as well (Bandura, 1977; Wood & Bandura, 1989). When learning through modeling and observing, it is important that attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation all take place to ensure success (Bandura, 1977; Wood & Bandura, 1989). The person that is learning must remain attentive and retain what is being taught (Bandura, 1977). Additionally, as people interact with one another, they can learn through others' actions and modeling (Bandura, 1977; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Later, Bandura went on to describe self-efficacy in the social cognitive theory as being one's own belief of success to accomplish what one is trying to do. Additionally, (Bandura, 1988) found that personal factors can be changed to improve the level of

organizational functioning. This includes developing competencies through modeling, strengthening individuals' beliefs in their capabilities so they use their talents, and establishing self-motivation by setting goals (Bandura, 1988). Given this, individuals need to have the confidence that they can complete the task to be successful. Therefore, if an individual has little experience, minimal success, or lack of confidence with accomplishing whatever it is they are trying to do, then they may struggle to complete the task.

The social learning theory added to the previous work of Erik Pavlov's classical conditioning and B.F. Skinner's operant conditioning (Bandura, 1977). Classical conditioning refers to learning through association or from the environment (Pavlov, 1902), which means that individuals learn to associate certain behaviors with particular routines. Pavlov discovered this in an experiment with dogs, where he determined that dogs began salivating when they heard a noise that they associated with being fed (Pavlov, 1902). Given this, adults may learn certain things from what is occurring in their surroundings. Operant conditioning refers to learning through rewards and consequences (Skinner, 1938). Moreover, individuals learned when positively reinforced for doing what is expected or when given a consequence for a less desired behavior (Skinner, 1938). When looking at learning through the terms of operant conditioning, individuals may choose if they want to participate in the behavior (Skinner, 1938). Operant conditioning suggests that individuals may learn through rewards and consequences (Skinner, 1938).

Bandura (1977) used both classical conditioning and operant conditioning as a foundation for the social learning theory. Also, the social learning theory added to previous theories the process of learning through observation in the environment and using the cognitive process for observational learning (Bandura, 1977). Given this, individuals observe one another and then

either exhibit similar behaviors or learn not to do certain things. When looking at Bandura's

social learning theory in terms of how teachers and paraprofessionals need to be trained to better

collaborate, training programs must be developed with considerations of the social learning

theory and how teachers and paraprofessionals may learn from observing one another in the

classroom. Therefore, teachers and paraprofessionals must be intentional about their learning and

pay attention to the effective strategies they are being taught through modeling. If they see their

partner do something that works, they should also try the same strategy. Furthermore, if

something is not effective, they should learn not to use that strategy or tweak it to make it an

effective strategy. Also, individuals must be willing to reproduce the positive behaviors and

strategies they observe and possess the motivation needed to continue carrying out the learned

behavior (Bandura, 1977). Moreover, it is also important that teachers and paraprofessionals can

recognize ineffective strategies that are used in the classroom, so they can avoid repeating these

strategies. If a teacher or paraprofessional is not successful with a particular strategy, they must

continually adjust the strategy so that it is effective or find a new strategy that will benefit the

student or students. Additionally, stakeholders should be sure to make sure the teams they are

pairing together will be a good fit and allow experienced teachers and paraprofessionals to teach

novice educators.

The social learning theory helps describe how humans learn when they are in social

settings, and one component of how humans learn in social settings depends on their motivation

(Bandura, 1977). When determining the impact motivation has on the present student, it is

important that special education teachers and paraprofessionals have the motivation needed to

want to work with students with disabilities as well as with the teachers or paraprofessional they

are assigned to so that they have the motivation required to learn from one another. Without

motivation, then the social learning theory may not influence how teachers and paraprofessionals learn.

Wood and Bandura (1989) state, "Mastery modeling programs have been successfully applied to help supervisors develop competencies" (p. 364). Given this, the social cognitive theory can help teachers and paraprofessionals guide and teach one another about how to use effective, evidence-based strategies to help students with disabilities be successful, both academically and behaviorally. Furthermore, Bandura's social cognitive theory will be used as the basis to describe how teachers and paraprofessionals can learn how to use evidence-based strategies to teach students with disabilities. When paraprofessionals work alongside teachers, they can observe and learn strategies from one another that they can use with their students effectively.

Adult Learning Theory

Malcolm Knowles developed the adult learning theory (Knowles, 1973; Knowles, Elwood, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). The adult learning theory describes how adults and children learn differently from one another (Knowles, 1973; Knowles et al., 2005). Children learn through pedagogy, or the method and practice of teaching youth, and adults learn through andragogy, or the method and practice of teaching adults (Knowles, 1973; Knowles et al., 2005). Specifically, the strategies used to teach adults vary drastically from the strategies used to teach children.

Knowles originally developed the Andragogical Theory with four major assumptions (Knowles, 1973; Knowles et al., 2005). These assumptions included a change in self-concept, the role of experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning (Knowles, 1973; Knowles et al., 2005). Later, motivation was also added to the assumptions (Knowles et al., 2005). Additionally, three types of learners were described: goal-oriented learners, activity-oriented learners, and

learning-oriented learners (Knowles, 1973; Knowles et al., 2005). All of these assumptions and traits help describe how adults should be taught so that they can learn. Knowles (1973) stated, "…our focus has started to shift from what the teacher does to what happens to the learners" (p. 41). It is important that when training and teaching adults to be effective paraprofessionals, we look at what they are currently doing and how they apply what they are taught as well as how they will best learn the strategies that we are trying to teach them. The adult learning theory also describes the importance of adult learners understanding the why behind what they are learning; adult learners needing to have self-concept and self-direction; how different experiences affect how adults learn; and that adults become ready to learn when they can make real-world connections (Knowles et al., 2005). Adults have many more experiences than children, and these experiences impact how adults learn. Given this, stakeholders that are teaching adults must consider the experiences of the adults they are teaching and how past experiences may impact how they learn.

The adult learning theory added to andragogy and the theory of adult education that was originally developed by Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. Rosentock-Huessy referred to andragogy as being a term for education for adults and differs from pedagogy and demagogy (Loeng, 2012). Rosentock-Hussey inspired Lindeman to use the term andragogy, and Lindeman became Knowles' mentor (Loeng, 2012). Much of Knowles' work was developed around previous ideas from Lindeman, and Knowles was the first person to discuss andragogy in America as well as transform it from a term to a theory (Loeng, 2012).

The adult learning theory may be able to help to supervise teachers better train paraprofessionals, and school systems and colleges to better train their teachers. Educators are often taught how to teach individuals using pedagogy since many programs are geared toward

teaching youth. Therefore, stakeholders developing training programs for adults must consider that adults learn through andragogy. Those training adults must be aware of what their trainees' experiences have been so that they know how they may respond to specific training presented to them. Additionally, adults are motivated intrinsically (Elwood, Holton, & Swanson, 2015), and stakeholders that are responsible for training adults need to consider how this may differ from younger students that are extrinsically motivated. Meaning that while students typically complete work to earn rewards or avoid consequences, adults will perform to earn personal gains and knowledge. When stakeholders are working on training educators, these teaching strategies must be remembered and considered throughout the development and execution of the training so that the training programs offered to meet the needs of the participants. Therefore, as this study determines how to assist teachers and paraprofessionals better when collaborating, the adult learning theory should serve as a foundation to set up learning opportunities for adults.

Related Literature

Special education teachers and paraprofessionals are required to work together to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the classroom. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) states that students should be instructed in their least restrictive environments to every extent possible (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1997). When determining a student's least restrictive environment, students with disabilities should be instructed with their typical peers using the least amount of accommodations and modifications to the general education curriculum that the student needs to be successful.

Students with disabilities are served in a variety of settings, including the general education classroom and the special education classroom. Students with disabilities may be receiving instruction in the general education setting with paraprofessional support, under the

direction of a special education teacher. In both general education and special education settings, teachers are required to help students make progress through evidence-based practices (Walker & Smith, 2015). Special education teachers and paraprofessionals are required to give students the support they need to be successful, including appropriate accommodations and modifications outlined in their Individualized Education Program, as well as collect data regarding their progress toward meeting their goals. However, paraprofessionals are expected to serve students with limited training or experience working with students with disabilities (Banerjee, Chopra, & DiPalma, 2017). Additionally, teachers enter the field with very little knowledge about how to effectively supervise and coach a paraprofessional on how to implement components of the students' IEPs. Given these issues, the collaborative relationship formed between the teachers and paraprofessionals tends to be negatively impacted as tension develops. This literature review examines the need for additional strategies for special education teachers and paraprofessionals to be able to strengthen their ability to collaborate to meet the unique needs of their students. Also, this literature review discusses a variety of strategies that have been successful in the past to train teachers and paraprofessionals.

An extensive search of literature from 2015 to 2021 was conducted in the EBSCOhost and Google Scholar databases to discover literature related to the study. Search terms included special education teachers, special education paraprofessionals, students with disabilities, and collaboration. An extensive review of the literature was conducted regarding special education teacher and paraprofessional collaboration, themes that impact collaboration, and the strategies that have been used to help with collaboration. A review of the literature revealed several themes regarding collaboration. These themes included creating effective teams, experiences of paraprofessionals, experiences of teachers.

Creating Effective Teams Between Paraprofessionals and Teachers

Teachers and paraprofessionals must collaborate to create effective teams that work together for the best interest of their students (Cipriano et al., 2016). Teachers and paraprofessionals have many daily obligations, and when they can effectively collaborate, they are more successful. Olson et al. (2016) found that collaboration between all stakeholders is an essential component to providing students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum. Therefore, teachers and paraprofessionals must effectively work together so that students will thrive. While it may take more time upfront to learn how to work best with one another and ensure that individuals are appropriately trained, it will benefit the collaborative efforts of the individuals in the long run.

Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2018) suggest several groups of stakeholders that can assist teachers throughout their careers with learning how to collaborate. These stakeholders include professors in preservice programs, administrators at schools, and teachers themselves (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2018). When teachers and paraprofessionals do not effectively collaborate, they become frustrated and overwhelmed. Frustration can cause tension between the teacher-paraprofessional team and this can further negate collaborative efforts. On the contrary, when teachers and paraprofessionals work together, they can support the students they serve effectively (Cole-Lade & Bailey, 2019). The ability for teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate is impacted by teacher-paraprofessional expectations and support that the paraprofessionals receive (Cole-Lade & Bailey, 2019). Therefore, all stakeholders play an important role in the effectiveness of collaboration.

When looking at relationships between teachers and paraprofessionals, it is important to look at how both groups of individuals can improve their collaboration skills. Cipriano et al.

(2016) identified four crucial elements to establish effective teams. These elements include solidarity, delegation to staff, respect, and disrespect (Cipriano et al., 2016). It is important that the teachers and paraprofessionals can support one another and not question each other's actions in front of the students (Cipriano et al., 2016). Additionally, special education teachers must be able to delegate tasks to their paraprofessionals (Cipriano et al., 2016). Ruppar et al. (2016) found that special education teachers felt more comfortable directing paraprofessionals than they did providing instruction to students with severe disabilities. If teachers have comfort directing paraprofessionals, then they will be more effective in working with them and training them. Teachers need to be able to assign jobs to their paraprofessionals without sounding rude or bossy. They also need to recognize paraprofessionals when they complete the tasks assigned to them. Respect for one another must also be established between special education teachers and paraprofessionals (Cipriano et al., 2016). These elements must be practiced daily to ensure that both groups of individuals feel valued and respected and develop an effective team.

Furthermore, Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2016) found five themes that influenced the relationships between teachers and paraprofessionals, including teacher influences, paraprofessional influences, shared influences, administrative influences, and underlining influences. Additionally, studies indicate that paraprofessionals, teachers, and administration must work together to create teams consisting of positive relationships; teachers noted a need for more training in regards to supervising paraprofessionals; and it was noted that paraprofessionals also need additional training on how to support students (Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2015). Often teachers graduate without the skills to supervise and train paraprofessionals effectively, and paraprofessionals begin working at schools with limited training.

Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2016) determined that the relationships between paraprofessionals and teachers are complex. It was determined that teachers and paraprofessionals must be supported to meet the needs of students with disabilities as well as maintain positive relationships with one another (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016). Teachers and paraprofessionals spend the majority of the day together, and they must have personality styles that complement one another as well as similar views and goals. It is also vital that teachers and paraprofessionals are seen as equal partners and that they do not feel that one is more superior to the other (Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2015). At times, superiority may occur when teachers feel that they have obtained a degree higher than that of the paraprofessional or when the paraprofessional feels that they have more experience than the teacher. Instead, teachers and paraprofessionals must understand that they both bring a unique skill set to the classroom, and each has strengths and weaknesses that will impact the instruction taking place. Teachers and paraprofessionals discuss the importance of paraprofessionals providing input in the classroom, establishing rapport, and sharing a vision for the team to be successful (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016). When looking at the collaborative efforts of teachers and paraprofessionals, themes arise, including having mutual respect, building positive relationships, open communication, and similar personalities (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016). Overall, professors, administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals must put forth the effort to ensure that all stakeholders are best trained on how to collaborate to better support students with disabilities.

Mutual Respect

When there is no mutual respect between teachers and paraprofessionals, instruction suffers. Rock et al. (2016) found that as the special education teachers' needs change, stakeholders must pay close attention to the digital revolution, the diversity gap, credibility,

collective impact, and the culture of we. Among many things, special education teams must use a team-based approach (Rock et al., 2016). With a team-based approach, comes the need for having mutual respect for one another. However, Iadarola et al. (2015) found that paraprofessionals did not feel respected by their teachers and felt like the teacher did not treat them appropriately. It was also noted that this largely impacted student instruction (Iadarola et al., 2015). Teachers and paraprofessionals working together have varying levels of experience. Teams may consist of veteran teachers with novice paraprofessionals, teachers that recently graduated paired with a paraprofessional with 20 or more years of experience, or a team with little or extensive experience. However, to develop an effective teacher-paraprofessional team that can produce effective instruction, mutual respect must be maintained between the two.

Douglas, Chapin, and Nolan (2016) discussed the importance of teachers respecting paraprofessionals and treating them as equal team members. Given this, teachers should not assign their paraprofessionals tasks that they are not willing to complete themselves. Additionally, Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2017) found that paraprofessionals are left feeling like they have been given little recognition or appreciation. Douglas, Chapin, and Nolan (2016) also noted the importance of providing paraprofessionals with positive feedback and appreciation. When a paraprofessional feels valued, they are likely to be more efficient in their daily tasks. Therefore, teachers should continuously praise and thank their paraprofessionals for the tasks that they help the teacher accomplish.

While mutual respect must be shared between teachers and paraprofessionals, Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2017) found that paraprofessionals feel less superior than their supervising teachers and work hard to please them. Often, this means that paraprofessionals are dropping what they are doing, including student instruction, to comply immediately with teachers'

instructions (Brown & Chapman, 2017). By working hard to please their supervising teachers, paraprofessionals neglect to complete student instruction. However, the paraprofessional is ultimately there to serve and provide instruction to the students in their classrooms.

Building Relationships. As teachers and paraprofessionals learn to work together as an effective team, they must build efficient relationships from the beginning. Teacher-paraprofessional teams need to build relationships starting the first day they know they will be working together Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2016) determined that teachers and paraprofessionals discussed the importance of building relationships and the positive impact that building personal relationships had on their professional relationships. Furthermore, Collins et al. (2017) state that new teachers that effectively collaborate with others gain the skills they need to foster positive results for students with disabilities. When teachers and paraprofessionals build relationships, they strengthen their skills with trust, compromise, and mutual respect (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016). Additionally, their communication skills improve. Strengthening relationships and communication skills will help the teacher-paraprofessional teams best instruct the students in their room as well as more easily resolve conflict or disagreements when needed.

One way to help build relationships is to get to know one another on a personal level. As teachers and paraprofessionals begin to learn more about the people they are working with, they gain a deeper respect for one another. Douglas, Chapin, and Nolan (2016) found that teachers and paraprofessionals had more positive experiences when they were able to work together, had mutual respect for one another, and were able to communicate with one another. Therefore, teachers and paraprofessionals should continually work toward building their relationships with one another.

Open Communication. It is important that teacher-paraprofessional teams also have an open communication plan. Teachers and paraprofessionals should feel open to discussing professional topics with one another. Douglas, Chapin, and Nolan (2016) noted that teachers discussed the importance of maintaining good communication with their paraprofessionals. Open communication requires that the teachers and paraprofessionals working together are approachable, respectful of one another, and provide valuable feedback. Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2016) stated that many teachers and paraprofessionals found that it was important that teacher-paraprofessional teams maintained communication that fosters trust and honesty. Additionally, Leigers et al. (2017) found that when training stakeholders on how to implement peer support arrangements to improve peer relationships, team members needed to have good communication and positivity. Therefore, open communication between teachers and paraprofessionals is essential.

While open communication is important, teachers and paraprofessionals often struggle to find the time to communicate. One way to ensure that open communication is maintained is for teachers and paraprofessionals to have scheduled meeting times (Douglas, Chapin, & Noan, 2016).). Stewart (2019) found that it is important that teachers and leaders can effectively communicate paraprofessional responsibilities. One way to help keep communication open is by using written forms, including email or text messages (Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2016). It was also noted that while paraprofessionals have such a vast amount of job duties, their job description may not be able to be noted in list form, but instead in a graphic organizer type format where strategies for many different situations can be described (Stewart, 2019). Teachers must find ways to communicate expectations to paraprofessionals.

If teams struggle with communication, they must find ways to address it. Douglas, Chapin, and Nolan (2016) said teachers suggested discussing expectations, providing written directions, sharing ideas, and posting schedules. If someone has a good idea, gets upset, or wants to know more about something, it is important that they express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Building communication skills will allow the teammates to learn from one another. Additionally, this will prevent individuals from internalizing feelings about particular issues and then later having issues regarding the situations that are occurring. Open communication leads to transparency and team building. On the contrary, when teams fail to have open communication, tension may rise as they hold in their thoughts and ideas.

Furthermore, it is the responsibility of supervising teachers and administrators to communicate expectations and provide ongoing support to paraprofessionals (Stewart, 2019). By having a plan to communicate expectations to paraprofessionals, paraprofessionals will begin to learn exactly what is expected of them each day in the classroom. Additionally, they will avoid stepping on their supervising teacher's toes by doing something outside their daily expectations.

Similar Personalities. When trying to create effective teacher-paraprofessional teams within schools, stakeholders may benefit from looking at the personalities of the teachers and paraprofessionals that will be working together. Each individual brings their own set of experiences to the table, but with that comes varying personalities. To help combat some discrepancies that may occur between teachers and paraprofessionals, leaders should look at each person's strengths and weaknesses to ensure the individuals who are being paired together will be an effective team. Additionally, administrators should consider the wishes of the teachers and paraprofessionals. Bettini et al. (2017) found that special education administrators look more closely at personal characteristics than they do teaching skills because they perceive that skills

are more easily taught than personal characteristics and traits. Additionally, administrators should not allow teachers and paraprofessionals to talk negatively about one another but instead, listen to their concerns about true personality clashes. Then, administrators should address concerns between teachers and paraprofessionals through team building and training before looking at other placement options.

Many personality tests are available that can help school systems guide teachers and paraprofessionals to learn more about each other and the characteristics that each one possesses. Administrators can administer personality tests during pre-planning to help coworkers better understand one another. It is also important that teachers and paraprofessionals realize one another's strengths, weaknesses, interests, and talents (Riggs, 2004). By understanding one another, teacher-paraprofessional teams will be able to understand what each other brings to the table. Then, they will be able to help each other continue to improve weak areas, continue to strengthen strong areas, and help balance one another to make an effective team.

Creating Time. Another issue that teachers and paraprofessionals face when creating effective teams is finding the time to build positive relationships with one another and to collaborate. Billingsley et al. (2019) found that special educators need time for collaboration with individuals that serve their students as well as time for individual planning. Teachers and paraprofessionals have many daily responsibilities, including planning daily instruction, preparing materials, instructing students, managing behaviors, attending meetings, and helping their co-workers. Many of their students require small group or one-on-one instruction for all activities, so they spend the majority of their day providing direct instruction to students. While teachers have a planning period to help complete some of these tasks, paraprofessionals spend the teachers' planning time supporting students with disabilities. Furthermore, paraprofessionals

typically get paid by the hour and are not expected to come in early or stay late to help find time to collaborate.

For teachers and paraprofessionals to build effective teams, they must be creative in finding time to collaborate. Finding time to collaborate requires the teachers and paraprofessionals to manage their time wisely and make time for collaboration. To strengthen relationships with one another, teachers and paraprofessionals should eat lunch or dinner together or spend time outside of school, learning more about each other. Teachers should also encourage paraprofessionals to share information regarding their backgrounds, hobbies, and interests (Gerzel-Short, Conderman, & DeSpain, 2018). As teacher-paraprofessional teams begin to learn more about each other, they will begin to be more empathic and understanding about how each other reacts to specific situations. Additionally, they will be able to recover more quickly from disagreements and setbacks as they arise.

To find time to collaborate on a professional level, teachers and paraprofessionals can make lists throughout the day of questions and concerns to share later and schedule time every day to address these issues. By making a list, teacher-paraprofessional teams will not interrupt instruction to discuss these concerns. Depending on the needs of the class, teachers and paraprofessionals may find extra time to collaborate or may need to collaborate during play or rest time. Additionally, teachers may create short training videos to share with their paraprofessionals that the paraprofessionals can view during a convenient time for them. Brock and Carter (2016) found that when teachers used videos paired with coaching and feedback, paraprofessionals were able to implement peer support arrangements, and three out of four students improved socially. Given this, paraprofessionals may benefit from watching training videos and then receiving feedback from their supervising teachers as they implement the

strategies. Using strategies similar to these will allow paraprofessionals to take part in training at times that are convenient for them.

If teacher-paraprofessional teams are unable to find the time to collaborate daily, then they need to address this with their administrator and ask for assistance. While teachers and paraprofessionals must be creative to find the time to collaborate, their collaborative efforts will benefit their relationship with one another and their instruction. Their collaborative efforts will, in turn, help students be successful. Collaboration is crucial when teachers and paraprofessionals are working together to meet the needs of their students, and they must set aside time each day to collaborate.

Experiences of Paraprofessionals

In school systems across America, there are more special education paraprofessionals than special education teachers (Brock, Seaman, & Downing, 2017). Often, paraprofessionals have little to no background or history, implementing evidence-based strategies to meet the needs of special education students (Brock & Carter, 2015). Furthermore, Douglas et al. (2019) found that training material for paraprofessionals often neglects to be facilitated by educators, is not alighted to legislation and standards, and disregards teaching methods in which adults learn best. Even more so, paraprofessionals are tasked with some of the most challenging behaviors ranging from behavioral needs, cognitive needs, and physical needs. Hendrix et al. (2018) found that paraprofessionals can serve as behavioral interventionists if appropriately trained and this can lead to a reduction in disorderly behavior from students. However, paraprofessionals must be trained on best practices to ensure student success (Douglas, Uitto, & Reinfelds, 2019). Brock and Anderson (2020) reviewed multiple studies and found that when training paraprofessionals, modeling, an implementation checklist, and performance feedback over time should occur in

conjunction with clearly defining the paraprofessionals' roles. Two strategies that have been proven to train paraprofessionals with working with students with disabilities include the use of web-based modules and teachers using modeling and coaching to train their paraprofessionals in the classroom. Both of these strategies take minimal time to implement but reap the rewards for the staff and students involved.

Paraprofessionals have also indicated that they do not feel adequately trained to support specific disabilities and their associated behaviors or implement instructional supports (Maltz & Seruya, 2018). Minimal training is due to many factors, including limited prior experience and lack of self-efficacy. Therefore, schools need to make sure they train their paraprofessionals on behavior and instructional strategies to help their paraprofessionals build self-efficacy and learn how to instruct students with disabilities. Bourque (2020) found that there has been a significant increase in how schools are using paraprofessionals and we must find an effective way to involve and train assistance. More effective training may improve instruction as well as help create a positive working relationship between the teacher and the paraprofessional as the paraprofessionals can complete more classroom tasks.

At times, paraprofessionals and teachers struggle to maintain positive relationships with one another, which may impact their ability to collaborate. Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2016) concluded that paraprofessionals aided in maintaining positive relationships with their teachers when they were cooperative, motivated, and focused on the students. As paraprofessionals work alongside teachers to meet students' needs, it is important that paraprofessionals exhibit these characteristics and work hard to assist the teachers and students they are assigned to. Maintaining positive relationships may lead to effective teacher-paraprofessional teams and student success.

Paraprofessionals Lack of Necessary Training to Support Students with Disabilities.

Paraprofessionals may enter the field with little to no training on instructional strategies and often just hold a high school diploma (Brock & Carter, 2015). However, paraprofessionals want to participate in additional training to increase their skills (Brock & Carter, 2015; Brown & Chapman, 2017; Wiggs et al., 2021). Additionally, Strait et al. (2020) concluded that when trained, paraprofessionals and graduate-level psychology students had the same success rate and implementation of fidelity when implementing a program they were trained to use. Walker et al. (2021) found that when appropriately trained, paraprofessionals can use interventions that will lead to success in students with autism. Additional training may lead to an increase in skills and knowledge related to the daily duties of paraprofessionals. Barrio and Hollingshead (2017) found that paraprofessionals felt that professional development increased their skills and knowledge regarding their roles. Moreover, key stakeholders working with or as paraprofessionals have noted the importance of improving the standards and training for paraprofessionals (Banerjee et al., 2017). Mason et al. (2020) noted that teachers discussed that observation and feedback for paraprofessionals may help them improve. With their willingness to learn strategies that will help them in the classroom, stakeholders need to find the most effective training tools to help them be successful. It is also important to note that Bertuccio et al., (2019) found that knowledge gained in training was not sustained over a seventh-month period for teachers and paraprofessionals that participated in training; therefore, ongoing training is beneficial. Barrio and Hollingshead (2017) also suggest that ongoing professional development models for paraprofessionals have helpful outcomes. While systems struggle to do this due to cost, time, and resources, it is an important component to ensure paraprofessional success.

Paraprofessionals have reported that they prefer receiving training with their colleagues in their current schools, in workshops, through courses online, and through classroom coaching (Walker, 2017). Additionally, paraprofessionals have indicated factors that impact their training, including that they do not feel comfortable addressing concerns with their teachers and do not feel as if their teachers effectively assigned responsibilities (Brown & Chapman, 2017). Stakeholders need to develop training strategies for both teachers and paraprofessionals that will aid in allowing paraprofessionals to feel more comfortable in the classroom as well as instruct teachers and paraprofessionals about appropriate duties to assign paraprofessionals. Sheehey et al. (2018) found that paraprofessionals do not feel adequately trained with communication and culture regarding the students they serve and they disclosed that most of their training came from past experiences. (Bodisch et al., 2016) found that a community college faculty was able to implement a curriculum program that led to an increase in both knowledge and confidence by both the faculty at the college as well as the paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals also felt like they were not adequately compensated, both financially and through praise, for their effort (Brown & Chapman, 2017). Stakeholders may look at strategies to improve positive reinforcement, training, and compensation in their districts. Improved training programs and positive reinforcement and compensation may ultimately benefit paraprofessionals' performance. To gain the best outcomes possible, administrators must provide them with ongoing professional development (Stockall, 2014).

Paraprofessionals Expectations. Paraprofessionals are expected to complete a variety of tasks both inside and outside of the classroom. The job description of paraprofessionals continues to advance (Cole-Lade & Bailey, 2019). Over the years, expectations of paraprofessionals have shifted from being focused on completing basic paperwork, preparing

materials, and completing duties around the school to completing all of this in addition to teaching students in small groups, whole groups, and working more closely with teachers to provide instruction. Additionally, paraprofessionals are now expected to handle classroom management and behavioral strategies when dealing with students with social and emotional needs. Often, there is very little clear explanation regarding paraprofessional expectations, and they step up and help wherever they are needed. Garwood et al. (2018) suggest the importance of promoting resiliency, emotional wellbeing, and self-awareness as paraprofessional demands continue to rise.

Clarke and Visser (2016) found that paraprofessionals are often working in classrooms without having an understanding regarding clear expectations of their roles. As schools hire paraprofessionals, schools must discuss the roles of paraprofessionals with the candidates, so they understand exactly what is expected of them. Expectations should be provided both verbally and through a written job description. Additionally, research-based professional development opportunities, like web-based modules and coaching and feedback, should be used to help train paraprofessionals and to remind them of their duties. School systems must communicate clear expectations and job descriptions to their paraprofessionals so that paraprofessionals understand what is expected. Providing expectations will clear up confusion and eliminate the feeling that they are being asked to do things that they feel should not be assigned to them.

Paraprofessional Training Using Technology. With advances in technology, more and more training programs are being offered using technology, including websites, modules, courses, and videos. When using training programs offered using technology, allows paraprofessionals to be trained without losing quality instruction time. Wright and Prescott (2018) provided paraprofessionals with training using video-based modeling and gave them a

chance to apply what they learned in the classroom. Through this training, paraprofessionals were able to improve their self-efficacy, knowledge, and performance concerning teaching students with disabilities. Additionally, Brock et al. (2016) found that after participating in a 2-hour training session, watching two video modules, and then participating in coaching and feedback after a 30-minute observation, paraprofessionals were able to implement evidence-based strategies with fidelity. After the paraprofessionals implemented the strategies, three of the four students progressed toward meeting their individualized education program goals. Cardinal et al. (2017) also found that paraprofessionals were able to successfully implement behavior strategies with fidelity that helped improve students' skills when participating in video modeling and brief in-person feedback. These strategies are cost-effective and take minimal time, yet help improve instruction for students. Knight et al. (2018) looked at the benefits of having paraprofessionals instruct students with disabilities using video prompting. Overall, there were benefits to using the video prompting and students were able to complete work after participating in video prompting (Knight et al., 2018).

Moreover, Mason et al. (2017) researched the benefits of using online instructional modules in conjunction with a practice-based coaching model when implementing discrete trial training. The results from this study differed from the results discussed in the previous studies. It was concluded that little to no change occurred with the video models; however, the practice-based coaching model helped paraprofessionals implement the strategy with fidelity (Mason et al., 2017). Suhreheinrich and Chan (2017) found that when using an iPad to provide immediate video feedback, paraprofessionals learned at a slower rate than teachers. It was noted that this could be due to the limited education and prior experience of the paraprofessionals (Suhreheinrich & Chan, 2017). Therefore, stakeholders must determine if technology or

modeling and coaching will produce the best outcomes for the paraprofessionals they are training. Additionally, it may be important for teachers and administrators to provide paraprofessionals with coaching and feedback as they implement new strategies they learn.

Paraprofessionals are also able to effectively use technology to help students make academic gains. Council et al. (2019) found that a paraprofessional could monitor students participating with a computer program to work on repeated reading intervention and then students may make gains in fluency and comprehension. Overall, technology may be beneficial to both training paraprofessionals on how to implement research-based strategies with fidelity as well as providing effective interventions to help students make gains.

Paraprofessional Training Using Modeling and Coaching. When training paraprofessionals on how to implement new strategies, using modeling and coaching may be highly beneficial. In this strategy, teachers model expected strategies and provide paraprofessionals with coaching and feedback as they apply the strategy themselves. Sobeck et al. (2020) found that when using both didactic instruction and performance feedback to train paraprofessionals on how to implement positive behavior support strategies, paraprofessionals received better outcomes when being trained with performance feedback. Brock and Carter (2017) conducted a meta-analysis and found that modeling and performance feedback improved fidelity in regards to implementing strategies. Mason et al. (2017) determined that modeling and coaching were more effective than having paraprofessionals participate solely in video or web-based models. Scheeler, Morano, and Lee (2018) found that when they used bug-in-ear technology, a device that allows teachers to into a device that is transmitted to a paraprofessional's ear, paraprofessionals were able to receive immediate feedback from their supervising teacher and improved their performance without interrupting instruction.

Furthermore, Ledford et al. (2017) found that the use of in-situ coaching and feedback was an effective strategy to help paraprofessionals and other non-certified staff implement evidence-based strategies to help meet the needs of students with disabilities. Paraprofessionals were able to help students improve their behavior by implementing the strategies learned. Levy and Begeny (2020) found that paraprofessionals were able to serve as effective interventionists after an eight-hour training and two coaching sessions. Even after coaching was removed, paraprofessionals were still able to implement the writing program with fidelity (Levy & Begeny, 2020).

When using modeling, coaching, and feedback, paraprofessionals can make gains related to implementing effective instructional practices (Ledford et al., 2018; Walker et al., 2020). Mason et al. (2019) found that paraprofessionals need specific directions on how to collect data with fidelity; however, once taught with formal coaching and feedback, paraprofessionals improved with data collection accuracy. Additionally, Brock and Carter (2016) conducted a study looking at the effectiveness of teachers training paraprofessionals to implement strategies and found that teachers were able to train paraprofessionals, paraprofessionals were able to implement programs with fidelity, and students benefited. Furthermore, when adequately trained, Biggs et al. (2018) found that paraprofessionals were able to use modeling and coaching to teach students communication skills that led to increased peer interaction, improved symbolic communication skills, and involvement of peers in communication interventions. Additionally, Biggs et al. (2017) found that when a special education teacher, a general education teacher, a paraprofessional, and a speech-language pathologist collaborated to implement augmentative and alternative communication, paraprofessionals were able to implement the program with fidelity. Also, when using Behavior Support Coaching for Paraprofessionals, paraprofessionals can

implement the support with fidelity and improvement in student behavior (Alperin et al. 2020; Wiggs et al., 2020)

Given all of this, when effectively trained, teachers should be able to model best practices for paraprofessionals so that paraprofessionals can use strategies to help students be successful in the classroom. Moreover, paraprofessionals can use similar modeling and coaching strategies to teach students with disabilities. When teachers take the time to train the paraprofessionals working in their classrooms, the students will benefit. Overall, current research shows that it is essential that school systems continue to communicate the importance of coaching and feedback to teachers that are working with paraprofessionals.

Paraprofessionals and Compensation. Paraprofessionals are typically compensated by the hour and earn a fraction of what their supervising teachers earn, even though they perform many of the same tasks. Paraprofessionals express their dissatisfaction with their careers in terms of monetary compensation (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2017). Even after paraprofessionals work in the field for several years, their compensation is still significantly less than most careers. While they do have Monday through Friday schedules with holidays and summer breaks off, and other benefits, including health insurance and retirement, the pay they bring home for working a full-time job is minimal. In Georgia, the average salary for paraprofessionals is $22,276 (Teacher Aide Salary in Georgia, 2020). Paraprofessionals average a gross salary of $1,856.33 a month. By the time taxes, insurances, and retirement are withheld, paraprofessionals are left bringing home under $1,000.00 a month for working a full-time job that is responsible for keeping students with disabilities safe while educating them. Current paraprofessional compensation is not enough for paraprofessionals to cover their monthly bills, thus leading to burnout, frustration, working more than one job, or leaving the field.

In addition to the minimal compensation, paraprofessionals also report not being recognized or appreciated for their work (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2017). Paraprofessionals describe not being thanked for completing tasks and feeling replaceable. Additionally, Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2017) observed paraprofessionals completing tasks for their supervising teachers and not being thanked for completing their requests and not recognizing their accomplishments. If paraprofessionals are not recognized and praised for the tasks they are accomplishing, then they can become discouraged and disappointed.

On the contrary, Brown, and Stanton-Chapman (2017) found that the supervising teachers of paraprofessionals recognized the minimal compensation but also expressed their opinions on the benefits and scheduling that paraprofessionals would not receive in other positions. Teachers felt that these benefits made up for the lack of compensation (2017). Furthermore, during interviews and observations, it was noted that teachers did not thank their paraprofessionals. In contrast, other times, they spoke highly of their paraprofessionals and showed their appreciation through their actions (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2017).

Experiences of Teachers

Special education teachers attend preservice programs that prepare and train them to teach the content using various teaching strategies and methods. In addition to being trained on how to teach the content, special education teachers are also trained on special education laws, strategies, and skills that are necessary to help students with disabilities be successful. Training may include additional courses and training in behavior, modified instruction, laws, and accommodations. However, very little is taught in these programs about how to supervise and manage paraprofessionals. Sobeck et al. (2021) found that pre-service should be better prepared in teaching programs by improving coursework, allowing time for preservice teachers to work

with paraprofessionals during their practicum, and identifying specific material to cover through the standards. an educator accepts a position as a special education teacher, they will often be assigned at least one paraprofessional to help support their students.

Bettini et al. (2020) found that special educators reported that special education teachers spend more time planning outside of school, are required to supervise paraprofessionals at a higher rate than their colleagues, have limited resources, and have unmanageable workloads. It is important that special education teachers are taught how to train, manage, and collaborate with the paraprofessionals that they are working with to ensure that the students are receiving a quality education. Training teachers on how to support and prepare paraprofessionals should be done during preservice programs as well as through ongoing professional development.

In addition to having to supervise and manage paraprofessionals, teachers must also be able to encourage and foster effective collaboration between themselves and their paraprofessionals. To do this, teachers must possess specific skills and dispositions that can be developed in preservice programs and as they gain experience working with paraprofessionals (Biggs, Gilson, and Carter, 2019). Additionally, teachers must be able to train paraprofessionals on how to effectively implement evidence-based practices so that paraprofessionals can help teachers meet the diverse needs of their students. However, teachers and paraprofessionals often find it difficult to find the time to spend training paraprofessionals. By taking time to train paraprofessionals, the collaborative efforts and student success will benefit in the long run.

Moreover, Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2016) concluded that teachers who were able to have a positive impact on the relationship between themselves and paraprofessionals were professional, organized, and had substantial skills and knowledge. Teachers must work to establish a positive relationship with their paraprofessionals to build a positive climate and

culture and ensure that the paraprofessional feels of equal importance to the teacher. It is also imperative that teachers use specific skills to collaborate with their paraprofessionals on how to teach the students using best practices. When teachers exhibit these skills, collaborative efforts may improve.

Special Education Teacher Burnout. Throughout the United States, there is a shortage of special education teachers. This shortage is due to lack of training, teacher burnout, lack of support and resources, and attrition. Hagaman and Casey (2018) found that new special education teachers leave the field due to stress, lack of recognition, and lack of support. Additionally, new special education teachers and preservice teachers reported that lack of specialized training and challenging caseloads led to special education teachers leaving the field. Hester et al. (2020) found that teachers were leaving the field due to lack of support from administration and feeling burnout due to the negative effects their careers had on their lives. Even with significant training and experience, Billingsley et al. (2020) found that even experienced special education teachers with unreasonable work demands and ineffective scheduling with lack of time for intensive instruction and collaboration. Additionally, Barnes et al. (2018) found that educators' perceptions related to the quality and amount of support they received were related to teacher burnout. Teachers reported a higher level of burnout when they reported lower levels of support (Barnes et al., 2018).

Furthermore, special education teachers who are teaching students with emotional or behavioral disorders are more stressed or burned out and have a higher rate of turnover than their colleagues (Bettini et al., 2020; O'Brien et al., 2019). The high turnover rate is due to working conditions including social and logistical conditions. However, (O'Brien et al., 2019) also found that teachers reported the importance of paraprofessionals to their classroom and stated that

paraprofessionals are an essential part of the classroom and collaboration takes place daily. Hagman and Casey (2018) determined that new special education teachers would prefer a paraprofessional to help serve the students and complete tasks in their place over completing new professional development.

Necessary Teacher Skills and Dispositions. Special education teachers that work with students with disabilities and supervise paraprofessionals must acquire specific dispositions to be successful. As teachers working with students with disabilities and managing paraprofessionals try to manage all of their duties, it may become overwhelming to the teachers if they do not exhibit specific skills. These skills ensure that students' needs are being met and require more out of the teacher than just knowing the content that needs to be taught.

Biggs et al. (2019) found specific competencies related to knowledge, skills, and dispositions when researching character traits teachers needed for teachers to be able to collaborate with paraprofessionals. Biggs et al. (2019) also discovered that teachers must have the knowledge and understanding of specific roles as well as an understanding of their paraprofessionals' backgrounds. Additionally, teachers must have assertive communication skills, the ability to collaborate with and coach paraprofessionals, the ability to resolve conflicts, and organizational skills. Furthermore, Gallagher and Bennett (2018) found six major principles to overcome as coaches prepared teachers to teach inclusively. These principles include teacher prerequisites, process, precipice, promotion, proof, and promise. Within these principles, Gallagher and Bennett (2018) discuss the importance of teacher receptivity, building trust, the importance of reflection, having administrative support, being able to see evidence of change, and understanding the future of their role.

With this, teachers need to have an understanding of their paraprofessionals' personality traits and how to best work with them. Teachers working with paraprofessionals must be open-minded, respectful, and personable (Biggs et al., 2019). For teachers to be able to work and supervise paraprofessionals, teachers must learn and strengthen these skills as they attend preservice programs and then continue to strengthen these skills as they begin working with paraprofessionals. Additionally, coaches working to train teachers must show them specific things they need to help them be successful.

Training Paraprofessionals. In addition to acquiring specific skills and dispositions for teachers to work with paraprofessionals, teachers must also be willing to train paraprofessionals on how to teach students with disabilities. Bettini et al. (2019) found that special education teachers discussed that training paraprofessionals were one of the most demanding emergent responsibilities. Specifically, to train paraprofessionals during planning periods and professional development time (Bettini et al., 2019). However, there are several studies discussing how paraprofessionals can most effectively and efficiently be trained.

When teachers use performance feedback and coaching, teachers can implement the training with fidelity (Brock & Carter, 2016; Walker & Snell, 2017). Performance feedback and coaching resulted in paraprofessionals learning, and the students making progress toward their goals. Also, Yates et al. (2020) found that paraprofessionals would be prepared to deliver high-quality instruction in teachers laid out paraprofessional roles in their lesson plans and then meet with the paraprofessionals to check for understanding before teaching the lesson. Additionally, Yates et al. (2020) found that if teachers provide the paraprofessional with constructive feedback after the lesson then paraprofessionals' instructional practices may improve. Koegel et al. (2019) found that paraprofessionals were able to implement social strategies to help four students meet

their social goals during a two-week summer camp that was carried over into the following school year.

Many paraprofessionals enter the field with little to no experience working with children with disabilities. O'Brien et al. (2019) found that teachers reported that paraprofessionals did not have enough training and teachers did not have additional time to train their paraprofessionals. Walker and Smith (2015) found that paraprofessionals showed improvement when trained on how to support students with disabilities. Irvin et al. (2018) found that when a paraprofessional was seen as being skilled, teachers provided them with more supervision and support than those paraprofessionals that were considered less skilled and resulted in the teachers noticing that the paraprofessionals were doing things that they shouldn't be assigned to do. Furthermore, Wermer, Brock, and Seaman (2018) found that when teachers taught paraprofessionals how to implement evidence-based practices related to alternative communication, the paraprofessionals were able to implement the strategies with fidelity. Improving instruction and implementing programs with fidelity resulted in the students improving toward meeting their individualized education program goals. However, before the training, the paraprofessionals weren't able to help students progress toward meeting their goals (Wermer, Brock, & Seaman, 2018). Teachers must remember the importance of training paraprofessionals and take the time to teach them effectively, evidence-based strategies to use when teaching students with disabilities. While it may take the time upfront to train paraprofessionals, it will ultimately benefit teachers and students in the long run.

Additionally, paraprofessionals are usually involved with student instruction and supervision at all portions of the day, leaving very little time to participate in planning and training with their supervising teacher. However, computer modules are effective training

methods for paraprofessionals. Computer-based training methods allow paraprofessionals the flexibility to complete the training. While some research shows that computer programs are effective when used in isolation (Gerencer et al., 2018), other research states that feedback and coaching are required, in conjunction with the program, to help paraprofessionals implement the programs with fidelity. Gerencer et al. (2018) conducted a study reviewing the effectiveness of interactive computer training to help paraprofessionals implement discrete trial instruction. It was concluded that after completing the training, the ability for paraprofessionals to implement the program increased for all of the participants. Participants did require feedback to be able to improve fidelity to 90% or higher. Teachers must advocate for their paraprofessionals to see what is available in their district.

Another beneficial training tool that teachers can use to train paraprofessionals is to participate in training sessions where information is presented and modeled. Seaman-Tullis, Cannella, and Brock (2019) conducted a study involving a paraprofessional being trained on how to implement video-prompting with a student with autism. The paraprofessional was able to improve his ability to implement video-prompting, which in turn helped the student improve toward his vocational goals. Additionally, Koegel, Kim, and Koegel (2014) determined that when paraprofessionals attended a workshop and were provided with feedback on how to improve social skills during lunch and recess, the paraprofessionals were able to implement social skills with fidelity. The training and implementation resulted in the students being able to learn from the paraprofessionals and make improvements socially.

Additionally, a direct instruction training model (DITM) can be used by teachers to train paraprofessionals. This model allows the teacher to train the paraprofessional while gradually expecting more out of the paraprofessional as their confidence grows (Stockall, 2014). Training

can be done effectively through side-by-side coaching. Side-by-side coaching provides paraprofessionals with differentiated training at minimal costs. Overall, it is up to the stakeholders to find the most beneficial tools to help teachers train paraprofessionals to be successful. The selected training tools may depend on resources available in the district.

Teachers Lack Necessary Training to Supervise Paraprofessionals. While teachers go through training to become certified educators, there are specific things they should be trained on to help them with their ability to supervise and train paraprofessionals. Biggs et al. (2019) researched specific qualities that teachers working with paraprofessionals should possess to help foster a positive relationship. It was determined that teachers must use leadership knowledge and skills and work to develop quality relationships with their paraprofessionals. Specific skills discussed include assertive communication, collaboration, coaching, organization, and conflict management (Biggs et al., 2019). Specific characteristics that emerged included being open-minded, respectful, and personable. To be able to gain these skills, it was recommended that teachers take courses in college focused on building these skills as well as participate in ongoing training as they gain personal experiences (Biggs et al., 2019). However, teachers do not receive training or education in college on how to supervise, manage, and collaborate with paraprofessionals. Given this, stakeholders need to identify what the teachers in their district need and help provide them with the support that will help them be successful.

Douglas et al. (2016) conducted a study looking at the supervision role of special education teachers that are supervising paraprofessionals. When interviewing special education teachers, they discussed concerns with creating effective teams with their paraprofessionals, ensuring that their paraprofessionals were trained and evaluated appropriately, and specific recommendations to help with these things in the field (Douglas et al., 2016). Teachers stated

they had very little training throughout their college experiences regarding the supervision of paraprofessionals and that the majority of their training was from experience or other professionals in their building. Brock et al. (2017) state that it is important that when training those working in special education modeling, written instructions for implementation, and performance feedback lead to improved fidelity. Stakeholders must be aware of the experiences of the teachers in their districts and work to support them.

For teachers to help support paraprofessionals and help them understand their responsibilities, communication of roles, and responsibilities is crucial. Stewart (2019) discusses the importance of teachers explaining performance criteria, scheduling, work methods, and planning with paraprofessionals. By communicating, teachers and paraprofessionals can help avoid negative student outcomes. Furthermore, this will allow teachers and paraprofessionals to build positive relationships.

Summary

Supporting students with disabilities in the general education classroom and special education classroom can be a challenging task for teachers and paraprofessionals. Additionally, paraprofessionals and teachers have limited support and training to be able to collaborate to develop and execute appropriate lessons for students with disabilities effectively. Teachers are not graduating college prepared to supervise paraprofessionals, and paraprofessionals are entering the field with little to no experience working with students with disabilities. Additionally, teachers often receive little ongoing training on how to support paraprofessionals in their classrooms. On the other hand, paraprofessionals are entering the field with little to no training or experience, and they do not know what is expected of them. These factors often lead to tension between teachers and paraprofessionals, and this impacts their ability to collaborate to

meet the needs of their students effectively. Stakeholders must develop strategies to prevent this from occurring. By developing beneficial strategies to better train teachers and paraprofessionals, all stakeholders will benefit.

When considering how to best train adults to collaborate, the social cognitive theory and the adult learning theory may help explain beneficial strategies. The social cognitive theory discusses how individuals may learn from one another through observing one another and how self-efficacy plays an important role in the success of individuals. The adult learning theory describes how adults learn through andragogy and are generally motivated intrinsically. The process in which adults learn varies from how children learn, and stakeholders must consider this when they are developing continuing education for their teachers and paraprofessionals.

Researchers need to continue discovering how special education teachers and paraprofessionals are being trained and supported regarding collaboration, so recommendations can be made to colleges, universities, and school systems that are responsible for instructing these adults. Stakeholders need to implement strategies to best train paraprofessionals and teachers to implement best practices for students. Additionally, colleges, universities, and schools need to make sure they are developing programs that are meeting the needs of the professionals that are working with students with disabilities as the needs for students with disabilities continue to rise.

The studies that have been reviewed come with limitations. For the researchers to gain specific information, the studies contained limited sample sizes. Given this, the information reported cannot be generalized to larger populations. Additionally, many of the studies just discuss the implementation of a particular strategy or tool. Given this, the information may vary if the same process was conducted on another tool or strategy. Therefore, it is important that

researchers continue to develop research on special education teachers and paraprofessional collaboration across different populations and regarding using different training tools for both teachers and paraprofessionals. This will allow stakeholders to gain a better understanding of how to develop and implement effective training programs in their districts.

The questions guiding this research look at determining how collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals can be improved. The questions driving the research are going to answer how teachers and paraprofessionals feel that stakeholders can help build collaborative efforts. By answering these questions, the researcher hopes to gain valuable insight into how to help teachers and paraprofessionals better collaborate to meet the needs of their diverse learners.

When reviewing the literature, it was noted that additional research needs to be conducted to determine strategies that can be taught to help special education paraprofessionals and teachers effectively collaborate to meet the needs of their students, as well as how districts can best teach these strategies to their teachers and paraprofessionals. Additionally, researchers need to look at the relationships formed between teachers and paraprofessionals and determine strategies to help strengthen these relationships to ensure that they are developing effective teams.

CHAPTER THREE: PROPOSED METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this study is to identify strategies that a rural North Georgia elementary school can implement to help with the problem of special education teachers and paraprofessionals not effectively collaborating to meet the needs of diverse learners. As special education teachers and paraprofessionals are expected to meet students' least restrictive environment by including students with disabilities with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible (Individuals with Disability Education Act Amendments of 1997, 1997), teachers and paraprofessionals are expected to collaborate to meet their individual needs. This study seeks to answer the following question: How can the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals be solved at Mountain Elementary School? The following information will contain the research design, procedures, and analysis of the present research study.

Design

A multimethod research design was used for this applied study, which incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods. A multimethod design allows the researcher to use combining methods to answer the questions the research has proposed (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). The researcher was interested in providing a possible solution to a problem that the researcher has experienced firsthand: ineffective collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals that are required to work together to meet the needs of students with disabilities. By using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the researcher was able to analyze three different data collection methods and use data triangulation to ensure that the data is valid and reliable (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

For this study, interviews, focus groups, and surveys were used to collect information and data. Interviews allowed the researcher to interact with each participant in a one-on-one setting ensuring that the participant felt safe to disclose answers to the questions being asked, which is a strong data collection tool (Bickman & Rog, 2009). This setting also allowed the participants to ask any questions they may have regarding the study. The focus group allowed the paraprofessionals and teachers time to brainstorm ways to collaborate more effectively. Focus groups are a combination of observations and interviewing. Focus groups can produce a variety of results and involve the focus group leader encouraging conversations within the group (Bickman & Rog, 2009; Check & Schutt, 2012). By participating in a focus group, teacher-paraprofessional teams began collaborating to help solve the problem, and the researcher was able to interview and observe the participates while collecting data. Surveys allowed participants to answer questions related to their experiences and demographics, and answer Likert scale questions related to collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals. Information collected using the Likert skills helped the researcher understand the positive and negative experiences of paraprofessionals and teachers regarding collaboration. By using both open-ended questions and Likert scale questions, data can be collected and analyzed simultaneously (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Research Questions

Central Question: How can the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals be solved at Mountain Elementary School?

Sub-question 1: How would special education teachers and paraprofessionals in interviews solve the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals in Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?

Sub-question 2: How would educators in a focus group solve the problem of lack of collaboration between paraprofessionals and teachers at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?

Sub-question 3: How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of a lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals?

Setting

To protect the individuals in the study, the pseudonym Mountain Elementary School will be used. Mountain Elementary School is a Title 1 school in North Georgia. The school is located in the North Georgia mountains and is located in a rural community. The school contains about 600 students that are primarily Caucasian, with less than 12% of the student population being of minority races. Additionally, 59% of the students are considered to be economically disadvantaged. Approximately 10% of the students attending Mountain Elementary School receive special education services. This setting was chosen as the location for the study because the teachers and paraprofessionals have noted their difficulty collaborating to meet the needs of their students. Additionally, the researcher works at the chosen school and has experienced the problem first hand.

Mountain Elementary school has a fairly new principal that leads the school. The principal has brought with her many new and fresh ideas that she gained from her previous school system. She is open to feedback and makes the staff feel as though they have a voice in the school. The assistant principal has worked in the school for many years. She assists the new principal with information regarding how things have been done previously, as well as provides the principal with information about how stakeholders will react to changes she wants to implement. She also supports the new principal and her decisions. The Instructional Lead

Teacher works hard to provide the staff with ongoing training as well as training on new strategies. She supports the staff and encourages them. The staff, both teachers and paraprofessionals, contains a large portion of individuals that grew up in the same community as well as individuals that gained experience elsewhere. Overall, the staff works together and shares ideas effectively. Given that the school is located in a small community, many of the students are related to the staff or have had relatives that know the staff through a variety of avenues. Most teachers give out their personal cell phone numbers and are in constant contact with their students' families to help support the students.

Participants

Six participants from Mountain Elementary School participated in the interview and focus group portions of the study. Three of these participants are special education paraprofessionals, and three participants are special education teachers. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants to ensure that the research findings are an accurate representation of the entire population. Purposeful sampling involves intentionally choosing specific settings, people, or events based on the information they will be able to provide that others may not be able to specify (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The participants were selected based on their job descriptions, experiences, and willingness to participate. Additionally, the researcher was sure to exclude the paraprofessionals that she supervises, so that the information is valid and reliable.

The survey was sent out to the entire school; however, the six participants from the interviews and focus groups were required to participate. There are currently 46 teachers and 24 paraprofessionals working at Mountain Elementary School, and the survey was sent out to all of these individuals. Participants were selected to participate based on convenience and their willingness to participate.

The Researcher's Role

I am a special education teacher and hold a B.S. degree in Elementary Education, an M.S degree in Special Education, and an Ed.S. degree in Curriculum and Instruction. Additionally, I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I am a Caucasian female in my late twenties, and I am passionate about education, particularly special education. I have worked both as a special education paraprofessional and a special education teacher. It is vital that I do not let my own experiences with collaborating with teachers and paraprofessionals interfere with my research. As a special education teacher with paraprofessionals in my classroom, I have had both positive and negative experiences with collaboration. Additionally, I started my career as a special education paraprofessional and had positive and negative experiences as a paraprofessional as well. During the entire research process, I will use bracketing to put aside my own beliefs and experiences to ensure I collect accurate data and analyze it without biases. Furthermore, I have decided to conduct my research at Mountain Elementary School to collect valuable data that will be beneficial to my school. While I am the lead teacher at my school and responsible for organizing meetings and helping train staff, I am not an administrator, and I am not responsible for directly supervising the teachers and paraprofessionals in my building.

I am a seventh-year special education teacher and also serve as my school's lead special education teacher and as a member of the school's leadership team. My motivation is to help my students with varying disabilities receive the support they need to become successful students, thus, helping them become successful adults in the future. My relationship with God also allows me to see the importance of advocating for students with disabilities, as He created us all in His image. I have been able to experience the difficulties with collaboration from both sides, as both

a teacher and paraprofessional, in multiple school settings and want to see the experiences that other educators have had with collaborating.

Procedures

First, the researcher obtained permission from the superintendent of the county and the principal of Mountain Elementary School. Written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the superintendent, the principal of the participating school, the key gatekeepers at any site, etc. (see Appendix B for permission request letter and permissions). Next, the researcher submitted the plan to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Permission from the IRB was obtained (see Appendix A for IRB approval). Then, the researcher began eliciting participants for the study at Mountain Elementary School using purposeful sampling and the participants' willingness to participate.

Once participants signed the consent to participate in the study (see Appendix C and D 0for consent form), the researcher began collecting data using interviews, focus groups, and a survey. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in the school in which the participants' work and were recorded using video and audio and later transcribed. The researcher coded the transcripts, analyzing the data for themes. The survey data were used to obtain quantitative data that will be compared to the qualitative data collected in the interviews and focus groups. All data were stored in a secure location throughout the entire process. Finally, the data were analyzed using the triangulation of data sources, and suggestions were made (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Data Collection and Analysis

The following section contains information related to the data collection and data analysis used. This applied study is composed of three data collection methods: interviews, focus groups,

and surveys. Each method is explained, and a rationale for using each method is provided. Data analysis refers to how the data is organized, stored, and used. Once the data were analyzed, the researcher used member checking and data triangulation to ensure that the data are valid and reliable.

Interviews

The first sub-question for this study explored how teachers and paraprofessionals in an interview would solve the problem of lack of collaboration at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia. Interviews allowed the participants to discuss their interpretations and experiences (Lambert, 2019). These questions sought to identify ways stakeholders would suggest strengthening collaborative efforts between teachers and paraprofessionals. Six participants, three teachers and three paraprofessionals were interviewed using the following process.

Each participant participated in one private, semi-structured interview that was recorded on the researcher's computer and transcribed using NVivo Transcription. Each interview lasted approximately twenty minutes. The interviews allowed the researcher to hear about the everyday experiences of the participants. These interviews took place over a four-week time period in the school in which the participants work. The researcher asked questions that were answered by the participants. These conversations were recorded. Following the interview, the researcher asked follow-up questions via telephone, in-person, or email. The following research questions were asked:

1. What do you enjoy most about your job?

This question was aimed at starting the interview off on a positive note and determining why the participants do what they do each and every day. This question helped the

researcher find out what the participants love about their job and why they show up every day to teach their students. Furthermore, this question led to conversations that helped the participant trusts the researcher which is an important part of research (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

2. Describe your background working as a paraprofessional or teacher.

This question provided background information about the participants and allowed the researcher to understand how long the participants have been in their role. Furthermore, this question was relatively easy for the participants to answer which is important for interview questions in the beginning (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). This question led to understanding more about the participants' experiences, education, time in the field, and/or other important information related to the research. Understanding background information about the participants helped the researcher throughout the study.

3. Tell me about your experiences as a paraprofessional or teacher collaborating with teachers or paraprofessionals.

This question allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of how long the participants had been expected to collaborate with teachers/paraprofessionals and the positive and negative experiences they had experienced. Furthermore, starting with "tell me about", allowed the participants to answer in a variety of ways (Jacob & Fergerson, 2012).

4. What dispositions do teachers and paraprofessionals need to effectively collaborate with paraprofessionals or teachers?

This question allowed participants to express important dispositions and characteristics that teachers and paraprofessionals need to possess to work with one another.

Specific dispositions are required of professionals for them to be able to effectively

collaborate (Biggs et al., 2019).

5. What factors are associated with positive experiences for teachers or paraprofessionals

working with paraprofessionals or teachers?

This question allowed the participants to express what factors help paraprofessionals

and teachers have positive collaborative experiences with one another. It is important that

respect for one another is established (Cipriano et al., 2016).

6. What factors are associated with negative experiences for paraprofessionals or teachers

working with teachers or paraprofessionals?

This question allowed the participants to express what factors hinder paraprofessionals'

and teachers' collaborative efforts. Disrespect between teachers and

paraprofessionals will negatively impact their ability to collaborate (Cipriano et al.,

2016).

7. Describe the professional development you have received as a paraprofessional or

teacher.

This question allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the training that

teachers and paraprofessionals receive each year. On-going professional development

is important to help paraprofessionals and teachers be effective (Biggs et al., 2019).

8. How can professional development opportunities be improved for paraprofessionals or

teachers in regards to collaborating?

This question identified ways that professional development opportunities can be

changed to create a more positive outcome in regards to collaboration between teachers

and paraprofessionals. Douglas et al. (2016) found that teachers were not trained to work

with paraprofessionals, so this question will help determine if the participants in this study are trained to work with one another.

9. What is most difficult about being a paraprofessional or teacher?

This question allowed the participants to add any other struggles they face throughout the day to the research. Current research lists a lack of ongoing professional development training and unclear expectations (Biggs et al., 2019; Clarke & Visser, 2016).

10. How would you solve the problem with lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals?

This question allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding regarding possible solutions to the underlying problem of lack of collaboration. Furthermore, it led to valuable information for the researcher to use to help identify themes to help answer the research question.

11. How would you solve the problem of lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?

This question helped the research gain a thorough understanding regarding how the problem of lack of collaboration can be solved as seen through those working at Mountain Elementary School. This allowed the researcher to identify themes related to the research question.

Interview data were analyzed by recording the interviews and transcribing the interviews using NVivo Transcription. NVivo Transcription was chosen to transcribe the interviews because the program is cost-effective, secure and confidential, and has an efficient turnaround time. Then, the researcher used NVivo to code the interviews and analyze the interviews looking for themes. NVivo is most often used by researchers for data management and analysis for

interviews and other forms of research (Woods et al., 2016). This allowed the researcher to gain

a better understanding of the experiences teachers and paraprofessionals have with collaboration

and how they feel these experiences could be improved. The researcher was able to compare the

experiences of all the participants within the themes. Additionally, member checking was used to

help improve the validity of the study. Member checks involve getting feedback from the

participants after the data have been analyzed (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Focus Group

The second sub-question for this study explored how educators in a focus group would

solve the problem of lack of collaboration between paraprofessionals and teachers at Mountain

Elementary School in North Georgia. A focus group allowed participants to have in-depth

conversations about the research question (Davis, 2017). Participants took place in a whole

group discussion about what they have experienced with collaboration and how they think the

problem should be addressed. Focus group data were recorded on a Zoom H2n device and using

the video chat platform. The focus group conversations were recorded and transcribed by NVivo

Transcription. Then, the transcriptions were coded and transcribed into themes using NVivo.

Focus groups allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of what teachers and

paraprofessionals need to be able to better collaborate to meet the needs of students with

disabilities.

> 1. Please describe your experience working as a paraprofessional or teacher including
>
> years of experience, grade level(s), and prior training regarding the education field.
>
> This question served as an icebreaker and allow the research and participants to learn
>
> about the experiences of one another. Icebreakers are an important part of the interview
>
> and focus group process (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

2. We are going to discuss the collaborative experiences between teachers and paraprofessionals. What are your opinions about collaboration?

This question was aimed at giving the participants an introduction about what the conversations will be about and to get an overall understanding of how the participants feel about collaboration. Douglas, Chapin, and Nolan (2016) indicated that paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators must work together for positive collaborative relationships to develop.

3. How long have you worked with a teacher or paraprofessional and what has this experience been like?

This question gave the researcher and participants a better understanding of how long the participants have experienced the topic and whether they have had positive or negative experiences. Sometimes, paraprofessionals enter the field with no experience working with students with disabilities (Banerjee et al., 2107). Likewise, new teachers enter the field with limited experience. This question allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the overall experience of teachers and paraprofessionals.

4. What are some strengths that you have when collaborating with a teacher or paraprofessional?

This allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding in regards to themes with collaborating when it comes to strengths and positive experiences. For effective collaboration to take place, teachers and paraprofessionals must respect one another (Cipriano et al., 2016). This question allowed the researcher to see if the participants respected each other.

5. What are some weaknesses/struggles that you have when collaborating with a teacher or paraprofessional?

This allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding in regards to themes with collaborating when it comes to weaknesses and negative experiences. Teachers have noted limited experience and training in regards to supervising and training paraprofessionals (Douglas et al., 2016). At the same time, paraprofessionals do not feel trained to support students with disabilities (Maltz & Senya, 2018).

6. What can school systems do to foster collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals?

This allowed the participants to discuss things that they need their school system to do to better collaborate. It is imperative that teachers and paraprofessionals provide appropriate training opportunities to teachers and paraprofessionals (Biggs et al., 2019; Koegel et al., 2014).

7. What can teachers do to foster collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals?

This allowed the participants to discuss ways that teachers can help improve collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals. Biggs et al. (2016) found that teacher collaborative efforts are influenced by teacher mindset, teacher proficiency, and teacher leadership.

8. What can paraprofessionals do to foster collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals?

This allowed the participants to discuss ways that paraprofessionals can help improve collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals. Biggs et al. (2016) found that

paraprofessionals' collaborative efforts are influenced by paraprofessionals' mindset and paraprofessional proficiency.

9. What barriers impact collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School?

This allowed participants to discuss barriers that are impacting the collaborative efforts between teachers and paraprofessionals. Biggs et al. (2018) found that teachers need specific competencies and dispositions to effectively work with paraprofessionals.

10. How would you solve the problem of lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School?

This allowed participants to share their perceptions related to solving the problem of lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals. Biggs et al. (2018) found collaborative efforts to be impacted by university-based preparation, school/district support, and personal development.

To analyze data collected from the focus groups, the conversations were recorded and transcribed using NVivo Transcription. NVivo Transcription was selected because it is cost-effective, secure and confidential, and has an efficient turnaround time. Then, the researcher used NVivo where the information was be coded and categorized into themes. NVivo is most often used by researchers for data management and analysis for focus groups and other forms of qualitative research (Woods et al., 2016). By comparing various pieces from the interviews, the researcher was able to better analyze the data (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The focus group portion of the research allowed the researcher to see how the paraprofessionals and teachers interacted with each other as well as how they work together to help suggest a solution for the lack of

collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals. Member checking was used to help validate the data.

Survey

The third sub-question for this study explored how quantitative survey data would inform the problem of a lack of collaboration between special education paraprofessionals and teachers. Data were collected by the researcher administering a survey created in Google Forms using a Likert scale format. The survey was sent via email to all teachers and paraprofessionals from Mountain Elementary School. Emails were obtained from the principal of the school. Participants had two weeks to respond to the anonymous survey. A reminder email was sent out two days before the two-week mark reminding participants to respond. Once the information was collected, the data were entered into NVivo.

1. Do you have experience collaborating with special education teachers or paraprofessionals to meet the needs of students with disabilities?

   o Yes

   o No

2. What is your current role at Mountain Elementary School?

   o Teacher

   o Paraprofessional

   o Other (Describe): _____

3. How many years of classroom experience do you have?

   o 0 years – 5 years

   o 5 years – 10 years

   o 10 years – 15 years

o   15 – 20 years

o   20 or more years

o   Prefer not to answer

4. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

o   Some High School

o   High School

o   Trade School

o   Associate's Degree

o   Bachelor's Degree

o   Master's Degree

o   Specialist's Degree

o   Ph.D. or Ed.D.

o   Prefer not to answer

5. What gender do you identify as?

o   Male

o   Female

o   Prefer not to answer

6. What is your age?

o   18-25

o   25-35

o   35-45

o   45-55

o   55 or older

○   Prefer not to answer

7. What is your ethnicity?

○   Caucasian

○   African-American

○   Latino or Hispanic

○   Asian

○   Native American

○   Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

○   Two or More

○   Other/Unknown

○   Prefer not to answer

8. Paraprofessionals are provided with time to plan with teachers. (This question allowed the researcher to see if paraprofessionals are given adequate time to plan with teachers. Teachers and paraprofessionals must plan with one another so that they have time set aside to collaborate (Stewart, 2019).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

9. Paraprofessionals are provided with time to collaborate with teachers. (This question allowed the researcher to see if paraprofessionals were given adequate time to collaborate with teachers. Teachers and paraprofessionals must have time set aside to collaborate (Stewart, 2019).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

10. Teachers are provided with time to plan with paraprofessionals. (This question allowed the researcher to see if teachers were given adequate time to plan with paraprofessionals. Teachers and paraprofessionals must plan with one another so that they have time set aside to collaborate (Stewart, 2019).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

11. Teachers are provided with time to collaborate with paraprofessionals. (This question allowed the researcher to see if teachers were given adequate time to collaborate with paraprofessionals. Teachers and paraprofessionals must have time set aside to collaborate (Stewart, 2019).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

12. Paraprofessionals are provided with professional development opportunities regarding collaboration with teachers. (This question allowed the researcher to see if paraprofessionals were adequately trained. Paraprofessionals must be trained on best practices (Douglas et al., 2019).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

13. Teachers are provided with professional development opportunities regarding collaboration with paraprofessionals. (This question allowed the researcher to see if teachers were adequately trained. Teachers need to take classes in college as well as on-

going professional development courses to ensure that they harbor the dispositions and

skills necessary to collaborate (Biggs et al., 2019).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

14. Teachers and paraprofessionals at our school have a positive working relationship.

(This question allowed the researcher to have a better understanding regarding the

school climate and the relationships created between teachers and paraprofessionals. For

effective collaboration to exist, paraprofessionals and teachers must have a good

relationship with respect for one another (Cipriano et al., 2016).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

15. Teachers and paraprofessionals at our school have a mutual respect for one another.

(This question allowed the researcher to have a better understanding regarding the

school climate and the relationships created between teachers and paraprofessionals. For

effective collaboration to exist, paraprofessionals and teachers must have a good

relationship with respect for one another (Cipriano et al., 2016).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

16. Paraprofessionals work with teachers at our school to meet the needs of diverse

learners. (This question helped the researcher better understand whether or not

paraprofessionals are working with teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners. The

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) states that students should be instructed in their

least restrictive environments to every extent possible (Individuals with Disabilities Act,

1997) and this requires paraprofessionals and teachers to work together to meet the diverse needs in their classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

17. Teachers work with paraprofessionals at our school to meet the needs of diverse learners. (This question helped the researcher better understand whether or not teachers were working with paraprofessionals to meet the needs of diverse learners. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) states that students should be instructed in their least restrictive environments to every extent possible (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1997) and this requires paraprofessionals and teachers to work together to meet the diverse needs in their classroom.)

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

Survey data were analyzed using means and standard deviations. Additionally, the information collected from the Likert-scale questions was displayed in pie graphs, which were used to explain the findings. The findings from the survey were compared to the information found through the interviews and focus group. Clusters of meaning in interviews and focus groups allowed the researcher to read and compile important statements into codes and then themes using NVivo. This process allowed the researcher to see common strengths and weaknesses occurring with the teachers and paraprofessionals. This process also allowed the researcher to write about the specific experiences of paraprofessionals and teachers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher read through the themes and describe what the paraprofessionals and teachers experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The process allowed the researcher to share the

experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically looking at means and frequency counts organized in graphs and frequency charts.

Information from the interviews, focus groups, and surveys were collected and compared to one another using NVivo. This allowed the researcher to use data triangulation to compare the data collected during the three portions of the study. Data Triangulation is the use of more than one method to collect data about the same topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process increased the reliability of the study because it provided information from more than one source. Member checking was also used to allow the participants to read the study's findings and give participants a chance to clarify information found in the study. Member checking is important because it helps build trust between the researcher and the participants and ensures the study is an accurate representation of the participants (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations or implications of the research were addressed throughout the study. Pseudonyms were used for the school and participants to protect the identity of the school and the participants involved in the study. Pseudonyms ensure that the school is free from being identified by stakeholders and that the participants feel as though they can disclose information without facing recourse from other stakeholders. The topics discussed were personal to the participants. The researcher was sure to accurately record and transcribe information so that the study accurately represents the participants, and member checking was used. Additionally, the information was stored in a place where only the researcher has access. The research will be kept in locked filing cabinets and on password-protected electronic files and will be destroyed three years after the conclusion of the study. All work belonging to someone else was appropriately

cited to ensure that others are credited for their work. Furthermore, the researcher explained to participants that the researcher cannot guarantee that others participating in the focus group will not share information with others. The survey given to participants was given through an anonymous Google form, and only participants that want to give their information will be required to do so. Moreover, the researcher ensured that the research was carried out and reported honestly and accurately (Check & Schutt, 2012). This will safeguard the results of the study.

Summary

This applied, multi-method study consists of interviews, focus groups, and surveys that are focused on solving the lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia. Special Education teachers and paraprofessionals are responsible for providing quality instruction to students with disabilities; however, they do not have the appropriate training to collaborate (Biggs et al., 2019). Throughout this chapter, the study design, research questions, participants, researcher's role, procedures, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and summary are discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of the lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School and to find strategies to best train teachers and paraprofessionals on collaboration practices. The purpose of this applied study is to help solve the problem that special education teachers and paraprofessionals are struggling to collaborate to meet the needs of their students at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia. This chapter contains a description of the participants, the results, a discussion, and a summary.

Participants

Interview Participants

To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms will be used. The participants will be noted as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, Paraprofessional 1, Paraprofessional 2, and Paraprofessional 3. While all of the participants work at Mountain Elementary School serving students with disabilities, they each bring a unique skill set to the school.

Teacher 1

Teacher 1 is a special education teacher with twenty years of experience working with students with disabilities. She started as a substitute teacher and her school asked her to do special education. She was reluctant to substitute in special education, but she did and fell in love with serving students with disabilities. Then, she worked as a paraprofessional in special education. She felt her medical background assisted her in serving students with medical needs and discovered special education was her passion. She then started her educational journey to obtain her teaching degree and she has earned her specialist degree.

Teacher 2

Teacher 2 is a special education teacher with 11 years of experience working with students with disabilities. She has served as a paraprofessional and teacher in pre-k thru second grade. While she was serving as a pre-k teacher, she decided she wanted to obtain her special education certification. She has experience working for two different school systems and in multiple settings.

Teacher 3

Teacher 3 originally started her career studying technology. She then became a substitute teacher and was asked to work alongside a special education teacher. She was nervous at first due to prior experiences and observations, but she quickly learned it was her calling. She has taught a variety of classes during her 19 years of service.

Paraprofessional 1

Paraprofessional 1 has 16 of experience working with students with disabilities as a paraprofessional. She worked for four years at the preschool level, six years in a self-contained elementary school classroom, one year of supportive instruction in fourth grade, three years of supportive instruction in middle and high school, and two years at the primary school in self-contained classrooms. All sixteen years of experience were spent serving students with disabilities of a variety of grade levels.

Paraprofessional 2

Paraprofessional 2 has 14 years of experience working in a self-contained setting. She has only worked with one teacher during her fourteen years of experience and has had a positive experience. Both Paraprofessional 2 and her supervising teacher describe their relationship as

being a positive relationship with open communication. They said that they really just get each other and typically always know what the other person wants or needs.

Paraprofessional 3

Paraprofessional 3 has been a paraprofessional for eight years. She spent her first year as a paraprofessional serving students with disabilities. Then, she spent six years working in kindergarten classrooms serving a variety of students. She is currently working again in special education.

Focus Group Participants

The focus group participants consisted of the same participants as the interview. Therefore, all of the participants work at Mountain Elementary School. In addition, the participants will be noted with the psuedonyms Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, Paraprofessional 1, Paraprofessional 2, and Paraprofessional.

Survey Participants

The survey was emailed out to the entire school. Recipients of the email included forty-six teachers and twenty-four paraprofessionals. At the time of the survey, eight of the teachers were serving as special education teachers, and eight of the paraprofessionals were serving special education teachers. However, many of the teachers and paraprofessionals have experience working with students with disabilities, and they were permitted to complete the survey if they had experience collaborating with special education teachers or special education paraprofessionals to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Thirty-four participants completed the survey; however, three of these participants were unable to complete the entire survey due to their lack of experience collaborating with special education teachers or paraprofessionals.

Of the thirty-one participants that met the criteria to participate in the study, twenty-two of the participants were teachers, and nine were paraprofessionals. Years of classroom experience within the group varied, with seven participants having 0-5 years of experience, four participants having 6-10 years of experience, six participants having 11-15 years of experience, and nine participants having 16-20 years of experience. Education levels among the group also varied, with one participant having a high school diploma, three participants had a trade school certification, three participants had an associate's degree, six participants had a bachelor's degree, nine participants had a master's degree, and nine participants had a specialist's degree. Thirty of the participants disclosed that they identified as being female, zero participants identified as male, and one participant said that they preferred not to answer. Age ranges also varied, with nine participants being 25 to 35 years old, ten participants being 36 to 45 years old, eight participants being 45 to 55 years old, and 4 participants being 55 or older. There were no participants younger than 25 years old. Thirty of the participants stated their ethnicity as being Caucasian, and one participant stated that they preferred not to answer.

Results

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with special education teachers and paraprofessionals from Mountain Elementary School to find themes related to their experiences with collaborating with other teachers and paraprofessionals at this school. Several themes emerged from the qualitative analysis. Second, a focus group was conducted with special education teachers and paraprofessionals to find themes related to their collaborative experiences at this school. Finally, a quantitative survey was administered to measure collaborative experiences between special education teachers and paraprofessionals and was used to corroborate the themes.

Sub-question 1

Sub-question one for this study was, "How would special education teachers and paraprofessionals in interviews describe ways to solve the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals in Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?" Interviews were conducted with teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School to find themes related to ways to solve the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals. The themes and frequencies are listed in Table 1.

The top three themes uncovered in the qualitative analysis were improving professional learning/training, experiences, and mutual respect. The need for professional learning and/or training was made apparent throughout nearly all of the interviews. Many of the participants had not received training related to how to plan and collaborate. Paraprofessionals noted that they rarely received any professional development and were often required to cover the room when their supervising teachers participated in professional development opportunities. Additionally, many of the participants discussed both positive and negative experiences that impacted collaboration and planning between their lead teachers and themselves. Many of the participants had specific experiences, either positive or negative, that have influenced their collaboration and planning styles. The third most frequent themes were the importance of having mutual respect for one another. The teachers discussed the importance of not making the teacher-paraprofessional relationship feel like that the teacher is the boss over the paraprofessional and the paraprofessionals discussed the importance of feeling respected and valued in the classroom. Both teachers and paraprofessionals discussed issues that may arise when there are personality conflicts within the classroom.

The next themes that arose were communication, time, personalities, and compensation. The need for communication in the classroom was discussed, and being able to communicate verbally, nonverbally, and during instruction was noted. Participants noted the importance of being able to communicate with their colleagues both verbally and nonverbally to maximize instruction. Many of the teachers and paraprofessionals stated that during the teachers' planning times, the paraprofessionals were expected to follow and support the students wherever they went. Participants stated a need for carving out time to plan and collaborate to provide better instruction to the students they serve. Additionally, they suggested that administrators administer a personality test to determine teacher-paraprofessional groups that would be most effective together. In regards to compensation, teachers and paraprofessionals both discussed the limited pay that paraprofessionals receive compared to the hard work they put in every day. Paraprofessionals discussed their pay in comparison to surrounding counties and stated that it is much lower. The need for a special education paraprofessional supplement was also discussed by paraprofessionals in the interviews as they are often completing more challenging tasks than general education paraprofessionals including changing diapers, feeding students, and managing challenging behaviors.

Table 1

Frequency of Codes for Sub-question 1

Codes	Frequency
Professional Learning/Training	27
Experiences	26
Mutual Respect	21
Communication	20
Time	16
Personalities	11
Compensation	7

Theme #1. The most common theme that emerged throughout the interviews was

professional learning and training. It occurred 27 times throughout the interviews. Furthermore, professional learning and training were also a theme within the focus group and survey results. Within the theme of professional learning and training in the interviews, teachers, and paraprofessionals had varying experiences and viewpoints. Several of the participants reported that they had never received training regarding collaboration in the interview, focus group, and survey. When asked about the training received by those interviewed, Teacher 1 stated, "I've never taught in a co-teaching classroom, so I don't feel like I have had that type of training." She went on to discuss the type of training she has received related to special education compliance and curriculum, but she had not ever had any "training related specifically to collaboration." She also mentioned the importance of "building-wide training" on collaboration and special education practices since special education students are often served in "other areas of the building." Additionally, out of the 31 participants that took the survey, 45.2% of the participants stated that paraprofessionals were "never" provided with professional development regarding collaboration, and 41.9% stated teachers were "never" provided with professional development regarding collaboration. Moreover, 0% of the participants notated that teachers were "often" or "always" provided with professional development opportunities regarding collaboration.

Regarding training received on collaborating, Teacher 3 stated, "But honestly, I wasn't really given anything. My professional development came from my experience as a parapro before I started teaching." Teacher 3 also discussed how teachers need to "work with teachers that have had parapros" to gain a better understating of how to help and treat paraprofessionals in the classroom setting. Paraprofessional 1 stated, "I have not received anything with collaboration, but I have received a lot of restraint training...but nothing specifically about collaborating with teachers." She also stated that professional development opportunities related

to collaboration should be "provided to paraprofessionals through online courses or trainings." Paraprofessional 1 also mentioned fixing the problem of lack of collaboration at Mountain Elementary School, "free time to collaborate and training" needs to be provided to teachers and paraprofessionals. Paraprofessional 3 stated, "...sometimes we are not trained for any of that. There's no training for us." Throughout the interviews, it was apparent that several of the participants had not received training but wanted to have training opportunities.

Some participants mentioned that they had received limited training. Teacher 2 discussed that she had received training on co-teaching, which had prepared her to collaborate with her paraprofessionals as well. She stated, "While parapros are not necessarily in a teaching situation, we are co-teaching, so it is very similar." She went on to say, "The training I have received on co-teaching at RESA probably best prepared me for that." Paraprofessionals 2 stated that she had received training on collaborating when she had "to complete PLUs in the past," but it had been several years since she had been given similar training. The majority of the participants stated that they had not received training in regards to collaborating with teachers and paraprofessionals, and those that had training were limited and held several years ago. Many of the participants in the interviews, focus group, and survey felt that the problem of lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals could partially be solved with additional training.

Theme #2. The second theme that emerged in the interviews was prior positive and negative experiences surrounding collaboration that the participants have experienced. Moreover, this was also a theme found in the focus group. In the interviews, many of the participants discussed positive experiences that they have had throughout their careers that have helped them with collaboration and planning with other adults in their room. Conversations

about prior experiences were also present in the conversations of the focus group, where it was noted that all of the teachers participating in the study had previously served and paraprofessionals and they spoke about how this positively impacted their perceptions as a teacher. Teacher 2 spoke positively about most of the experiences she has had collaborating with paraprofessionals and said, "I've been pretty lucky to work with parapros that have wanted to do their best." Teacher 3 spoke positively about her experiences collaborating as well and said that her "experience as a paraprofessional" before teaching "helped with her with collaboration." She said, "I just always treated them right," because she had been a paraprofessional before and, "they were teachers without the certification." When Paraprofessional 2 discussed working in general education classrooms to support students with disabilities, she said, "I like when the teacher in the room I am working in tries to better understand what is going on with the kids and includes them in their classroom." She said that when the paraprofessionals and students "feel included," then collaboration, planning, and instruction improve. Teacher 2 said, "I have had some paraprofessionals over the years with lots of experience, which is a great benefit when they have worked with many other teachers to share their ideas and things that they have seen that have worked. I have been lucky to have paraprofessionals that really wanted to do their best."

While there were many positive experiences notes, there were also some negative experiences. Teacher 2 spoke about a particularly disturbing situation where a "paraprofessional was" using "names towards special needs children that was not appropriate." She felt it necessary to "take that situation up to administration." She felt that this impacted the relationship and collaborative efforts in their classroom. Teacher 1 also spoke about a difficult instance with collaboration in the classroom and said she "had one bad experience that lasted four months and I felt like it was because we were not able to collaborate," and "we were not on the same page, so

I had to really take it, get more serious, and get on the same page so we could have a successful classroom." She stated that she had to work "extra hard to be a leader" and create a "successful environment." Paraprofessional 3 discussed her particularly difficult experience working with students with behavioral needs after eight years of experience because "she had no experience in it whatsoever." She went on to say, "It has been very hard. It has probably been the hardest year I have had as a paraprofessional." She contributed a lot of this difficulty due to a lack of communication, stating, "there is some lack of communication sometimes. I think sometimes paraprofessionals are just expected to handle behavior issues."

Theme #3. The third theme that emerged in the interviews was mutual respect. Mutual respect was the most common theme found in the focus group. In the interviews, both teachers and paraprofessionals discussed the importance of having respect for one another as they work with others to plan and collaborate. Discussions of mutual respect was also noted in the conversations that were held between the teachers and paraprofessionals in the focus group. Teacher 1 discussed the major factors that can lead to positive experiences with collaboration and said that respect was crucial because "if parapros feel respected, you are going to get respect back." She also mentioned the importance of teachers remembering to "be polite" and "to show gratitude for the help that others give them." Paraprofessional 2 said, "I love working with the teacher I have been with. We have been together the whole time. She is not my boss; we are a team." Teacher 2 stated, "I think treating them as an equal is important," and that "I never felt like I needed to treat them anything other than that." She also discussed that "connecting on a personal level" regarding their lives outside of the classroom can lead to "improved relationships and mutual respect for one another." When discussing factors that can help improve relationships within the room, Teacher 1 stated, "Plain out respect. I think if they feel respected, you are going

to get that back, and it makes them feel more worthwhile." She also went on to discuss the importance of showing "gratitude" to those she works with. Teacher 3 also mentioned the importance of treating paraprofessionals as equals and with respect stating, "You have to have patience, respect, and treat them as they are equal all of the time."

Paraprofessional 3 discussed issues she has had involving mutual respect and the impact it has on collaboration. She said, "I think there should be respect, communication, positive attitudes…I mean, we are professional here and work together," and, "we are all after the same goals so, you know, let's work together because that is not always happening." She went on to discuss the negative effects that a lack of communication and negative attitudes have on the collaborative efforts in the classroom and said that it does "cause tension in the classroom."

While participants noted the importance of mutual respect in the interviews and focus group, out of the 31 survey participants at Mountain Elementary School, 67.7% stated that teachers and paraprofessionals at their school "often" have mutual respect for one another. Additionally, 9.7% answered with "always" and 19.4 answered with "sometimes." Only 3.2%, or 1 participant, felt that teachers and paraprofessionals "never" had mutual respect for one another.

Theme #4. The fourth theme that emerged in the interviews was communication. Both teachers and paraprofessionals discussed the importance of being able to communicate verbally and nonverbally during the school day. Paraprofessional 1 stated that "communication is key" when collaborating with teachers. Teacher 3 said that "communication skills improve over time" working with adults and children and said that "you start to know what each other are thinking." She went on to discuss how teachers and paraprofessionals, over time, get to where "they look at you and you know what to do." Paraprofessional 3 stated, "Most teachers that I have worked with have communicated well with me," but she did go on to say, "there is a lack of

communication sometimes, though." She also discussed the tension that is present when collaboration is not present and the importance of "talking out any issues" that may arise in the classroom between the teacher and paraprofessional, stating, "If there is any indifference, talk it out, work it out." Teacher 1 discussed the importance of sitting down and talking with paraprofessionals stating, "let's sit down and have a talk about this and what we can do." Teacher 2 discussed the repercussions of a lack of communication, stating, "If there is a lack of communication, that can be a struggle," and went on to say that she wants her parapro to let her know if "something bothered them" so she can address it.

Theme #5. The fifth theme that emerged in the interviews was how time constraints interfere with the ability to collaborate. While it was noted many times throughout the interviews, it was also a theme in the focus group. During the interviews, Paraprofessional 1 stated that the most difficult part about collaborating as a paraprofessional was "not having time to collaborate." It was noted multiple times throughout the interviews and focus group that special education paraprofessionals are always connected to the students to provide supportive instruction. Meaning, that when the students go to lunch, recess, and connections, the paraprofessionals also go. Teachers and paraprofessionals discussed that this often led to them not getting a break or lunch and made it hard for them to collaborate with their teachers. Paraprofessional 2 stated, "I have kids from seven-thirty until three-twenty every day. You know, no breaks, no lunches, no nothing," she also said, "whatever we do collaboration-wise has to be done with kids in the room." Paraprofessional 3 also said, "There's no breaks for us this year. I hardly have any breaks whatsoever."

When 31 participants answered survey questions related to time, an issue with collaboration and having the time to plan and collaborate was noted. When asked if

paraprofessionals were given the time to plan with their teachers, 64.5% of the participants stated "rarely" or "never"; when asked if paraprofessionals are provided with time to collaborate with their teachers, 51.6% of participants said "rarely" or "never." When asked if teachers are provided with time to plan with paraprofessionals, 61.3% said "rarely" or "never"; when asked if teachers are provided with time to plan with paraprofessionals, 48/4 responded with "rarely" or "never" and 41.9% responded with sometimes.

Given that teachers and paraprofessionals have such little time to plan and collaborate, the concern with providing teachers and paraprofessionals with professional development also brought up the concern of when this would take place. When asked about how professional development opportunities could be improved, Teacher 1 stated, "That's a tough one because we only have so many hours in the day." Teacher 2 stated, "We really need that time to sit down and talk just like we would if we were with a co-teacher and plan together, even if it is just once a week." Teacher 2 also mentioned that to solve the problem of lack of collaboration, special education teachers and paraprofessionals would need "to be provided with time to collaborate." Overall, all of the participants discussed, in both interviews and the focus group, the need for having a set time to plan with one another to improve collaboration and planning.

Theme #6. The sixth theme that emerged in the interviews was personality traits and differences between teachers and paraprofessionals. Both teachers and paraprofessionals sometimes stated when teachers and paraprofessionals are paired together that have conflicting personality traits, and this impacts their collaborative efforts. Paraprofessional 1 stated that positive experiences with collaborating with teachers "depends a lot on the teacher's personality and the paraprofessional's personality." Teacher 1 followed this up by stating, "I wish there was some kind of test we could do that we could grade everybody on and say, oh, these two people

match up," or that, "these two people do not match up."

Paraprofessional 3 stated that "personality conflicts" can lead to negative experiences between teachers and paraprofessionals. Teacher 2 also stated that "personality differences" can lead to tension in the classroom. She said, "If you have a parapro and a teacher and they both have very strong personalities, a lot of times that clashes." She also said, "You really have to be sure those personalities are going to connect," and mentioned "giving a personality test to teachers and paraprofessionals before matching them up."

Theme #7. The seventh theme that occurred throughout the interviews was the lack of compensation for the special education paraprofessionals. Lack of compensation for special education paraprofessionals was also a theme found within the focus group. Teacher 1 stated that she started teaching in a school system where "paraprofessionals working in special education classrooms" received a "higher rate of pay, and that seemed to help." She also discussed that while this was not a large amount of money, it "was acknowledging what the paraprofessionals were doing." She noted that this might also benefit the special education paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School.

Paraprofessional 3 stated, "Parapros are expected to do a lot of work, and we really do not get paid for what we do." She also went on to discuss the importance of paying paraprofessionals adequate wages stating that the paraprofessionals "see what other counties pay their paraprofessionals" and that it is "so much more than our own county does." Teacher 3 mentioned dispositions teachers need to be able to effectively communicate with paraprofessionals and said, "Patience and understanding that they (paraprofessionals) are doing the job for a whole lot less than we are. That's why we get the big money." Overall, paraprofessionals stated they were there for the kids and to meet their needs, but both teachers

and paraprofessionals did not feel like paraprofessionals were adequately compensated for the amount of work they were expected to do.

Sub-question 2

Sub-question two for this study was, "How would educators in a focus group solve the problem of lack of collaboration between paraprofessionals and teachers at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?" A focus group was conducted with special education teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School to find themes related to ways to solve the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals. The themes and frequencies are listed in Table 2.

Throughout the focus group, the top three themes that occurred were mutual respect, training, and time. During the focus group, the teachers and paraprofessionals discussed the importance of treating one another fairly and with respect. Participants also discussed both positive and negative experiences they have had throughout their careers in regards to mutual respect with one another. It was also discussed that just because teachers have a degree and are compensated more than paraprofessionals, they should not treat paraprofessionals as though they are less than. Additionally, teachers and paraprofessionals discussed a need for professional learning and training for paraprofessionals in regards to collaboration and how to handle student behaviors. It was discussed that oftentimes when teachers go to professional development, the paraprofessionals are left to run the classrooms. Both teachers and paraprofessionals stated that it would be beneficial for the paraprofessionals to attend training with the teachers as well so that they could bounce ideas off of one another and collaborate. Most of the participants did state that paraprofessionals were training in Mindset De-escalation and Restraint, but that is all of the training they have received. Participants also mentioned that when teachers attend professional

development and then return to the classroom, they have a difficult time finding the time to redeliver what is learned to their paraprofessionals. Participants noted the lack of time that teachers and paraprofessionals have to collaborate and plan with one another. Both teachers and paraprofessionals said that paraprofessionals are connected to the students in their room and are responsible for providing support for the students during the teachers' planning time. Additionally, paraprofessionals have duties and responsibilities before school and after school, leaving minimal time to collaborate and plan with their supervising teachers.

Themes were also noted with compensation and experiences. When discussing mutual respect, paraprofessionals stated that the minimal money they receive each month is not worth having to deal with disrespect from their supervising teachers. Some teachers started as paraprofessionals and noted their experiences with minimal pay as well. Both positive and negative prior experiences were also discussed and how these experiences impacted their current practice. Some of the teachers started as paraprofessionals and were able to empathize with them. Additionally, both positive and negative experiences impacted how the teachers and paraprofessionals treated one another.

Table 2

Frequency of Codes for Sub-question 2

Codes	Frequency
Mutual Respect	33
Need for Professional Learning/Training	22
Time	20
Compensation	11
Experiences	10

Theme #1. The first theme that emerged in the focus group was the importance of mutual respect between teachers and paraprofessionals. Mutal Respect was also a theme noted in the

interviews and within the survey results. The need for mutual respect and having positive attitudes toward one another was noted 33 times throughout the focus group. Teacher 1 discussed how teacher-paraprofessional teams should create a family-like atmosphere stating, "if we can show that love and show it to our children, they are going to benefit more too." When asked about experiences with collaboration and what teachers can do to help foster collaboration in the classroom, Teacher 3 simply stated, "Mutual Respect." The first major sub-theme that arose within the importance of mutual respect between teachers and paraprofessionals was treating others the way you would want to be treated. Teacher 3 said, "Teachers need to treat their paraprofessional like they would want to be treated because they are just as valuable." She went on to say, "Mutual Respect- Do not treat paraprofessionals like they are second-class citizens." Additionally, Teacher 1 said, "I do not think a lot of teachers realize that they should not give their parapro anything to do that they would not do their selves." Near the end of the focus group, Teacher 1 said, "And if we can show that love with our colleagues and children, they are going to benefit from it more too."

Another sub-theme that emerged was the importance of teachers involving paraprofessionals in planning and decision making. Teacher 1 mention the importance of involving the paraprofessionals with the decision-making process because the paraprofessional may have a better idea. She stated, "Involve them in the decision. Maybe they see something a little better than we do." Additionally, Paraprofessional 2 mentioned the importance of backing each other up in the classroom, stating that if teachers and paraprofessionals do not support one another, "the students are going to use them against one another."

When talking about the dynamics of working together in the classroom, Teacher 1 said, "And it takes a while to get that mesh worked together when there is more than two people in the

room." Participants discussed how difficult it is when you work together with someone for several years and then a new person joins the team. Paraprofessional 3 stated, "I have seen teachers have attitudes with paras before, and it makes a bad atmosphere in the classroom." Teacher 3 stated, "If you are not being respected, I don't care who you are. It's hard to work in that environment." Overall, the need for mutual respect between teachers and paraprofessionals was apparent throughout the interviews, focus group, and survey.

While participants noted the importance of mutual respect in the interviews and focus group, out of the 31 survey participants at Mountain Elementary School, 67.7% stated that teachers and paraprofessionals at their school "often" have mutual respect for one another. Additionally, 9.7% answered with "always," and 19.4 answered with "sometimes." Only 3.2%, or 1 participant, felt that teachers and paraprofessionals "never" had mutual respect for one another.

Theme #2. The second theme that emerged in the focus group was the need for training and professional development surrounding collaboration. Professional development was also a reoccurring theme in the interviews and survey results. When discussing training that paraprofessionals and teachers had received, both teachers and paraprofessionals in the focus group admitted to having very limited training regarding collaboration outside of their personal experiences in the classroom. Paraprofessional 2 said, "…the only training that we have had extra is the restraint training." Teacher 3 spoke up though, and said that the experience paraprofessionals receive was probably far more effective than first-year teachers' training. However, Teacher 2 also talked about the "limited time" provided to train paraprofessionals. Paraprofessional 3 spoke up and showed her willingness to learn additional information by saying, "And what I do not know, teach me. Teach me what I need to know because I was hired

to help you!" Teacher 1 stated, "And you can always learn from someone. You can take it as learning. It may not be positive all the time, but you can learn from other people." Additionally, out of the 31 participants that took the survey, 45.2% of the participants stated that paraprofessionals were "never" provided with professional development regarding collaboration, and 41.9% stated teachers were "never" provided with professional development regarding collaboration. Moreover, 0% of the participants notated that teachers were "often" or "always" provided with professional development opportunities regarding collaboration.

Participants also talked about the importance of paraprofessionals attending the same training that teachers attend. Teacher 3 said, "Send us to some trainings together. Don't send us and have us come back and reteach them. Send us together so that we are sitting side by side discussing what one another is thinking." She also discussed an important "behavior training" she attended at RESA and stated, "my para should have gone with me to that." Paraprofessional 3 spoke up and said, "I was just thinking about that." She went on to say that many of her students worked with behavior specialists and/or had behavior plans, but she "…does not even understand some of it." Paraprofessional 3 went on to say, "Bring in substitutes for us, just like they do for the teachers, and let us go to these trainings too." She talked about how paraprofessionals come into the schools with limited education and training and need to be taught how to be effective at their job.

Theme #3. The third theme that emerged in the focus group was the need for time. This was also a reoccurring theme in the interviews and survey results. During the focus group, teachers and paraprofessionals shared their frustrations with having limited to no time to plan and collaborate. Paraprofessional 1said, ". . . We do not have time. I mean, everything from our schedule and everything the teachers are doing. Collaboration is on the fly. There's no time to sit

down and plan." Paraprofessional 2 said, "There's no planning. There's no time when we are alone without the kids at all." She went on to say, "Paraprofessional 3 and I have kids from seven-thirty to three-twenty. There are ten minutes at the end of our workday that I see the teacher I work with."

Paraprofessional 2 also noted the differences between special education paraprofessionals and kindergarten paraprofessionals. The kindergarten paraprofessionals "do not have to provide support" to their students during connections, so they get time away from the students that special education paraprofessionals "do not get." Paraprofessional 2 discussed kindergarten paraprofessionals' expectations stating, "…they get forty-five, maybe fifty minutes, and a lunch." but the special education paraprofessionals do not. Meaning kindergarten paraprofessionals can collaborate with their teachers for fifty minutes a day, and special education teachers and paraprofessionals do not get this.

Teacher 1 stated that the limited time to plan and collaborate made her feel "inadequate because she doesn't get time to spend with her paraprofessionals." Paraprofessional 1 mentioned that there is no time when she is without kids meaning, "collaboration" takes place "on the fly." Participants in the focus group then began brainstorming ways that special education teacher-paraprofessional teams may get set aside time to plan and collaborate. Teacher 2 discussed the point that co-teachers are given time to plan together and said, "paras and teachers should get time too because they are teaching too." Teacher 3 said, "I really, really think that if our school could set up so that we have thirty minutes, or some time, where we can get together…."

When 31 participants answered survey questions related to time, an issue with collaboration and having the time to plan and collaborate was noted. When asked if paraprofessionals were given the time to plan with their teachers 64.5% of the participants stated

"rarely" or "never"; when asked if paraprofessionals are provided with time to collaborate with their teachers, 51.6% of participants said "rarely" or "never." When asked if teachers are provided with time to plan with paraprofessionals, 61.3% said "rarely" or "never"; when asked if teachers are provided with time to plan with paraprofessionals, 48/4 responded with "rarely" or "never" and 41.9% responded with sometimes.

Theme #4. The fourth theme that emerged in the focus group was compensation. This was also a reoccurring theme in the interviews. While the paraprofessionals talked about their reason for being a paraprofessional was to serve the students, there were also discussions of the limited compensation they receive in comparison to the hard work they do. Several times throughout the discussion, both teachers and paraprofessionals discussed the limited pay that paraprofessionals receive. Teacher 1 spoke up, saying, "there are no perks" for being a teacher or paraprofessional in special education. Paraprofessional 3 and Teacher 1 discussed how there was no additional compensation for paraprofessionals working in special education compared to those working in general education. Paraprofessional 3 and Teacher 2 also discussed how teachers and paraprofessional were equals except, as Paraprofessional 3 stated, "I don't have that degree and that pay." Teacher 1 stated, "I have been shocked that they are not supported financially because other special education parapros are in other counties." Paraprofessional 3 followed that up by saying, "Yeah, that is true. I have talked to other counties, and they do make more money."

Theme #5. The fifth theme that emerged in the focus group was the experience that teachers and paraprofessionals have received during their careers and how this has influenced their current practices. Experiences were also an apparent theme in the interviews. All three of the teachers that participated in the focus group had served as paraprofessionals before they were

teachers. Teacher 3 spoke about when she was a paraprofessional, and she worked with a teacher that "did not trust me." She talked about how she had to "earn the teacher's trust," and it was a "rough start to their relationship." She said that once she earned the teacher's trust about halfway through the year when the teacher was "called out by the principal" and she "just took over," she said the teacher returned and "sat down and started smiling." Teacher 2 also talked about her experience as a paraprofessional stating, "The first year was about learning each other and figuring out each other's weaknesses and strengths. Once we are able to figure that out, we use it to our advantage."

Most of the experiences were positive ones; however, there were a few negative experiences noted as well. Teacher 1 stated, "I have only had one bad experience throughout my career. And once you've had that, you know when you have it good." She also discussed that "throughout her teacher education courses," she was never "taught how to handle a situation" within the classroom "with another adult." She said it was just something she had to "figure out on her own." Teacher 3 also discussed how early in her career, a paraprofessional was doing something that was morally and ethically wrong by calling special education students "names and telling them they were stupid." She said that she had to discuss with the teacher, and she discussed the stress that this caused her as well.

Sub-question 3

Sub-question three for this study wa**s,** "How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of a lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals?" A survey was sent out using Google Forms to the staff at Mountain Elementary School to find themes related to solving the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals. There were 18 total questions, with 7 of them being related to

demographics and 11 relating to the collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals.

Thirty-four participants indicated they were willing to participate in the study, and 31 of these participants qualified to participate based on their experience. Of the 31 participants, 22 were teachers, and 9 were paraprofessionals. There was a wide range of years of experience noted, and there were representatives from each of the years of experience categories. There was also a wide variety of education levels noted. Thirty of the participants were female, and one participant indicated that they would prefer not to note their gender. The age range of participants also varied, with nine participants being 25 to 35, ten participants being 35 to 45, eight participants being 45 to 55, and four participants being 55 or older. Thirty of the participants indicated that their ethnicity was Caucasian, and one participant stated they would prefer not to answer. The remainder of the survey contained Likert Scale Statements related to teachers, paraprofessionals, and collaboration, with responses being never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always using a one to five-point scale.
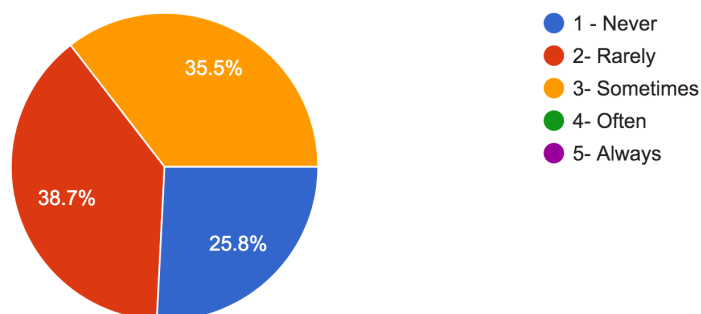
Question 8 was "Paraprofessionals are provided with time to plan with teachers." Out of the thirty-one responses, twenty of the participants stated they were rarely or never provided time to plan. These responses suggest that paraprofessionals are not provided with time to plan with the teachers. Responses are displayed in a pie-graph in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Answer to Survey Question 8

Paraprofessionals are provided with time to plan with teachers.
31 responses

Question 9 was "Paraprofessionals are provided with time to collaborate with teachers."
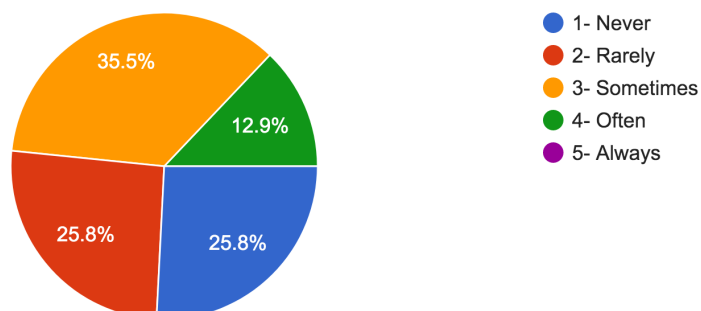
Out of the thirty-one responses, sixteen of the participants indicated paraprofessionals were

never or rarely given the time to collaborate with teachers. These responses suggest that

paraprofessionals are not always provided with time to collaborate with the teachers. Responses

are displayed in a pie-graph in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Answer to Survey Question 9

Paraprofessionals are provided with time to collaborate with teachers.
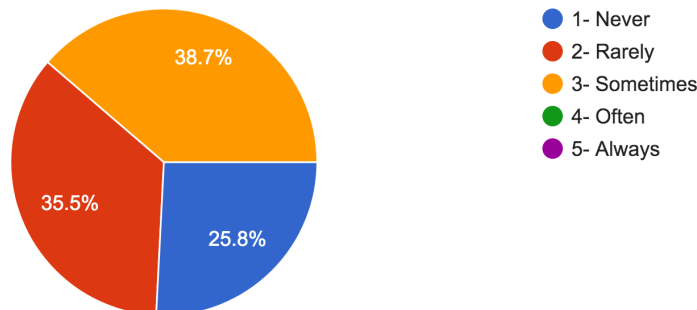31 responses

Question 10 was, "Teachers are provided time to plan with paraprofessionals." Out of the thirty-one responses, twenty of the responses were never or rarely. These responses suggest that teachers and paraprofessionals feel that teachers are not always provided with time to plan with their teachers. Responses are displayed in a pie-graph in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Answer to Survey Question 10

Teachers are provided with time to plan with paraprofessionals.
31 responses

- 1- Never
- 2- Rarely
- 3- Sometimes
- 4- Often
- 5- Always

Question 11 was, "Teachers are provided time to collaborate with paraprofessionals." Out of the thirty-one responses, fifteen of the responses were either never or rarely. These responses suggest that paraprofessionals and teachers are not always provided with time to collaborate with paraprofessionals. Responses are displayed in a pie-graph in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Answer to Survey Question 11

Teachers are provided time to collaborate with paraprofessionals.
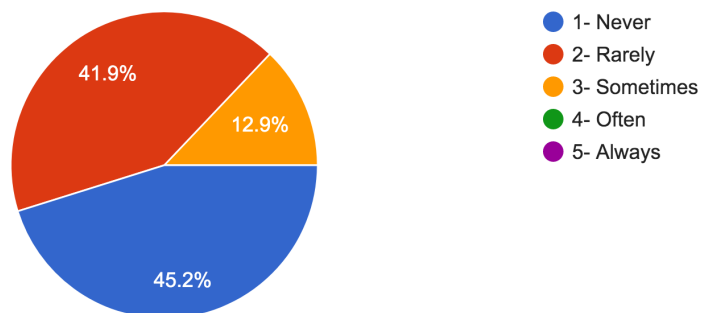31 responses
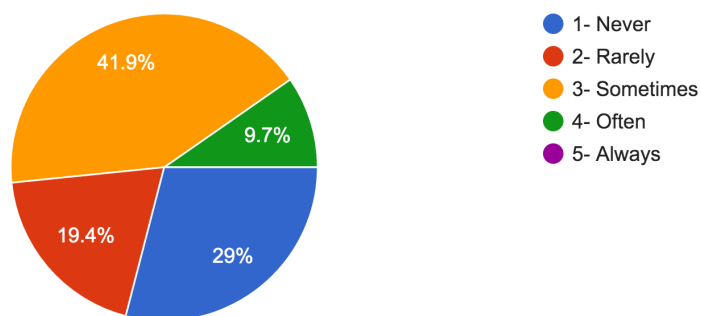
Question 12 was, "Paraprofessionals are provided with professional development opportunities regarding collaboration with teachers." Out of the thirty-one responses, twenty-seven participants stated never or rarely. These responses suggest that paraprofessionals are not always provided with professional development opportunities relating to collaborating with teachers. Responses are displayed in a pie-graph in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Answer to Survey Question 12

Paraprofessionals are provided with professional development opportunities regarding collaboration with teachers.
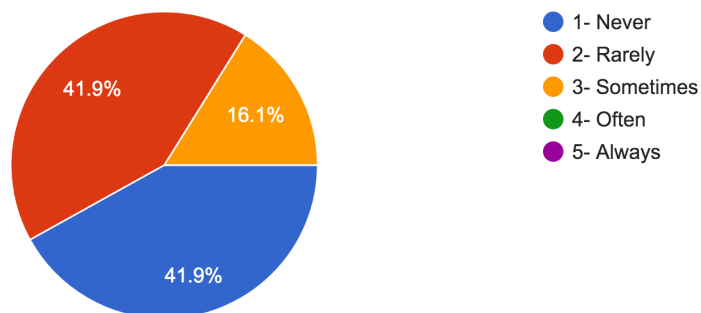31 responses

Legend:
- 1- Never
- 2- Rarely
- 3- Sometimes
- 4- Often
- 5- Always

45.2% (blue), 41.9% (red), 12.9% (orange)

Question 13 was, "Teachers are provided with professional development opportunities regarding collaboration with paraprofessionals." Out of the thirty-one responses, twenty-six participants stated never or rarely. These responses suggest teachers are not provided with professional development opportunities relating to collaborating with paraprofessionals. Responses are displayed in a pie-graph in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Answer to Survey Question 13

Teachers are provided with professional development opportunities regarding collaboration with paraprofessionals.
31 responses

Question 14 was, "Teachers and paraprofessionals at our school have a positive working relationship." Out of the thirty-one responses, twenty-three participants stated often or always. These responses suggest that paraprofessionals and teachers have a positive working relationship with one another. Responses are displayed in a pie-graph in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Answer to Survey Question 14

Teachers and paraprofessionals at our school have a positive working relationship.
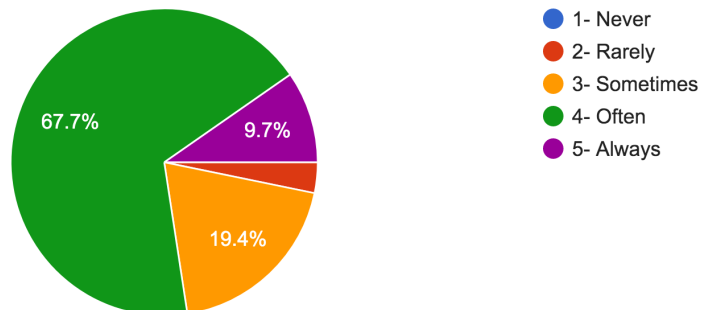31 responses
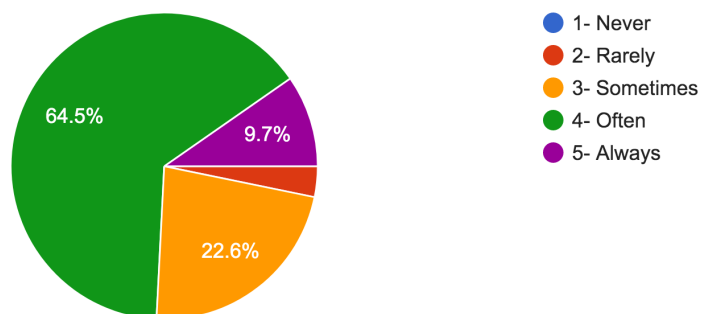
Question 15 was, "Teachers and paraprofessionals at our school have mutual respect for one another." Out of the thirty-one responses, twenty-four participants stated often or always. These responses suggest that teachers and paraprofessionals have mutual respect for one another. Responses are displayed in a pie-graph in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Answer to Survey Question 15

Teachers and paraprofessionals at our school have mutual respect for one another.
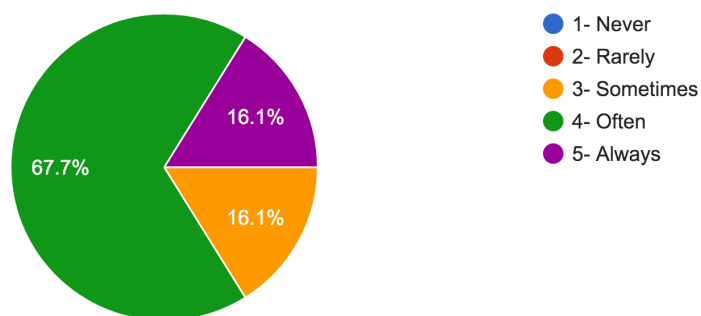31 responses

Question 16 was, "Paraprofessionals work with teachers at our school to meet the needs of diverse learners." Out of the thirty-one responses, twenty-six of the participants stated often or always. These responses suggest that paraprofessionals work with the teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners. Responses are displayed in a pie-graph in Figure 9.

Figure 9

Answer to Survey Question 16

Paraprofessionals work with teachers at our school to meet the needs of diverse learners.
31 responses

Question 17 was, "Teachers work with paraprofessionals at our school to meet the needs of diverse learners." Out of the thirty-one responses, twenty-five of the participants stated often or always. These responses suggest that teachers work with paraprofessionals to meet the needs of diverse learners. Responses are displayed in a pie-graph in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Answer to Survey Question 17

Teachers work with paraprofessionals at our school to meet the needs of diverse learners.
31 responses
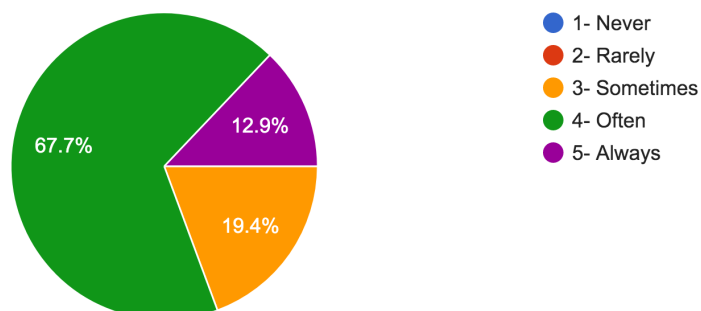
Theme #1. The first theme that emerged from the survey was that teachers and paraprofessionals are not provided with time to plan and collaborate with their counterparts. This was also a reoccurring theme in the interviews and focus group. On the survey, both teachers and paraprofessionals noted that there was never or rarely time set aside to plan with those they are working with. This theme is supported by question numbers 8, 9, 10, and 11. For question 8, asking if paraprofessionals are provided with time to plan with teachers, 8 respondents said "never," 12 respondents said "rarely," and 11 respondents said "sometimes." None of the respondents said "often" or "always." Question 9 asked if paraprofessionals are provided with time to collaborate with teachers, and 8 respondents said "never," 8 said "rarely," 11 said "sometimes," and 4 said "often." Question 10 asked if teachers are provided time to plan with paraprofessionals, and 8 participants said "never," 11 said "rarely," and 12 said "sometimes." Question 10 asked if teachers are provided with time to collaborate with paraprofessionals, and 9 said "never," 6 said "rarely," 13 said "sometimes," and 3 said "often." Overall, when asked if teachers and paraprofessionals are provided with time to plan and collaborate at Mountain Elementary School, teachers and paraprofessionals rarely answered with often or always.

Theme #2. The second theme that emerged from the survey was that teachers and paraprofessionals are not provided with specific professional development opportunities related to collaborating with their colleagues. Professional develop was also a reoccurring theme in the interviews and focus group. This theme emerged from the survey in the responses for questions 13 and 14. Out of the 31 respondents, none of the respondents answered with "often" or "always" when asked if teachers were provided with professional development opportunities regarding collaboration with paraprofessionals. Additionally, 13 participants said "never," 13 said "rarely," and 5 said "sometimes." When asked if paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary

School were provided with professional development opportunities, none of the respondents answered with "often" or "always," and 14 of the respondents said "never," 13 said "rarely," and 4 said "sometimes." Given this information, teachers and paraprofessionals are not given many professional opportunities regarding collaboration.

Theme #3. The third theme that emerged from the survey was that teachers and paraprofessionals have a positive working relationship with one another, mutual respect for one another, and work together to meet the needs of diverse learners. Mutual Respect was also a reoccurring theme in the interviews and focus group. This theme emerged on the survey throughout questions 15 thru 18. Twenty of the 31 participants stated that teachers and paraprofessionals have a positive working relationship, 21 of the 31 participants stated that teachers and paraprofessionals have mutual respect for one another, 21 of the 31 participants stated that paraprofessionals work with teachers to meet the needs of their learners, and 21 of the 31 participants noted that teachers work with paraprofessionals to meet the needs of diverse learners. Furthermore, out of questions 15 thru 18, participants did not choose "never" for any of the questions, and "rarely" was minimally chosen as a response. Overall, the participants noted that the relationship between teachers and paraprofessionals was a positive one.

<center>**Discussion**</center>

Themes from the study, including professional development, mutual respect, time, personalities, and compensation, were apparent in the empirical literature as well as throughout the triangulated data from interviews, focus group, and survey responses in this study. The information drawn from this study shows the importance of providing these things to teacher-paraprofessional teams at Mountain Elementary School.

Empirical Discussion

Current research contains many important factors impacting the collaborative efforts between special education teachers and paraprofessionals and strategies that can be used to help improve these efforts. After reviewing the empirical literature in Chapter Two, the researcher identified four main themes across all methodologies that corresponded with the research findings. This study helps extend on current literature by showing the importance of professional development opportunities, the importance of mutual respect between teachers and paraprofessionals, the need for teachers and paraprofessionals to have time to plan and collaborate, the impact personalities have on the relationships built between teachers and paraprofessionals, and the importance of adequately compensating paraprofessionals, both monetarily and with appreciation. These four themes were found throughout the methodologies in this study as well as in the current research.

Professional Development

One important theme found throughout the literature is the importance of professional development for both teachers and paraprofessionals and strategies needed to ensure that the professional development is beneficial (Brock & Carter, 2015; Brown & Chapman, 2017; Douglas et al., 2019; Douglas, Uitto, & Reinfields, 2019; Maltz & Seruya, 2018). Brock and Carter (2015) mentioned that paraprofessionals often have little to no background or history, implementing evidence-based strategies to meet the needs of special education students. Furthermore, Maltz and Seruya (2018) discussed paraprofessionals indicate that they do not feel adequately trained to support specific disabilities and behaviors. Participants in the study noted issues with this as well, and the paraprofessionals stated that training regarding collaboration and other components of their jobs would be beneficial. When using modeling, coaching, and feedback, paraprofessionals can make gains related to implementing effective instructional

practices (Ledford et al., 2018; Walker et al., 2020). Additionally, research shows that paraprofessionals showed improvement when trained on how to support students with disabilities Walker & Smith, 2015; Walker et al., 2021). Participants in the study also discussed the importance of being trained in the classroom by their supervising teachers.

While paraprofessionals frequently have limited training, teachers also have limited training regarding how to collaborate and support paraprofessionals. Douglas et al. (2016) found that teachers had very little training throughout their college experiences covering supervision of paraprofessionals. Teachers in the interviews and focus groups also discussed this as an issue and stated they were not trained to supervise or train paraprofessionals.

Mutual Respect

Another important theme found throughout the literature is the importance of ensuring that there is mutual respect between teachers and paraprofessionals (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2017; Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2016; Iadarola et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2016). Mutal Respect was also a theme found throughout the interviews, focus group, and survey in this study. Cipriano et al. (2016) discussed the importance of teachers and paraprofessionals collaborating to create effective teams. To create effective teams having mutual respect for one another was an important element found throughout the literature. Douglas, Chapin, and Nolan (2016) discussed the importance of teachers respecting paraprofessionals and treating them as equal team members. Teachers and paraprofessionals in this study also mention the importance of being treated equally throughout the interviews and focus group. Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2016) stated that when teachers and paraprofessionals build relationships, they strengthen their skills with trust, compromise, and mutual respect. Participants also noted the importance of having

open communication with one another so that the paraprofessionals receive on-the-job training from the teacher they work with.

Time

The third theme found throughout the literature, and this study was the importance of having time to collaborate and plan together (Billingsley et al., 2019; Brock & Carter, 2016; Gerzel-Short, Conderman, & Dispain, 2018). Billingsley et al. (2019) found that special education teachers need time for collaboration with individuals that serve their students as well as time for individual planning. Teachers and paraprofessionals in the study stated that they did not have time set aside to plan and collaborate and felt they would benefit from a common planning time, even if it were only once or twice weekly. Teachers and paraprofessionals in the study stated that they did not have time set aside to plan and collaborate and felt they would benefit from a common planning time, even if it were only once or twice weekly.

Personalities

The fourth theme found throughout the literature, and this study is that administration needs to consider the personalities of teachers and paraprofessionals when creating teams (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016; Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2015; Riggs, 2004). Riggs (2004) stated the importance of teachers and paraprofessionals realizing one another's strengths, weaknesses, interests, and talents to ensure they are successful. Participants in the study also mentioned a need for administrators to look at personalities when pairing up teacher-paraprofessional teams during the interviews.

Compensation

The fifth theme found in the literature and this study is the need for paraprofessionals to receive additional compensation (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2017). In Georgia, the average

salary for paraprofessionals is $22,276 (Teacher Aide Salary in Georgia, 2020).

Paraprofessionals average a gross salary of $1,856.33 a month. By the time taxes, insurances,

and retirement are withheld, paraprofessionals are left bringing home under $1,000.00 a month

for working a full-time job that is responsible for keeping students with disabilities safe while

educating them. Regarding compensation, Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2017) found that

paraprofessionals are dissatisfied with the amount of monetary compensation they receive and

are not thanked for the tasks they perform. Participants in the study also mentioned

paraprofessionals' compensation and stated that paraprofessionals working in special education

deserve a position supplement.

Theoretical Discussion

The two primary theoretical constructs in the current literature that guided this study were

the social learning theory and adult learning theory. These theoretical constructs appeared to be

connected with the data collected throughout the study and may help explain how teachers and

paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School can best learn to collaborate. Bandura's social

learning theory suggests that individuals learn from observing one another (Bandura, 1977).

Knowles' adult learning theory suggests that adults learn through andragogy (Knowles, 1973).

Social Learning Theory

One of the most present themes found throughout the interviews, focus group, and

survey, was the need for additional professional development and training regarding

collaborating. Albert Bandura's social learning theory states that if individuals see a specific

behavior gain the desired outcome, they are likely to exhibit the behavior as well (Bandura,

1977; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Therefore, as teachers and paraprofessionals learn to collaborate

and see success within other teacher-paraprofessional teams, then other teacher-paraprofessionals

will start exhibiting similar collaborative styles. Additionally, when learning through modeling and observing, it is important that attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation all take place to ensure success (Bandura, 1977; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Therefore, when paraprofessionals are learning specific teaching strategies in the classroom, they must consider and focus on attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation.

Adult Learning Theory

Malcom Knowles' (1973) adult learning theory is also connected to the literature and the information collected in the study. The adult learning theory describes how adults learn differently from children. Adults learn through a process called andragogy, where they want to be in control of what they are learning and how they are learning it, while children require someone to direct how and what they are learning. The adult learning theory consists of assumptions including a change in self-concept, the role of experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning (Knowles, 1973; Knowles et al., 2005). Later, motivation was also added to the assumptions (Knowles et al., 2005). Therefore, when looking at this study, it should be noted that when developing professional development opportunities, these assumptions should be considered so that the teachers and paraprofessionals gain the skills needed to be able to collaborate effectively.

Summary

The data collected in the interviews, focus group, and the survey confirmed many of the barriers impacting collaboration that are found in the literature, as well as the strategies that need to be implemented to improve collaboration. Within the interviews, themes included the need for professional learning or training, experiences, mutual respect, communication, time, personalities, and compensation. Within the focus group, themes included mutual respect, the

need for professional learning and training, time, compensation, and experiences. Within the survey, themes were time, professional development, and the importance of a positive working relationship, mutual respect, and the ability to work together. There were many common themes found throughout the three sources of data collection. There were strong, significant connections between the empirical, theoretical, and study information.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of the lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School and to find strategies to best train teachers and paraprofessionals on collaboration practices. A multi-method design was used, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Interviews, a focus group, and a survey were used to collect data. The problem that Mountain Elementary School faced was that special education teachers and paraprofessionals were struggling to collaborate to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This chapter contains a restatement of the problem, a proposed solution to the central research questions, the resources and funds needed to solve the problem, roles and responsibilities, a timeline, solution implications, an evaluation plan, and a summary.

Restatement of the Problem

The problem identified in this research study was the issue of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals at an elementary school in North Georgia. The problem was based on information provided by special education teachers and paraprofessionals working in the school. The difficulties impacting teachers and paraprofessionals have been researched and reported in the past. However, despite the current research, teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School continue to struggle with collaboration. This study has the possibility of providing stakeholders at Mountain Elementary School with the information needed to foster collaborative efforts between special education teachers and paraprofessionals

Proposed Solution to the Central Question

Based on the information collected using interviews, a focus group, and a survey in this study as well as through a thorough review of the literature, a solution to the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals at an elementary school in North Georgia may come from four specific changes to current practices within the school. The goal of the solution suggested is to improve collaboration and between special education teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School. Improvements with professional learning/training covering collaboration, providing teachers and paraprofessionals with time to plan with one another, giving teachers and paraprofessionals personality tests before matching them up as teams, and providing a positional supplement to paraprofessionals working with special education students may benefit the collaborative and planning efforts between special education teachers and paraprofessionals.

Professional development and training opportunities need to be provided to both teachers and paraprofessionals that cover best practices in regards to collaboration and teaching strategies to serve students with disabilities. Throughout the interviews, focus group, and surveys in this study, participants mentioned the importance of professional development opportunities for both teachers and paraprofessionals regarding collaboration as well as the lack of professional development opportunities present at Mountain Elementary Schools. This was also reoccurring subject found within the literature.

Bettini et al. (2019) found that special education teachers felt that training paraprofessionals was one of the most demanding emergent responsibilities. Additionally, Biggs, Gilson, and Carter (2018) suggested that several groups of stakeholders, including professors, administrators, and other teachers, can assist teachers throughout their careers with learning how to collaborate. When the administrative staff at Mountain Elementary School begin creating

professional development opportunities, they can create opportunities within the classroom as well as in the teachers' and paraprofessionals' professional learning communities. The school system can utilize exemplar teachers and paraprofessionals to train other teachers and paraprofessionals within the system or may need to reach outside the county to find trainers.

Brock and Carter (2015) discussed that paraprofessionals often enter the field with limited training and that paraprofessionals show their willingness to participate in training. In the interviews and focus group, paraprofessionals also expressed their interest in more training. At Mountain Elementary School, teachers need to be instructed on how to train paraprofessionals in the classroom using modeling, coaching, and feedback. Mason et al. (2020) determined that observation and feedback may lead to paraprofessional improvement. The goal of providing professional development and training opportunities to both teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School is to develop effective strategies to improve collaboration and planning, which may lead to improved instruction and student outcomes. Barrior and Hollingshead (2017) found that paraprofessionals' perceptions regarding professional development were that it increased their skills and knowledge.

Teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School must also be provided with time to collaborate and plan with one another. Bettini et al. (2019) found that special education teachers had significant demands for training paraprofessionals during planning times. The negative effects of lack of time and the impact it had on collaboration at Mountain Elementary School was a common theme throughout interviews, the focus group, and the survey. Additionally, a review of the literature noted the importance of creating time. Participants in all settings in this study stated there was limited time to plan and collaborate with their colleagues.

Billingsley et al. (2019) found that special educators need time for collaboration with individuals that serve their students; however, it was noted throughout the interviews, focus group, and survey conducted for this study that this is not presently happening Mountain Elementary School. Currently, paraprofessionals are required to provide support to their students throughout the entire day. Administrators must develop a schedule that will allow teachers to have a minimum of two, thirty-minute planning sessions with their paraprofessional(s) each week. Administrators should guide and monitor teachers and adults during this time to make sure that they are using it effectively. The goal of providing teachers and paraprofessionals with sufficient time to plan and collaborate is to allow teachers to develop and create quality instruction for the students they serve as well as provide them with time to discuss strengths and needs found in the classroom.

Administrators at Mountain Elementary School also need to give personality tests before matching up teacher-paraprofessional teams. The need for personality tests was a common theme found throughout the interview as well as throughout the literature review. Cipriano et al. (2016) stated that teachers and paraprofessionals must collaborate to create effective teams that work together for the best interest of their students. Personality tests will allow administrators to best pair up teams and will also allow the teams to see each other's strengths and weaknesses. Riggs (2004) noted the importance of teachers and paraprofessionals learning one another's strengths, weaknesses, interests, and talents. Personality tests will also allow teacher-paraprofessional teams to begin learning these things about one another. Personality traits must be known within the classroom so that the educators know how to best work with their team. The goal of administering personality tests within the classroom is to ensure that teacher-paraprofessional

teams that are being created have the necessary traits to be an effective team and that they will be able to effectively collaborate.

Special education paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School should also be provided with a positional supplement for duties requiring feeding students, changing clothes and diapers, and managing extreme behaviors. Compensation was a common theme found throughout the interviews and the focus group. Participants, both teachers, and paraprofessionals, stated that paraprofessionals were not adequately compensated for the job they were doing. Lack of compensation for paraprofessionals was also noted in the literature review. Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2017) stated that paraprofessionals expressed their dissatisfaction with their careers in terms of monetary compensation. Paraprofessionals across the board receive minimal compensation, so those that have extra duties and responsibilities should be compensated appropriately so that they understand that they are valued and appreciated for all they do. Additionally, administrators and teachers should constantly let their paraprofessionals know how grateful they are for them through their words and actions. Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2017) found that paraprofessionals report not being recognized or appreciated for their work. While this was not a noted theme in this study, it is important that Mountain Elementary School ensure they recognize their paraprofessionals for the hard work they are doing. The goal of providing paraprofessionals with both monetary and nonmonetary compensation is to help show them they are needed, valued, and appreciated so that paraprofessionals continue to work hard to meet the needs of their students and supervising teachers.

Resources Needed

To solve the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals, Mountain Elementary School will need a few resources. First, they will need

the means to provide professional development to staff regarding best collaborative efforts between special education teachers and professionals. To obtain these resources, the school may reach out to exemplar teacher-paraprofessional teams in their building, county, and surrounding area. Additionally, they will need to set aside time during professional development days to have teachers and paraprofessionals regarding best collaborative practices. Furthermore, administrators need to understand the importance of ongoing training to continue to provide teachers and paraprofessionals with new research and effective strategies regarding collaboration.

Moreover, administrators at Mountain Elementary School will need to set aside a sufficient amount of time for teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate during the school day. This will be challenging as the students the teachers and paraprofessionals serve are generally high-need students; however, administrators may choose to put teachers and paraprofessionals on a morning or afternoon duty rotation schedule that allows each team time together to collaborate. Another possibility would be to have other adults in the building occasionally cover support during specials time (Art, Music, PE, STEAM, Computer Lab) to free up the paraprofessionals to plan with their supervising teachers during the teachers' planning time. When interviewing the teachers and paraprofessionals it was mentioned that the kindergarten paraprofessionals get to plan with their supervising teachers for fifty minutes every single day. A minimum of two, thirty-minute segments each week need to be provided to the teachers and paraprofessionals working together.

To provide additional compensation to paraprofessionals, the special education department will need the resources to provide these funds. There are currently approximately eight special education paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School that are responsible for

serving special education students. If the school system could pay each of these paraprofessionals an annual supplement of $1,000 each this would allow the special education paraprofessionals to see that they are seen and appreciated for their hard work, which may lead to recruitment and retention of experienced paraprofessionals.

The biggest barrier with obtaining both professional development and time is finding the time to provide both of these things. Teachers and paraprofessionals already have full plates, and this may initially just seem like another thing to do. However, if the school makes the time to provide professional development opportunities and time to plan and collaborate, then their instructional practices should improve, the workload should become less to manage, and ultimately the students will benefit. Additionally, it may be difficult to budget for a supplement for the paraprofessionals; however, it may lead to the recruitment and retention of experienced paraprofessionals.

Funds Needed

If stakeholders reallocate the time and resources already found within the personnel in their building, then no additional funds would be needed to provide professional development, time, or personality tests within Mountain Elementary School. Funds that may be needed to solve the problem of lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School would include additional training from outside of the system and a position supplement to paraprofessionals. The funds for training could come from the professional development budget, and the funds for position supplements for paraprofessionals could come from the special education budget. There are potential barriers that may arise when trying to obtain these funds, but these barriers are minimal. The school may not have the extra funds to provide such professional development training. If this is the case, the school system will need to

be sure to find resources within the county to help train their personnel that will require minimal funds. Additionally, the special education budget may not have adequate funds to cover a supplement; therefore, the system needs to carefully consider the funds it will be able to use each year. The system should also be sure to explain to paraprofessionals that the supplement may vary from year to year depending on the annual budget.

Roles and Responsibilities

To best implement the proposed solution, the administrators at Mountain Elementary School will first need to meet with the special education staff and discuss the importance of effective collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School. Administrators must receive buy-in from all special education staff. Then, administrators must plan professional development opportunities for special education teachers and paraprofessionals. This training should be effective and ongoing to ensure that special education teachers and paraprofessionals continue learning and growing.

To make time available for teachers and paraprofessionals to plan and collaborate, administrators must develop a schedule that allows for time to collaborate. Ideally, the school would start the year with a minimum of two, thirty-minute time segments per week set aside for teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate. This time may be adjusted to provide more or less time to plan together based on the impact it has on the instruction provided to the students. Administrators would also be responsible for administering personality tests and talking with teachers and paraprofessionals to ensure they are paired up with other colleagues that will benefit their personality type. The special education director would be responsible for allocating funds to allow a position supplement to the six paraprofessionals that are responsible for serving high-needs students each day at Mountain Elementary school.

Timeline

When looking at the time it will take to implement the proposed strategies, it is imperative to understand the importance of effective implementation of the plan. It is important that stakeholders do not rush into the plan because this may result in teacher-paraprofessional burnout or lead to the educators not making the most out of the professional development and time that is given to them. Additionally, time must be given to the leaders of professional development opportunities so that the training opportunities are well thought out and beneficial to those participating in the training.

The first goal of Mountain Elementary School should be to plan an administrator-led introduction meeting for the Spring of 2022. This meeting will allow the administrators to discuss the importance of collaboration, the plan that has been developed to improve collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals, and discuss the school's plan to make these improvements. Additionally, the school should plan and execute the first professional development opportunity during the spring of 2022. The second professional development opportunity will be held in the Fall of 2022 after teachers and paraprofessionals have been allowed to practice what they learned in the first portion.

It is important that during the introduction meeting and the first professional development meeting, that teachers and paraprofessionals are taught how to plan and how to make the most out of their planning time before being provided with this time. Then, administrators will create a schedule during the Summer of 2022 that will allow teachers and paraprofessionals that work together to have a minimum of two, thirty-minute planning sessions together. Administrators should also work with teachers and paraprofessionals during this time to ensure that the time is being spent the way it has been intended. Also beginning Fall of 2022, personality tests and

interviews should be given to appropriately match teacher-paraprofessional teams and a

paraprofessional positional supplement should be provided to the special education

paraprofessionals. Moving forward, teachers and paraprofessionals should participate in a

minimum of one professional development opportunity per year to ensure that stakeholders

continue learning effective planning and collaborative strategies.

Table 3

Implementation Timeline

Activity	Timeline
Administrator Led Introduction Meeting	Spring 2022
Professional Development-Part A	Spring 2022
Professional Development-Part B	Fall 2022
Development of Schedule Providing Collaboration/Planning Time	Fall 2022
Personality Tests to Match Teachers and Paraprofessionals	Fall 2022
Position Supplement for Special Education Paraprofessionals	Fall 2022
A Minimum of One Professional Development Opportunity per Year	On-Going

Solution Implications

There are both positive and negative implications that the school needs to be aware of

before implementation. Overall, the timeline should be relatively smooth to implement and

follow, and the funds to carry out the timeline are minimal. Positive implications are that with

increased training and professional development, teachers and paraprofessionals will begin

learning strategies to better collaborate and plan with one another during instructional time and

during planning time. Additionally, another positive implication is that teachers and

paraprofessionals will now have some time where they will be free from students to talk, plan,

and collaborate to meet the needs of their students. Additionally, with a positional supplement

and increased positive feedback for the special education paraprofessionals, they will see that

they are appreciated and valued for the time and effort they pour into their duties at the school. In

regards to giving personality tests, teachers and paraprofessionals will begin to see that

administrators have a strategic plan to pair up teacher-paraprofessional teams and that administrators are considering personality traits and needs when creating these teams.

While these positive implications should benefit instruction for students with disabilities, there are also negative implications that need to be known. Teachers and paraprofessionals are already overworked, and they may view additional professional development and collaboration time as just another thing to do. Therefore, administrators must explain the purpose of this program and the benefits that stakeholders will see if the program is implemented with fidelity. Additionally, teachers and paraprofessionals may not use the extra time to maximize collaboration, planning, and instruction and instead use it as free time. Administrators must teach teachers and paraprofessionals how to collaborate and plan with one another through ongoing training. Administrators must also stress the importance of using the time to talk with one another, plan lessons, and brainstorm ideas and not use this time to run errands, talk to other colleagues, or make copies. Furthermore, it is important that administrators explain that while they are administering personality tests and taking into consideration what makes effective teacher-paraprofessional teams, that teams still must put forth an effort to gain mutual respect and to work well with one another. Regarding compensation, administrators must explain that the supplement may vary from year to year and recognize that while the supplement may not be a large amount, positive words and encouragement will also show the paraprofessionals that they are respected and valued.

Evaluation Plan

The evaluation plan will be a critical component to determining whether or not the overall plan is being successful. To ensure that the program is beneficial, administrators should first note the collaborative and planning efforts between teachers and paraprofessionals before

the implementation of the suggested plan. Administrators should talk with teachers, paraprofessionals, and students and observe them, making notes in regards to collaboration and planning. Then, the administrators should roll out the new program, ensuring that they receive buy-in from all stakeholders. Additionally, as professional development opportunities and extra planning time are implemented, administrators should be sure to continually observe the new practices being implemented and provide teachers and paraprofessionals with constructive feedback. Throughout the entire process, administrators should use goal-based evaluations to ensure that the program is effective and to determine if adjustments should be made.

Delimitations to the study include the study being conducted in one Title I school in North Georgia. Therefore, the results, suggestions, and conclusions cannot be generalized to other settings. These delimitations were made because the researcher was interested in solving an immediate problem at a specific school. Limitations to the study involve factors that were unable to be controlled by the researcher. For this specific study, limitations included minimal participants from one school with minimal diversity with gender and ethnicity. Future research should be conducted across multiple settings with a variety of diverse participants to determine if the issues with collaboration and planning between teachers and paraprofessionals are the same across multiple settings and with a variety of participants.

Summary

The problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School is a problem that must be addressed. When teachers and paraprofessionals are not able to collaborate effectively, then the instructional practices are impacted. The themes and suggestions present in this study are consistent with current literature.

Overall, the lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals may be improved by increasing professional development opportunities, providing teachers and paraprofessionals time to collaborate, administering personality tests before pairing up teacher-paraprofessional teams, and providing a position supplement to special education paraprofessionals. The goal of implementing these things is to improve the collaborative efforts, which should lead to improved instruction. Overall, all stakeholders should benefit from implementing the suggestions.

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APPENDIX A

[External] IRB-FY20-21-794 - Initial: Initial - Non-Human Subjects Research

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 15, 2021

Brianna Wilbanks
Daniel Baer, Meredith Park

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-794 DEVELOPING STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE COLLABORATION BETWEEN SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS: AN APPLIED STUDY

Dear Brianna Wilbanks and Daniel Baer, Meredith Park,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) 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 does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B

Hello {Principal/Superintendent},

I am currently attending Liberty University to earn my EdD and writing a dissertation titled, ***Developing Strategies to Improve Collaboration Between Teachers and Paraprofessionals: An Applied Study.*** I would like to request your permission to conduct this study at {School Name}. I may also need to utilize teachers and paraprofessionals at {Alternate School Name} depending on the individuals' willingness to participate as I need 12-15 participants. I am planning on defending my proposal in the near future. I hope to gain IRB approval and then start research as soon as possible. I have included important information related to my study below and attached my proposal and my proposal presentation.

Problem Statement: The problem is that special education teachers and paraprofessionals are struggling to collaborate with one another to meet the needs of their students at Mountain Elementary School (pseudonym) in North Georgia.

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School and to find strategies to best train teachers and paraprofessionals on collaboration practices.

Central Question: How can the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals be solved at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?
   Sub-question 1: How would special education teachers and paraprofessionals in interviews describe ways to solve the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals in Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?
   Sub-question 2: How would educators in a focus group solve the problem of lack of collaboration between paraprofessionals and teachers at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?
   Sub-question 3: How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of a lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals?

Method: For this study, interviews, focus groups, and surveys will be used to collect information and data.

Participants: Ten participants from Mountain Elementary School will participate in the interview and focus group portions of the study. Seven of these participants will be special education paraprofessionals, and three participants will be special education teachers.

Please let me know if you have any other questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brianna Wilbanks

Approval granted via email from superintendent on 4/9/21 at 12:02 PM and from the principal on 4/9/21 at 12:42 PM.

APPENDIX C

Developing Strategies to Improve Collaboration Between Teachers and Paraprofessionals:
An Applied Study
Brianna Wilbanks
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a project on the collaborative efforts of paraprofessionals and teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been working as a teacher or paraprofessional in a K-2, Title I school, for 1 to 25 years. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Brianna Wilbanks, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of the lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School (pseudonym) and to find strategies to best train teachers and paraprofessionals on collaboration practices.
The project seeks to answer the following questions:
    Central Question: How can the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals be solved at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?
    Sub-question 1: How would special education teachers and paraprofessionals in interviews describe ways to solve the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals in Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?
    Sub-question 2: How would educators in a focus group solve the problem of lack of collaboration between paraprofessionals and teachers at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?
    Sub-question 3: How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of a lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals?

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in a face-to-face or Google Meets semi-structured interview: The interview will last approximately an hour and will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
2. Participate in a face-to-face or Google Meets focus group: The focus group session will last approximately an hour and will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
3. Participate in an online survey using Google Forms: The survey is 16 questions and asks demographic related questions and likert-scale questions.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.
Benefits: Benefits to society include the contribution of information that will allow paraprofessionals and teachers to better collaborate to meet the needs of their students.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Project records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants and schools will be assigned a pseudonym. The researcher will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and Focus Group conversations will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or 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 will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Brianna Wilbanks. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ████████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Daniel Baer at ████████████████.

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., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or 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 me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX D

I've invited you to fill out a form:

Collaboration Study- Informed Consent

Developing Strategies to Improve Collaboration Between Teachers and Paraprofessionals: An Applied Study
Brianna Wilbanks, Liberty University, School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on the collaborative efforts of paraprofessionals and teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been working as a teacher or paraprofessional in a K-2, Title I school, for 1 to 25 years. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Brianna Wilbanks, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of the lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School (pseudonym) and to find strategies to best train teachers and paraprofessionals on collaboration practices.
The research seeks to answer the following questions:
Central Question: How can the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals be solved at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?
Sub-question 1: How would special education teachers and paraprofessionals in interviews describe ways to solve the problem of lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals in Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?
Sub-question 2: How would educators in a focus group solve the problem of lack of collaboration between paraprofessionals and teachers at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?
Sub-question 3: How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of a lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals?

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things for the survey portion of the study:

Participate in an online survey using Google Forms: The survey is 16 questions and asks demographic related questions and likert-scale questions.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Benefits to society include the contribution of information that will allow paraprofessionals and teachers to better collaborate to meet the needs of their students.

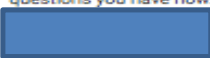Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

• Participants and schools will be assigned a pseudonym. The researcher will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
• Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
• Interviews and Focus Group conversations will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or 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 will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Brianna Wilbanks. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Daniel Baer at

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., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or 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.
By selecting "Fill out Form and Yes" I understand that I am giving my consent to participate.
By selecting "Fill out Form and No" I understand that I am declining to participate.

FILL OUT FORM

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

1. What do you enjoy most about your job?

2. Describe your background working as a paraprofessional or teacher.

3. Tell me about your experiences as a paraprofessional or teacher collaborating with teachers or paraprofessionals.

4. What dispositions do teachers and paraprofessionals need to effectively collaborate with paraprofessionals or teachers?

5. What factors are associated with positive experiences for teachers or paraprofessionals working with paraprofessionals or teachers?

6. What factors are associated with negative experiences for paraprofessionals or teachers working with teachers or paraprofessionals?

7. Describe the professional development you have received as a paraprofessional or teacher.

8. How can professional development opportunities be improved for paraprofessionals or teachers in regards to collaborating?

9. What is most difficult about being a paraprofessional or teacher?

10. How would you solve the problem with lack of collaboration between special education teachers and paraprofessionals?

11. How would you solve the problem of lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School in North Georgia?

APPENDIX F

Focus Group Questions

1. Please describe your experience working as a paraprofessional or teacher including years of experience, grade level(s), and prior training regarding the education field.

2. We are going to discuss the collaborative experiences between teachers and paraprofessionals. What are your opinions about collaboration?

3. How long have you worked with a teacher or paraprofessional and what this experience been like?

4. What are some strengths that you have when collaborating with a teacher or paraprofessional?

5. What are some weaknesses/struggles that you have when collaborating with a teacher or paraprofessional?

6. What can school systems do to foster collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals?

7. What can teachers do to foster collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals?

8. What can paraprofessionals do to foster collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals?

9. What barriers impact collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School?

10. How would you solve the problem of lack of collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals at Mountain Elementary School?

APPENDIX G

Survey Questions

    1. Do you have experience collaborating with special education teachers or

paraprofessionals to meet the needs of students with disabilities?

- o Yes

- o No

2. What is your current role at Mountain Elementary School?

- o Teacher

- o Paraprofessional

- o Other (Describe): _____

3. How many years of classroom experience do you have?

- o 0 years – 5 years

- o 5 years – 10 years

- o 10 years – 15 years

- o 15 – 20 years

- o 20 or more years

- o Prefer not to answer

4. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

- o Some High School

- o High School

- o Trade School

- o Associate's Degree

- o Bachelor's Degree

- o Master's Degree

- Specialist's Degree

- Ph.D. or Ed.D.

- Prefer not to answer

5. What gender do you identify as?

- Male

- Female

- Prefer not to answer

6. What is your age?

- 18-25

- 25-35

- 35-45

- 45-55

- 55 or older

- Prefer not to answer

7. What is your ethnicity?

- Caucasian

- African-American

- Latino or Hispanic

- Asian

- Native American

- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

- Two or More

- Other/Unknown

    o   Prefer not to answer

8. Paraprofessionals are provided with time to plan with teachers.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

9. Paraprofessionals are provided with time to collaborate with teachers.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

10. Teachers are provided with time to plan with paraprofessionals.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

11. Teachers are provided with time to collaborate with paraprofessionals.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

12. Paraprofessionals are provided with professional development opportunities

regarding collaboration with teachers.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

13. Teachers are provided with professional development opportunities regarding

collaboration with paraprofessionals.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

14. Teachers and paraprofessionals at our school have a positive working relationship.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

15. Teachers and paraprofessionals at our school have a mutual respect for one another.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

16. Paraprofessionals work with teachers at our school to meet the needs of diverse learners.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

17. Teachers work with paraprofessionals at our school to meet the needs of diverse learners.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always