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# Managing Adult Relationships in an Autism Classroom

## Abstract

**The purpose of this research is to explore what happens when a novice teacher embarks on the role as the lead in a self-contained, Autism, special education classroom. The task of managing adult relationships in special education classrooms can become complex. Self-contained special education classrooms offer unique challenges for even the most seasoned teachers and paraeducators. Most college preparatory classes do not prepare teachers for the role of managing other adults. Often, the paraeducators have been attached to their classrooms for a longer period of time and have more knowledge of the classroom structure and students than the novice teacher. The research will identify: (1) What happens when the teacher does not have the foundational skills to implement effective structures/management strategies in the classroom. (2) How the lack of structure impacts staff relationships and overall communication within the classroom. (3) Can the classroom team function in a respectful manner when they do not have a shared understanding of the role and responsibilities of the adults in the classroom? This study shows when roles are not clear, problems multiply. The results of the research demonstrate that classroom teams cannot function effectively without clear consistent communication and demonstrated acts of respect. When the classroom teacher and staff cannot find a way to communicate effectively, develop a shared understanding for classroom instruction/ management and hold mutual respect for all team members daily, the adult relationships become increasingly difficult. Cohesive classrooms improve student engagement and increases aide retention.**

## CONTEXT

I am one of two Program Specialists managing preschool Autism programs in Brightwood Unified School District. The role is multifaceted in the sense that I am part of a three-person team, serving as the administrative arm at Starlight School, the District's preschool assessment center. In addition to duties at Starlight School. I work with nine site-based preschool Special Day Classrooms across the District that serve children who have been offered 3 or 5-hour daily instructional programs after assessment. Countless data sources demonstrate that early intervention improves the outcome of student achievement for children on the Autistic spectrum

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Rogers, S. J., & Vismara, L. A. (2008, 03), Landa, R. (2018). Best practice supports that more than one evidenced program may offer support but what they all have in common are elements that include parent involvement, a predictable environment incorporating the child's interests that actively engages the child, and focuses on individual developmental goals (C. Corsello, 2005).

The ability to diagnose children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) has vastly improved. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) 1:68 children has ASD as compared to the rate of 1:150 children previously identified in 2002. With improved diagnosis, more children are accessing educational services prior to the age of 5. The average age for an autism diagnosis is 4. Evidence-based practices support that early intervention improves the educational outcome for students on the spectrum.

My focus classroom has a new teacher who is working on "waivers" this year. Although the teacher has worked as a substitute teacher, their experience managing a classroom and running an Autism preschool program is very limited. Even with maximum support, the slightest change in the day throws the teacher off, which results in the abandonment of the classroom schedule for the remainder of the day. Classroom aides have been successful at supporting challenging students and implementing calming strategies, but once the behavior subsides often the staff and the teacher do not follow through with the appropriate intervention to address the behavior; therefore it is recurring. The unpredictability of my teacher's classroom and the faulty implementation of the daily schedule causes children to increase their off-task behaviors. "The behavior of children with autism is easily disrupted by changes in the environment and routine; programs must adopt strategies to assist the child with transitions from one activity to another" (Dawson and Osterling 1997). The overall lack of planning and fluctuating implementation of

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the schedule frequently leads to difficult situations regarding safety in the classroom because the children are unable to follow a predictable routine. Within the first two weeks of school, the teacher was provided with a template of a 5-hour day in an ASD program to help plan the schedule. The teacher had not made use of the template nor developed the schedule. It is critical that the teacher take action on the schedule.

An added casualty of the teacher failing to follow a schedule is the toll on the support staff within the classroom. They have expressed feeling frustrated and worn out because of increasing demands of the students in the classroom. An outgrowth of the dysfunction is the adult behavior shifts and their increased absences, leaving the classroom in a fragile state. A posted schedule which includes staff breaks and lunches could be a tool that demonstrates to staff that the teacher is taking hold of the classroom and has an eye on an area that has not been respected--breaktime has been neglected due to increased need of support staff on a daily basis.

A direct implication of staff fatigue is increased absences -- one aide had been absent seven times in the first 12 weeks of school. A second aide has mentioned taking days off as well since she does not feel it is fair that she is at work all of the time and the other aide has been off. The class is down one aide because the third position had not been filled at the start of school by a consistent support person. In turn, the frazzled teacher is feeling burnt out. Although the staff is largely willing to work, they lament the changes in the program. One of the aides has 17 years of experience in the Autism program and the other has worked seven years. Both expressed the hardships they have faced as this is the third teacher in the classroom within the past three years. One of the aides worked in the classroom with the teacher who founded the Autism program in Brightwood Unified School District. In the past, there was a lot of training for the

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paraprofessionals in the classroom; now there are few opportunities for aides who express an interest to grow their craft.

Two aides expressed an interest in further training. During a recent “crisis team meeting” facilitated by a school psychologist, the staff expressed concern with the way the teacher spoke to them: “it felt disrespectful.” The teacher felt the staff talked about her behind her back and often included the teacher next door in the conversation--she felt unsupported even when she tried to give compliments or thanked the staff for their hard work. If the teacher does not repair her relationship with the staff, she cannot effectively manage the adults, which directly impacts the students and their ability to access the curriculum in the classroom. Lack of administrative support and respect, few opportunities for career advancement, and inadequate wages are contributing factors to paraprofessional turnover (Tillery, Werts, Roark, & Harris, 2003).

### **Problem of Practice**

**My special education preschool teacher does not consistently follow a daily schedule. An inconsistent daily schedule impacts the classroom routine, negatively impacts the students and jeopardizes effective working relationships with the support staff.**

Often, the newest teachers are assigned to special education classrooms. These teachers are ill equipped to manage other adults, underprepared to manage challenging student behaviors and unskilled as practitioners implementing classroom routines to support meaningful student engagement. Urban schools serving low-socioeconomic students are more likely to employ teachers who are on emergency waivers and who are not certified in the subject they are teaching (Carey 2004). Frequently, these teachers become overwhelmed. Reactive and adverse teaching methods result in teacher frustration and can cause the teachers to withdraw from their position as an educator (Baker, 2005). When teachers are trained to implement research-based teaching

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methods, both instructional and behavioral, they are better prepared to educate in diverse learning environments (Baker, 2005). By failing to ground the functioning of their classrooms with well thought out schedules and implementing daily classroom routines with fidelity, teachers create instability for their ASD preschool students and do not provide the structure to hold support staff accountable.

### **Literature Review**

Although there are not many studies addressing the impact of paraeducator/teacher relationships, the data from the limited studies reveals that the lack of connectivity amongst team members (teachers and aides) impacts the staff's ability to implement programs in special education classrooms with fidelity. Without cohesive interactions between these team members, students suffer. Data reveals that the lack of effective aide support debilitates an ASD classroom when it is not present (Cipriano et al., 2016). In the "No Child Left Behind" legislation, the employment of qualified teachers and aides for special education was mandated based on tenants previously set forth in IDEA.

Providing teachers with access to professional development and an abundance of teaching materials is not a lasting guarantee that teachers will learn or be effective. This literature review will also examine the support that teachers need -- a safe environment to learn, multiple opportunities to apply new strategies, continuous feedback, as well as effective support to reflect upon their practice. When teachers feel insecure about their ability to learn, they shut down and make excuses.

The literature review will layout the importance of an effective routine in an autism classroom. Predictable classroom routines solidify the expectations for staff and students. The literature review will demonstrate that a harmonious connection among the staff members within

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the classroom is of the utmost importance when implementing evidence based practices. While there is no single intervention that has been identified to address the needs of all children with autism, there is a growing consensus regarding effective intervention programs being critical to their success.

In a qualitative research study conducted Grossi-Kliss(2006) states, “Teaching children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can be the most challenging to preschool teachers because of the complexity of this brain disorder. A child's life is affected, whether it is communication and language, social and play skills, activities of daily living, self-regulation behaviors, and sensory impairments.” While the focus of Grossi-Kliss’s study is to survey a number of preschool teachers to determine which skills are best to focus on when teaching autistic preschoolers, her initial discovery brings to light a national problem surrounding who is staffing America’s preschool classrooms at any given time. Grossi-Kliss (2006) continues by citing a national study of conditions in New York’s preschool classrooms at that time. In a report by the New York Department of Special Education on “The Availability and Effectiveness of Programs for Preschool Children with Autism,” a survey was sent out to preschool programs to study how many children with autism attended a preschool program in the school year 2000 to 2001. Out of 292 preschool special education programs reporting, 191 programs served 5 or more children with autism, which were located in 38 counties statewide. Of these children, 65% were in a self-contained class and 35% were in an integrated setting. In 191 preschool programs, 36% of preschool teachers who taught children with autism, classified themselves in their knowledge of working with autistic children as experts to a large degree, 38% as somewhat, and 17% to 25% as not at all expert. Grossi-Kliss poses “How can 17% to 25% of teachers working with children with ASD in 191 programs throughout New York have some to no knowledge in

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teaching and be able to meet the needs of these children?” A national pre-kindergarten study in May 2005, entitled, “Massive National Study Finds Many pre-kindergarten Teachers Underpaid; Others Lacking Required Credentials,” 3,898 pre-kindergarten teachers were surveyed from all of the nation's 52 statewide pre-kindergarten systems in 40 states. Some of the same issues addressed in this study 15 years ago exist in my district now – some teachers lack proper credentialing and knowledge to meet the needs of the children they serve.

Key findings of this study about the education of pre-kindergarten teachers nationally revealed that, 13% had a high school diploma, 14% had an associate's degree, 49% had a Bachelor's degree and 24% had a Master's or higher. The study highlights a wide range of pre-kindergarten teacher qualifications: West Virginia, Maryland, New York and South Carolina had a majority of teachers who work with children had Master's, but teachers in Alaska and Florida had only a high school diploma. Albeit, special education classrooms in California are generally staffed with “teachers,” however, their lack of preparedness for the role impacts this crucial intervention period for children with autism.

A hallmark of a well-run autism school-based program is a structured classroom, which maintains a highly predictable routine for its students (e.g., Lord & Schopler, 1994). Children on the spectrum need routines to be concrete and predictable. Schedules assist the student in being informed about their routine and increase independence (Sterling Turner & Jordan, 2007) . The presence of a schedule often lessens the anxiety of the student and helps with transitions by providing the student with information of what is coming next. Lessened anxiety can support the student being able to more fully participate in the planned learning activity. A well-organized physical environment is critically important as it provides the structure and predictability that many students with ASD need to understand expectations and participate (Blakeley-Smith &

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Carr, Cale, Owen-DeSchryver, 2009). Teachers must spend time teaching routines to students and provide time for practice. Routines can improve task completion and behavior for students with ASD by providing consistency and clarity for classroom expectations (McIntosh, Herman, Sanford, McGraw, & Florence, 2004). Routines organize student and teacher behavior (Watson & DiCarlo 2015).

### ***Schedules***

ASD students do better when the physical environment is simplified and organized with a strong visual components. The room should be free of clutter. Lessening these distractors help the teacher focus on the schedule and supports better interactions with the staff. Paraeducators indicate frustration when they cannot predict what the teacher or the students need, (Wallace, T., 2002). The physical layout of the classroom helps the teacher strategically plan/design the classroom routine to support student independence. Creating visuals to identify paths of travel and material locations helps to promote student independence. The physical structure of the environment can lessen undesired behaviors. Clearly defining areas where tasks occur lessens frustrations of support staff too. Schedules can assist a student and the support staff with information about a student's routine and increase their independence (Sterling-Turner & Jordan, 2007). Schedules take an abstract concept, such as time, and present it in a concrete and manageable form. Implementing an evidence-based practice like a visual schedule allows a student to anticipate upcoming events, predict change, develop an understanding of time, and reduce fear of the unknown. Importantly, a schedule can make the day more predictable and less anxiety provoking (Sterling-Turner & Jordan, 2007). A schedule concretely lays out the expectations for the support staff as well. The goal of the schedule is for students to manipulate and use schedules independently. Students must be taught this skill. It takes time and practice to

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generalize this skill. Educators cannot expect a student to automatically know how to use a schedule (Sterling-Turner & Jordan, 2007). Explicit instruction and modeling of how and when to use the schedule must be provided until data supports the student's ability to use it independently or with minimal support (Sterling-Turner & Jordan, 2007).

A visual activity schedule (VAS) is an important element in an ASD classroom. VAS can be a series of images, pictures, photographs, or line drawings used to depict a sequence of events. The purpose of a VAS is to visually support transitions of the individual with ASD from one activity to the next activity or next step within an activity or routine (Knight, Sartini & Spriggs, 2015). Transitions for students with ASD are a significant issue for this population (Banda & Kubina, 2006). Even students within general education settings have to be taught how to transition from one activity to another or from one setting to another. For students with ASD the ability to read cues naturally occurring in the environment signaling a change, whether routine or unusual can be tricky. Understanding what comes next lessened students' anxiety and decreases the opportunities for negative behaviors. Advanced preparation for a transition and the pending activity can prevent students from feeling anxious, frustrated, and overwhelmed (Knight, Sartini & Spriggs, 2015). Clear expectations can increase knowledge of the rules, creating a path for increased instructional time. VAS helps increase, maintain, and generalize a range of skills for individuals from preschool through adulthood in a variety of settings (Knight, Sartini & Spriggs, 2015).

For children with ASD to be successful in classrooms, they must understand transitions and routines throughout their day. "Experts, practitioners, and individuals with ASD themselves (e.g., Temple Grandin) believe that the reason visual supports are beneficial is because children and adults with ASD process visual information better than auditory information" (Knight,

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Sartini & Spriggs, 2015). Visual cues offer non-intrusive prompts for smoother transitions, often increasing activity engagement (Bryan & Gast, 2000; MacDuff et al., 1993; Massey & Wheeler, 2000; Morrison et al., 2002; and supports engagement in tasks complete a series of activities (Bennett et al., 2011; Bryan & Gast, 2000; Carson et al., 2008; Dettmer, Simpson, Myles, & Ganz, 2000; Krantz, MacDuff, & McClanahan, 1993; MacDuff et al., 1993; Massey & Wheeler, 2000; Schmit, Alper, Raschke, & Ryndak, 2000; Sowers, Verdi, Bourbeau, & Sheehan, 1985; Spriggs et al., 2007; Whatley, Gast, & Hammond, 2009); Pierce et al., 2013).

Banda, et al., (2009), cite that children with ASD typically respond to visual input as their primary source of information (Quill, 1995). The use of visual support systems can supplement verbal directions when students have deficits in auditory processing. In addition, children with ASD may prefer photographs of people to the people themselves. Even when directly interacting with people, these children tend to focus on physical features rather than attending to the person as an intact entity (Heflin & Alaimo, 2007).

Consequently, schedules drive routines and transitions in autism classrooms and are an essential tool for classrooms to function well. Visuals support comprehension and aid students in making sense of the sequence in a routine. Watson & DiCarlo's 2015, single blind study cites that visuals serve as a prompt that directs students through the order of the routine, thus aiding comprehension (Breitfelder, 2008; Breslin and Rudisill, 2011). Breitfelder, (2008) states that activity schedules provide students with a clear beginning and ending of an activity. Watson & DiCarlo (2015), agreed with previous studies -- Because language can be processed differently, expectations can be interpreted differently. Picture activity schedules depict step-by-step visual cues, and students begin to learn what is expected of them (Bryan and Gast 2000; Lequia et al., 2012 ). Breslin and Rudisill (2011) remarked that activity schedules "... display the abstract

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constructs of the tasks in concrete ways...” (p. 344). Activity schedules transform the abstract constructs into a concrete reference tool for students, thus further clarifying expectations (Bryan and Gast 2000; Lequia et al., 2012 ). The guessing game is eliminated through the use of activity.

Watson & DiCarlo (2015), concludes that once the intervention is mastered the scaffold should be pulled away to discern if the child can complete the routine independently. “Between the ages of 3 and 5 is the best opportunity for children with ASD to learn many functional skills such as following a routine with a visual schedule. It is imperative that we have teachers and staff trained to make the most of this timeframe.” Decisions made in this crucial window of opportunity can impact the rest of their lives. Routines support engagement and lessen undesired behaviors. Routines “provide children with consistency, confidence, security, trust, and a sense of safety because the routines allow them to identify patterns that help them predict what is going to happen next” (Salmon 2010, p. 132). It is imperative that the teacher develops a consistent schedule and follow it with fidelity because it is impacting all areas of the classroom: student independence; student behavior; student engagement and, in general, the attitudes of the classroom staff and the service providers (Watson & DiCarlo, 2015).

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law. NCLB stated that “From this day forward all students will have a better chance to learn, to excel, and to live out their dreams.” NCLB maintains that teachers be highly qualified in the core subjects they teach; use proven, research-based instructional methods; and supply timely information and options for parents. “Practices are considered evidence-based when they are implemented consistently and reliably with positive results across multiple research studies.

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An evidence-based practice is identified by the rigor of the research design, the methodological quality, magnitude of effect, and the overall number of quality studies that are essential when evaluating research effectiveness in special education” (Cook et al., 2009). Evidence-based practices must be selected for implementation based on sound professional judgment, coupled with the careful review of available data, input from individuals and family members, and an honest evaluation of interventionists’ capacity to implement the interventions accurately (Vanderbilt-Kennedy Center, 2014). Quinn et al., 2014, cites evidence-based instructional practices as being defined by the integration of research-validated instructional strategies having an established history of yielding positive results, with practical educational expertise (Odom, Brantlinger, Gersten, Horner, Thompson, & Harris, 2005; Schlosser, 2009; Schlosser & Raghavedra, 2004). In theory, Quinn recognizes that special education teachers should institute evidence-based practices when instructing their student noted that these practices are being implemented inconsistently.

Skokut M. (2008), points out, while there is no single intervention that has been identified to address the needs of all children with autism, but there is growing consensus regarding the key characteristics of effective intervention programs (National Research Council, 2001). Skokut reports the following:

The emphasis is on providing appropriate services as early as possible, with key characteristics including: (1) Systematically planned and developmentally appropriate services targeting identified objectives should be provided at least 25 hours a week, 12 months a year; (2) Objectives must be measurable, observable, and monitored; (3) Interventions will generally emphasize functional communication, cognitive development, social skill instruction, and play skills. Key components to consider when

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developing comprehensive intervention plans for children with autism include: a) supportive and structured learning environments, b) family involvement, c) early intervention, d) specialized curricula focusing on communication and social interaction, e) integration with typical peers, f) a functional approach to problem behaviors, g) planned transitions between preschool and kindergarten/first grade, h) individualization of support service, i) systematic and carefully planned instruction, j) intensity of engagement, and k) developmentally appropriate practices (Iovannone, Dunlap, Huber, & Kincaid, 2003). None of the strategies can take place without the teacher carefully planning a schedule and implementing the routine with fidelity.

An evidenced-based practice to support student independent learning, referred to as Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH). The TEACCH program has been proven to be an effective program in supporting children on the spectrum with the acquisition of skills. TEACCH is routine-based but takes planning to implement. The beauty of the program is the children get an opportunity to take some responsibility for their learning as it requires each child to complete a number of tasks independently at a “station” where tasks have been individualized to meet each child where they are instructionally.

Implementation of the TEACCH program can be an important element of the daily routine for students in this classroom. Skokut et al., (2008), argues in conclusion, “TEACCH is a school-based program for students with autism that has existed for decades, and research on TEACCH has evidenced some positive outcomes for children with low-functioning autism. TEACCH is well disseminated, particularly within special education classrooms and group homes; however, there appears to be limited empirical study of the approach.”

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Critics of the research base for TEACCH reference the limited classroom research and lack of adequate control for threats to internal and external validity (Gresham, Beebe-Frankenberger, & MacMillan, 1999). Teachers frequently identify regular caretaking routines such as diapering, meals, and hand washing, for intervention strategies. However, routines and activities with greatest potential for developmental intervention are those activities that keep the child engaged and interested (Dunst, 2001). Kratz et al., (2015), comments that the complexity of interventions and the use of multiple instructional strategies concurrently in general, have not been effectively implemented in community settings (Dingfelder & Mandell, 2011; Stahmer, Collings, & Palinkas, 2005).

### ***Teacher Quality***

Educators are charged to successfully teach ALL students, and to accommodate students who need it (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Another component of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is that aides working with special education students be highly trained. A shortage of teachers qualified to fill teacher positions each year often leaves districts short of highly-qualified people to fill these positions. “A quality teacher is a powerful school-based factor in student learning. It is critical to ensure that there are highly qualified special education teachers implementing school-based interventions for students with ASD. Teachers without adequate training and education can alter the maximum potential of children with disabilities including ASD in the early years” (Grossi-Kliss, 2006). Darling-Hammond, (2002), citing the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future found that the hiring of underqualified teachers is less a function of shortage of candidates and more a function of cumbersome hiring practices instituted by some districts that drive good candidates away.

### ***Teacher Burnout***

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For more than two decades, special education teacher shortages have been of concern to policymakers and administrators who work to recruit and retain special educators (Council for Exceptional Children[CEC] 2000; Morsink 1982). There are multiple reasons for the shortage but research implicates that teacher burnout may be related to this issue (Billingsley 2004; Winiewski and Gargiulo 1997). A shortage in special educators is concerning and may have far-reaching consequences for children with disabilities, particularly those with ASD. Wong et al., (2017), applied Maslach and Leiter's (1999) model to understand the direct effects of burnout on teaching in general and stress arising from interaction with a specific student on the individualized education program (IEP) outcomes of young children with autism spectrum disorder. Crowe, (2013), National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), cites a Metropolitan Life survey that indicated a growing number of teachers are giving serious thought to leaving the profession due to lack of support, unacceptable working conditions, and inadequate opportunities for professional collaboration with their colleagues.

Wong et al., (2017), cites teacher stress and burnout as detrimental to teacher workforce of Special Education Teachers and having a negative impact on IEPs. Wong's team believes their study is the first to "demonstrate empirically the direct and indirect effects of special education teacher burnout and stress on teaching quality, student engagement, and IEP outcomes." Teacher stress was directly related to teaching quality and student engagement, whereas personal accomplishment, but not emotional exhaustion or depersonalization, was directly related to student learning outcomes.

Special education teachers experience heavier workloads than their general education counterparts; excessive paperwork (Paperwork in Special Education 2002). For instance, a preschool Autism classroom teacher must complete annual IEPs, progress reports on

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individualized goals and the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) in addition to creating a variety of materials for individual and group needs within their classrooms; much of this work is done after the normal teacher day has ended. An ASD classroom is even more challenging given the importance of developing materials at a rapid pace as student's needs change (Morvant et al., 1995), wearing multiple hats (Billingsley and Cross 1992), and often being excluded from supplies available to their general education counterparts (Miller et al., 1999). Districts forget that special education is a service -- students receiving special education services are general education first.

These factors lead to teacher burnout, higher levels of stress, withdrawal from students, and eventually attrition (Billingsley 2004). Gersten, R. et al., (2001) suggests that stress can be tied to dissonance "These feelings may be related to teachers' experience of dissonance between their role expectations about duties of a special education teacher and the expectations held by others, such as administrators, other teachers, parents, and support service personnel." "These stressors may be even greater among educators of students with ASD. The increased "challenges that make educating this population particularly complex, including the characteristics central to ASD, the pervasiveness of these impairments, and the increased parent-teacher relationships that are often necessary for these students and their families (Dymond et al., 2007)." Families often create unreasonable demands on special education teachers. Some teachers take refuge by increasing their absenteeism or offering lower instructional strategies when they are working with students. "Teacher stress and burnout have a detrimental effect on the stability of the workforce" (Wong et al., 2017). Kratz et al., (2015), hypothesized that "teachers who experience higher levels of burnout having poorer working relationships with their classroom assistants and lower classroom cohesion."

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Knight, V., et al., (2015), cites “Teachers of children with developmental disabilities experience an extraordinary amount of chronic stress (Fore et al. 2002; Miller et al. 1999).” Multiple interacting environmental factors including unmanageable workloads (Morvant et al. 1995), role ambiguity (Billingsley and Cross 1992), excessive paperwork (Paperwork in Special Education 2002), and a lack of resources (Miller et al. 1999) all lead to high levels of stress, withdrawal from students, and eventually, attrition (Billingsley 2004).

### ***Special Education teachers lack of experience***

Approximately 13% of the American workforce of 3.4 million public school teachers either moves (227,016) or leaves (230,122) the profession each year (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, August 2010). The National Research Council [NRC] (2001), found that most teacher graduates receive minimal to no preparation in evidence-based practices for students diagnosed with ASD. Their exposure is typically limited to a single introductory course. Universities may offer additional authorizations for these areas, but it is typically at an additional cost and generally after the teacher has found themselves working with ASD students (Morrier, Hess, & Heflin, 2011). The NRC (2001) identified effective programming for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families (p. 225) as one of the weakest areas of teacher preparation.

The lack of preparation is an indicator of why teachers rarely employ evidence-based instructional strategies with students with ASD (Hess, Morrier, Heflin, & Ivey, 2008). Ingersoll (2003), suggests that “school staffing problems are rooted in the way schools are organized and the way the teaching occupation is treated, and that lasting improvements in the quality and quantity of the teaching workforce will require improvements in the quality of the teaching job.”

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Teachers of children with developmental disabilities experience an extraordinary amount of chronic stress (Fore et al., 2002; Miller et al., 1999).

### ***Classroom Management***

An added complication of an autism classroom is an effectively run classroom must have great classroom management at all times. A highly-effective autism classroom moves like an orchestrated dance. Everyone has a role to play, which requires them to execute it with precision. Lamar, Gentry & Baker, 2016, cites a plethora of sources in their qualitative study of beginning teacher classroom management practices as barriers to effectively run classroom. “Classroom management is a major challenge for beginning teachers as indicated by a strong consensus among researchers and practitioners (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Garrett, 2014; Goodwin, 2012; Greenberg, Putnam & Walsh, 2014; Jones, 2006; Simonsen & Myers, 2015).” *The Elementary School Journal* (2010), reports similar findings, that many novice teachers cite low confidence in their abilities to effectively manage student behavior (Hertzog, 2002; Meister & Melnick, 2003; Woolfolk-Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005).” p. 56

Research indicates that experienced teachers feel classroom management is primary cause for teacher burnout (Friedman, 2006; Freiberg & Lapointe, 2006; Simonsen & Myers, 2015). Inadequate training in classroom management during initial teacher preparation programs has been identified as the primary source of the problem (Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Garrett, 2014; Greenberg, Putnam, & Walsh, 2014; Jones, 2006; Stough & Montague, 2014). Stough and Montague (2014) comments “ teacher preparation has emphasized content knowledge at the expense of training in classroom management, and behavior management techniques have been largely ignored.” Jones (2006) reports, many beginning

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teachers state that they were inadequately prepared by their teacher preparation programs to deal with classroom management. Evertson and Weinstein (2006) cited the presentation of several models without sufficient depth to prepare students for professional practice. Greenberg, Putnam and Walsh (2014), criticize teacher preparation programs for ignoring research-based management strategies, for fragmenting classroom management into multiple courses, and for leaving teacher candidates to develop their own, personal adaptation of classroom management. Additionally, Everston & Weinstein cite the disconnect between what was taught about classroom management and accountability for implementing management practices in clinical teaching experiences (Greenberg, Putnam, & Walsh, 2014).

### ***Role and Importance of Paraprofessionals in Autism Classrooms***

Causton-Theoharis, J. et al., (2007), equates paraprofessionals to sous-chefs-- their role is working under the direction of a qualified teacher. Paraprofessionals do not plan or design classroom instruction. A paraprofessional contributes to classroom instruction by effectively implementing important delegated tasks for which they are specifically trained and help keep things running efficiently and effectively.

Cipriano et al., (2016), cites that government statistics indicate that half a million paraprofessionals are employed in public school settings throughout the USA (Likins 2003), and an increasing number of paraprofessionals are hired specifically to support children with disabilities (French, 2003). The quality and support of the paraprofessionals is key to any special education classroom. Lack of effective aide support debilitates an ASD classroom when the support is not present. Attracting the right people as paraprofessionals is key to the continuity of a school's capacity to support students with disabilities (Cipriano et al., 2016). " Classroom quality, as well as student and teacher outcomes, in self-contained special education classrooms

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may be improved by targeting the interactions between the special educator and paraeducators” (Cipriano et al., 2016). Cipriano et al., (2016), believes “Teacher-Paraeducator Interactions consist of Solidarity, Delegation of Staff, Respect, and Disrespect. Together these components account for the full range of interactions between educators in self-contained special education classrooms which may promote quality teaching and learning in these settings.” Cipriano et al., (2016), recognized that interactions between teacher and aides required a framework by which school teams could construct healthy environments for students in self-contained classrooms.

### ***Structural Conditions for Paraeducator Success***

Kratz, et al., (2015), cited several studies find that classroom assistants perform their duties most effectively when (a) they are appropriately supervised, (b) their roles are clearly defined, (c) they are trained for assigned tasks, and (d) they participate in regularly scheduled planning meetings (French, 2001). Teachers typically receive little or no training in how to interact with their aides, and little is known about the quality and impact of staff relationships in these classrooms (French, 2001; Scheuermann, Webber, Boutot & Goodwin, 2003). The importance of solidarity amongst educators is paramount in special education classrooms for students with emotional and behavioral disorders who may be more likely to challenge the authority of their educators (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski & Epstein, 2005).

Giangreco et al., (2004), suppositions that, retaining paraprofessionals who are satisfied with their work (a) “Allows inservice training resources to be used more effectively.” This is provided districts view this an important area. Often the lack of resources or perception that training is not important complicates the area; (b) “Creates opportunities for teachers, special educators, and paraprofessionals to develop constructive working relationships.” Conflict frequently develops because teachers do not know how to instruct paraprofessionals. At times,

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their ineffective planning compromises their ability to provide guidance to the paraprofessional staff; (c) “Allows school administrators to make strategic staffing decisions” This is questionable as principals often do not understand how to effectively deploy paraeducators on their campuses and often demonstrate the same weaknesses as teachers in overseeing their paraeducators; and (d) “Provides continuity for students with disabilities and their families.” “Paraeducators should not replace teachers as communicators with parents but act as an extension of positive supports for the classrooms” (Giangreco, M. F. et al, Summer 2011). This can be can be challenging for paraeducators who on are called upon to translate for exchanges between the teacher and the parent because they share the same home language or culture as the parent. Classrooms across districts face paraeducator shortages and teacher shortages on a daily basis. These positions are often low paying. Frequently, paraeducators work a second job to make enough to live on.

### ***Team Respect***

Kratz, et al., (2015) cites “When educators second guess one another it undermines their credibility to their students, which can jeopardize student performance and functioning” (Mastropieri et al., 2005; Scruggs et al., 2007). Kratz, et al., (2015), continues “Teachers and paraeducators demonstrate solidarity when they use “we” language when speaking with students (e.g., “we (teacher and paraeducator) expect you all to participate in the activity by raising your hand.”)” As is good practice, educators may reinforce and/or restate one another (Walther-Thomas, 1997). It is important to function as a team. “Educators demonstrate respect when they reiterate decisions they have made together as a team and maintain resolve when instructing and/or disciplining a student” (Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout & Epstein, 2004). Another demonstration of respect is how the lead classroom teacher incorporates the support of the additional paraeducator(s) to enable or hinder the smooth functioning of the classroom

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(Giangreco, Halvorsen, Doyle & Broer, 2004). “How the the lead teacher delegates tasks to the paraeducator (administrative, clerical, or instructional) not requiring their direct involvement demonstrates respect.”

Kratz et al., (2015), states the respect among all team members is crucial; teachers and aides must respect each other. Successful collaboration among teachers and paraeducators hinges upon their respect for one another (Conderman, 2011; Murawski & Swanson, 2001). Respect refers to educators positively acknowledging each other’s work in the classroom. Respectful educators engage in more productive working relationships than educators who do not respect one another (Clarke, Embury, Jones, & Yssel, 2014; Friend et al., 2010; Mastropieri et al., 2005). When respect is present, collaboration is easier as individuals are more likely to be open to working with one another (Friend et al., 2010). Respectful interactions between educators are demonstrated by the use of each other’s name, eye contact, use of manners, or a warm tone when interacting with each other (Conderman, 2011; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend et al., 2010; Walther-Thomas, 1997). When engaging in these behaviors, teachers and paraeducators are being prosocial models for their students (Lunenburg, et al., 2007).

Disrespect is cited as one of the main reasons for paraeducator turnover (Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Given the range of vital roles paraeducators fulfill in special education (Rea, P. J. et al., 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2004), respect is critical to the functionality of the classroom environment and supports student learning. “Disrespect undermines successful collaboration among educators (Chopra et al., 2004; Riggs & Mueller, 2001).”

Kratz et al., (2015), emphasizes the importance of cohesion of team members in special education classrooms and cites the following reports to support the necessity of cohesive team members. “Conceptual models from organizational psychology have been used to improve our

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understanding of team functioning (Wang, Ying, Jiang, & Klein, 2006). Much like in other settings, teachers and classroom assistants must function as a team, defined as “a collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks” (Cohen & Bailey, 1997, p. 241). “Team functioning, which can include a number of dimensions, such as collaboration, conflict resolution, leadership, and cohesion, has been shown to affect both performance and outcomes across a broad range of settings (Lemieux-Charles & McGuire, 2006).” Cohesion, the tendency of a group to “stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its goals and objectives” (Wang et al., 2006), is most closely associated with team performance and outcomes (Lemieux-Charles & McGuire, 2006). Kratz et al., (2015), cites a National Research Council study, 2001 “no published study has addressed cohesion among staff in special education classrooms, where many children with autism spend the majority of their time.” Kratz et al., 2015, concludes that it is important for teams to see themselves as a unit. One predictor for less effective connections between paraeducators and teachers was the presence of teacher burnout. Teachers who experience higher levels of burnout have poorer working relationships with their classroom assistants and lower classroom cohesion Kratz et al., (2015).

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), states that “Professionals must be familiar with theory and research concerning best practices for students with ASD. Individuals with ASD benefit from an environment that is structured and that provides predictability and organization.” As part of an extensive literature review, VDOE noted that “professionals and paraprofessionals working with a student with ASD must be qualified to do so” (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Leko & Brownell, 2009; Lynch & Adams, 2008; Scheuermann, Webber, Boutot, & Goodwin, 2003).

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“All professionals must be familiar with theory and research concerning best practices for students with ASD, including instructional methodologies, adaptation of the environment, social supports, behavior supports, assessment, and the effective use of data collection systems” (NRC, 2001). Unfortunately, high turnover in professional and paraprofessional staff impacts the implementation of many school-based programs. A direct implication is that training can help shape the specific skills needed to work in a class with ASD students. NCLB mandates, it is essential for professionals to provide effective and accessible instruction that optimizes learning outcomes. The use of evidenced based practices in an ASD classroom is essential for stronger student outcomes. Students with ASD benefit from an environment that is structured and provides predictability and organization. Consistency is an important consideration in special education classroom settings (Panerai, Zinagle, Trubia, Finocchiaro, Zuccarello, Ferri, & Elia, 2009). Children with ASD are best served in environments that are well organize – physical environment is critically important as it provides the structure and predictability that many students with ASD need to understand expectations and to participate (Blakeley-Smith & Carr, Cale, Owen-DeSchryver, 2009).

### ***The Teacher As A Adult Learner***

No organization can continue to improve unless the people within it engage in ongoing learning (R. DuFour et al., 2010). DuFour cites two of the largest research studies ever implemented to analyse factors impacting student learning. The first dispels the myth that all teachers are equal. “There is an appreciable amount of variability in the effectiveness of teachers” (Hattie, 2009). Hattie states that “the devil in the story is not the incompetent teacher, but the average teacher who has no idea of the damage that he or she is doing.” The only way to improve outcomes is to improve teaching.”

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Hattie, (2009) finds the following:

- 1) The teacher must become aware of specific weaknesses in his or her instruction.
- 2) The individual teacher must become more aware of effective practices through demonstration in an authentic setting.
- 3) The teacher must be motivated to make the necessary changes.

DuFour et al., ( 2010) cites Popham (2009 p.37 ) “It is only sensible that teachers that educators should be focused on student learning results” to continuously improve teaching. DuFour et al., (2010) shares that “a powerful motivator for changing behavior is positive peer pressure that comes from being the member of a team. When people work in isolation, the success or failure has little or no direct and immediate bearing on others. If teachers recognize the interdependence there might be reluctance to let colleagues down. Reluctance to the team down down can be an effective catalyst for changing behavior.” (Blanchard, 2007; Fullan, 2008; Lencioni, 2005; Patterson et al., 2008). DuFour et al., 2010, concludes that teachers who disengage in the process will find it harder to feign excuses when it prevents the team from achieving a desired goal.

What is required for improvement DuFour et al, 2010, believes is timely feedback (frequent and precise) and ongoing support as they attempt to implement practices. Schein, E. (2004), suggests the following:

“There are basically two mechanisms by which we learn new concepts, new meanings for old concepts, and new standards of evaluation: either we learn through imitating a role model and psychologically identifying with that person, or we keep inventing our own solutions until something works.” Schein, E. (2004), continues: “If one has been

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trained to think in a certain way and has been a member of a group that has also thought that way, how can one imagine changing to a new way of thinking?” Schein, E. (2004), describes ways present learning: “as part of a training program, the leader can provide role models through case materials, films, roleplays, or simulations. One can bring in learners who have acquired the new concepts and encourage others to get to know how they did it.” This mechanism works best when (1) it is clear what the new way of working is to be and (2) the concepts to be taught are themselves clear. However, we sometimes can learn things through imitation that do not really fit into our personality or our ongoing relationships. Once we are on our own and the role models are no longer available, we often revert to our old behavior. If we want real internalization of the new cognitive constructs and standards of evaluation, we need to encourage scanning and trial-and-error learning from the outset.” Adult learners have some strong beliefs about how they learn. These beliefs, whether accurate or not, can interfere or enhance their learning.

A teacher’s efficacy is more likely to change and improve student learning in the presence of effective peers. C. Kirabo Jackson and Elias Bruegmann (2009), found that an individual teacher’s students have larger achievement gains in math and reading when other teachers in the schools are more effective. The authors conclude that the effects were due to peer learning along with a teacher’s decision to invest effort in acquiring new instructional skills. They found that positive spillovers are strongest for less-experienced teachers who are still acquiring “on-the-job” skills, and that both past and current differences in peer quality affect current student achievement. Accruing expertise has long-term effects and the cumulative exposure to peers proves to be a powerful predictor of improved student achievement.

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Coghlan, D. (1996), states that “As long as learning anxiety remains high, one will be motivated to resist the validity of the disconfirming data or will invent various excuses why one cannot really engage in a transformative learning process right now.”

These responses come in the following stages:

1. Denial. You will convince yourself that the disconfirming data are not valid, are temporary, don't really count, reflect someone just crying “wolf,” and so on.
2. Scapegoating/passing the buck/dodging. You will convince yourself that the cause is in some other department, that the data do not apply to you, and that others need to change first before you do.
3. Maneuvering/bargaining. You will want special compensation for the effort to make the change; you will want to be convinced that it is in your own interest and will be of long range benefit to you.

Schein, E. (2004), proposes that there is “difficulty of launching any transformative change because of the anxiety associated with new learning. The change process starts with disconfirmation, which produces survival anxiety or guilt the feeling that one must change but the learning anxiety associated with having to change one’s competencies, one’s role or power position, one’s identity elements, and possibly one's group membership causes denial and resistance to change.” Schein, E. (2004), continues “ The only way to overcome such resistance is to reduce the learning anxiety by making the learner feel psychologically safe. If new learning occurs, it usually reflects cognitive redefinition, which consists of learning new concepts and new meanings for old concepts and adopting new standards of evaluation. The change goals should initially be focused on the concrete problems to be fixed; only when those goals are clear

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is it appropriate to do a culture assessment to determine how the culture may aid or hinder the change process.”

National Research Council, (2000), (Chapter 8), states that teachers learn in the following ways: (1) they learn from their own practice. (2) teachers learn through their interactions with other teachers. Some of this occurs during formal and informal mentoring that is similar to apprenticeship learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Little, 1990; Feiman-Nemser and Parker, 1993). (3) teachers learn from teacher educators in their schools, in degree programs, and in specific teacher enhancement projects that are often provided by consultants. (4) many teachers enroll in graduate programs. Relatively, teachers take graduate courses in education rather than in the subject matter of their teaching due to limited access to the lack disciplinary graduate courses at convenient time for teachers. Further, the NRC comments that “the task of rethinking subject matter can be difficult for teachers. Learning involves making oneself vulnerable and taking risks, and this is not how teachers often see their role. Elementary teachers often lack confidence, and they worry about admitting that they don’t know or understand for fear of colleagues’ and administrators’ reactions “ (Heaton, 1992; Ball and Rundquist, 1993; Peterson and Barnes, 1996; Lampert, 1998). Helping teachers become comfortable with the role of learner is very important. Providing them with access to subject-matter expertise is also extremely important. Teachers generally are accustomed to feeling efficacious—to knowing that they can affect students’ learning—and they are accustomed to being in control (National Research, 2000). An important approach to enhancing teacher learning is to develop communities of practice, an approach that involves collaborative peer relationships and teachers’ participation in educational research and practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School* (Bransford, Brown and Cocking 2000) states, “To develop

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competence in an area of inquiry, students must: (a) have a deep foundation of factual knowledge, (b) understand facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework, and (c) organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application. Drawing out and working with existing understandings is important for learners of all ages. Numerous research experiments demonstrate the persistence of preexisting understandings among older students even after a new model has been taught that contradicts the naïve understanding.”

Adult learners can be resistant to change, Lunenburg, F. (2011) states that teachers may resist change because they are worried about how their work and lives will be affected by the proposed change. Most change processes emphasize the need for behavior change (Schein, E. (2004). Ota et al., 2006, references adult learning behaviors “Adults come into an educational activity with different experiences than do youth (Knowles et al., 2005; Cite Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Marquardt, M. et al., (2001) references “Adult learning (andragogy), is concerned with how adults learn, recognizes and acknowledges that a number of factors influence how adults learn differently from children (pedagogy).” Marquardt, M. et al., cites Knowles (1970, 1984) identified several factors that distinguish andragogy from pedagogy; namely, (1) the adult learner is self-directing, (2) adults’ experiences make them rich resources for one another, (3) their readiness to learn can be triggered by effective role models, (4) adults enter an educational activity with a life-centered, task-centered, or problem-centered orientation to learning, and (5) the more potent motivators for adults are internal such as self- esteem, recognition, better quality of life, self-confidence, and self-actualization.

There are individual differences in background, learning style, motivation, needs, interests, and goals, which create a greater need for individualization of teaching and learning strategies (Brookfield, 1986; Silberman & Auerbach, 1998). The richest resource for learning

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resides in adults themselves; therefore, tapping into their experiences through experiential techniques (discussions, simulations, problem-solving activities, or case methods) is beneficial” (Brookfield, 1986; Knowles et al., 2005; McKeachie, 2002; Silberman & Auerbach, 1998).

Conclusion:

Adult learners can be resistant to change. Part of the reason for the resistance might be the impact they feel the change will have on their work or personal lives, Lunenberg, F. (2011). Change takes place when behaviors shift, Schein, E. (2004). Resistance in adult learners can assume many forms including: learning style, interest, lack of confidence or resisting the validity of disconfirming data, Coghlan, D. (1996). Sometimes, teachers are not comfortable with the role of learners. When teachers are resistant learners themselves, it is a difficult task taking hold of the classroom management and instructional issues of the classroom. Unclear management strategies and undefined instructional strategies create tension among the adults in the classroom. Without the institution of a daily schedule, the classroom cannot follow a predictable routine. A predictable routine is crucial for an ASD classroom; it provides structure for students and staff. There are a variety of reasons why the classroom routine needs to improve but none can be more important than to strengthen the adult relationships in the classroom by connecting the adults to work. Without strong communications, the classroom routine cannot not be articulated and, the aides will continue to work without teacher direction. The importance of solidarity amongst educators is paramount in special education classrooms (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, & Epstein, 2005).

Novice teachers need support learning new materials. The teacher needs coaching support to implement management/instructional strategies in the classroom. In the literature review, Hattie (2009), states that the teacher must become aware of his or her weakness instruction,

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become aware of effective practices through demonstration in an authentic setting and demonstrate a willingness to change. Unless the teacher and the aides meet regularly to discuss the needs of the classroom things will not improve. Without a “vehicle” to support the aides, they will leave this classroom. Paraeducators are finding it difficult to manage children and expectations from the teacher when the routine is not predictable. Adult relationships are suffering due to lack of relational trust, incidents of perceived disrespect and inconsistent communication between the teacher and the aides. "Educators demonstrate respect when they reiterate decisions they have made together as a team and maintain resolve when instructing and/or disciplining a student" (Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout & Epstein, 2004). It is critical for the students that the teacher and the staff mend their relationship. Can a regular coaching cycle with observation and feedback with the teacher and frequent meetings with the whole team improve the classroom routine and the adult relationships in the classroom?

It is critical for teacher and staff to have a shared understanding of what best practices are to support children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. When teachers strive to create an inclusive environment in their classrooms for staff and students, it improves the opportunity for greater success. A well-managed classroom supports harmonious staff functioning and increased independence of students. Equally, it is important that all “teachers” maintain a respectful working atmosphere with their classroom to ensure the fidelity of the implementation of a daily schedule. Unhealthy classroom management/structures and the lack of respect between team members impacts student learning (Mastropieri et al., 2005; Scruggs et al., 2007).

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Table 1

Framework for Action Research Project

Problem of Practice	Literature Review	Intervention	Expected Outcome	Research Methods/ Data Collection
<p>One of my special education preschool teachers does not follow a daily schedule with fidelity. An inconsistent daily routine negatively impacts the students and the staff.</p>	<p>All students benefit from a predictable classroom routine.</p> <p>Lack of routines affect adult relationships in the classroom.</p> <p>Novice practitioners with limited opportunities to engage in effective learning serve</p>	<p>Teacher observations 4 completes coaching cycle and prompt feedback.</p> <p>Whole team meetings with feedback from classroom observations</p>	<p>Teacher will recognize the importance of an effective classroom routine.</p> <p>Teacher will implement a daily classroom schedule with fidelity to support staff and students.</p> <p>Improved collegiality</p>	<p>Researcher's reflective journal</p> <p>Teacher and Aide questionnaire</p> <p>Aide/Teacher journal entries</p> <p>Classroom observation with continuous coaching cycle for the teacher.</p> <p>Regular classroom team meetings to</p>

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	some of our most vulnerable students.  Routines organize student and teacher behavior (Watson & DiCarlo 2015).		between teacher and staff.	pertinent issues/students.  Absence data from school site and conversations with site Principal.

### Intervention Plan

Given the increased number of students receiving an Autism diagnosis and being supported with early intervention services, it is imperative that Special Education teachers are able to meet the needs of the students utilizing evidence-based strategies. Classroom routines are an important element in any well-run classroom. Routines support continuity—it is the “glue” that holds the adults and children together. Evidence of routines has an even greater significance in a special education classroom serving students on the autism spectrum. We have established that routines add predictability for students; they get a sense of what is coming “next” thereby, giving them more control over their day and fostering greater independence. There is increasing pressure to educate autistic children in more inclusive classrooms with their general education peers. Given mandates for more inclusive instructional practices, it is important that teachers ready these students for more inclusive classroom models. Giangreco M. F., et al. (2015) suppositions, that the inclusion of all students in general education classrooms, including those with the full range of disabilities, focuses on high-quality policies, curriculum, evidence-based

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instructional strategies, and regular the use of data for decision making (Burrello, Sailor, & Kleinhammer-Tramill, 2013; Cook & Tankersley, 2013).

Failure to follow a schedule and to implement a predictable routine impacts everyone and, particularly, points to the disorganization of a classroom.

The para education staff is equally impacted when they cannot predict the type of support that the teacher expects at a given interval. The air of unpredictability of the routine stymies the classroom staff and often leads to conflicts among the adults. Adult interactions are critical in the classroom since paraeducators are considered “teachers” and facilitate many of the learning activities for children on a daily basis. All “teachers” need a voice within the classroom—even in the form of a regular meeting to check in, to share data, or to communicate a need for a change in the routine. Often, the para education staff is more seasoned than the teacher and may understand the children better than the leader. One of the greatest gripes of the para education staff is feeling undervalued within the setting and disrespected. Cipriano et al., ( 2015), cites (Chopra et al., 2004; Riggs & Mueller, 2001) Disrespect can undermine successful collaboration among educators. Disrespect between teachers and paraeducators are termed as incidences of belittling, mocking, hostile, discriminatory, aggressive, or sarcastic (Chopra et al., 2004; Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

The purpose of the intervention plan is to focus on the adult relationships in an Autism Preschool classroom. In order to establish a more predictable classroom routine it is of particular interest to analyze the classroom dynamic and how it impacts student learning and the management of the classroom. The teacher is new to the profession and has hit several roadblocks based on her lack of knowledge and training on the importance of well-structured classroom routines and some uneasy interactions with her support staff. The intervention plan

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will include a 4 to 6 week coaching cycle, including classroom observations and pre- and post-conferences to help the teacher reflect upon her practice. Additionally, the plan includes meetings with the classroom teacher and the classroom aides to reflect on “what is working or not working” in the classroom at least two times during the intervention period. The staff, including the teacher will receive a pre- and post-questionnaire and a journal which asks them to record daily for a 4-week period: “What went well today? What did not work? and, What would you change?”

### *Data Collection*

Table 2 reflects a visual viewpoint of the activities included in the intervention and the evidence of completion (the timeline, intervention data and activities).

**Table 2 - Intervention Plan**

	<b>Component</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Process/ Impact</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
1	Pre-intervention Baseline Data	-Pre-intervention survey for teacher and staff (control group will be surveyed as well/no intervention support)  -Collaborate on areas for observations/videos  -Pre-intervention meeting with teacher & teacher/staff	Impact	2/27/18	Response to Survey
2	Collaboration & Team Building	-Bimonthly meeting with teacher and aides to reflect on classroom needs  -Team input (via researcher’s journal)	Process	3/13, 3/27, 4/17 and 4/23	Mtg. Notes  Journals

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3	Coaching cycles with teacher	-4 wk. coaching cycle with teacher with pre-observation conference/observation and post observation conference	Process	2/27- 3/30	Pre Conf. Notes Videos Post Conf. notes
4	Aide focused Support	-Reflective journal entries over 3 -4 wk period  -Possibly compiling aide absenteeism data for site	Process	3/1-4/30	Pre & Post Survey Aide Notes Absence data
5	Evaluation	-Observation analysis -Researcher reflective journal -Reflective journal aides -Staff Journals -Post Survey data	Impact	4/1 - 5/31/18	

Although my original intention was to focus on a set teacher within this intervention, the plan changed when the teacher resigned on March 30, 2018. A substitute teacher was introduced into the intervention process as a result of the change. I continued the research with the remaining staff, which has not changed, and the incoming long-term sub assuming the role as the teacher. The staff continued to respond in their notebooks answering the questions “What went well today? What did not work? What would you change?” Also, I will continue supporting the classroom with regular classroom meetings using the following questions as the focus for the meeting: **(1) How does the group draw upon their central purpose? (2) How does the group develop a shared understanding for their roles within the classroom? (3) Are the lines of communication open and is mutual respect demonstrated in all settings?**

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### ***Data Collection Plan***

The focus of the research is limited to one classroom although there are likely many classrooms across the District struggling with similar issues: especially around team cohesion. The overarching research questions are: (1) What impact can an inexperienced special education teacher have on leading support staff? (2) What happens when the perception between the aides and the teacher do not match, does it impact the classroom? (3) Do poor relationships between teacher and classroom aides have an impact on the implementation of the schedule? (4) How does demonstrated acts of respect between teacher and classroom staff impact the functioning of classroom teams? (5) Does the teacher value the expertise of the team? (6) What needs to be in place for successful collaboration between the teacher and the team?

Focusing on the outlined questions drove the selection of the research instruments. Given the complexities of the classroom and the competing demands of the team, I narrowed the collection instruments to increase the willingness to participate in the intervention.

### ***Process***

- Pre-intervention interview with teacher to identify areas where teacher would like support in building an effective classroom routine.
- Establishing a shared understanding of the hallmarks of an effective classroom routine.
- Pre-intervention scale survey with teacher and staff

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- Reflective journal from researcher
- Regular coaching cycles with prompt feedback

### ***Impact***

- Post-intervention interview with teacher
- Post-intervention scale survey from teacher and classroom staff
- Reflective journal entries from staff
- Video of team meetings
- Researcher field notes recorded from observations (teacher coaching cycles and team meetings)

### ***Research and Findings***

Will providing support to a novice classroom teacher in the form of coaching and holding regular meetings with the classroom staff produce effective communications, strengthen the teacher and classroom aide working relationships, and improve classroom structure/management? What impact can structured, supported meetings have on the relationship between teacher and support staff in terms of staff and teacher interactions and engagement? At the heart of the research, I wanted to find a way for the team to develop respectful lines of communication and to find a way for the teacher to implement the classroom schedule because it was impacting the flow of the classroom routine.

### ***Data Analysis***

The findings demonstrate that even with continuous feedback and support, an inexperienced teacher can have an adverse effect on classroom management, structure and adult relationships in the classroom. When teams do not have a shared understanding of the classroom

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management strategies and structure, as well as develop respectful ways to communicate with each other, there will be conflicts among the adults in the classroom.

### ***Methods***

- Survey of focal/non-focal classroom aides and teachers
- Notes from coaching records
- Classroom observation notes
- Notes from classroom aide's journal
- Videos of team meetings
- Videos of classroom observations
- Videos of debrief with focal teacher
- Meetings with site Principal

### ***Analysis***

- Looked at survey data four ways:
  - Compared responses from focal and non-focal classroom aides
  - Compared survey data from the three classroom teachers
  - Compared survey data from focal classroom aides and focal teacher
  - Compared focal classroom aide responses to the substitute teacher responses
- Listened to recorded conversations and transcribed sections from team meetings
- Reviewed notes from informal classroom observations
- Reviewed videos of classroom observations and transcribed sections
- Reviewed post observation debrief videos with the teacher
- Reviewed transcribed exit conversation with the focal teacher

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- Reviewed notes from conversations/emails from Principal

### ***Impact Data: Analysis and findings***

#### **Survey**

First, I started by analyzing the data with a quantitative lens. I took the responses from the aide and teacher surveys and assigned values to each response on the survey scale (Strongly Agree =5, Agree =4, Neither Disagree or Agree =3, Disagree =2, Strongly Disagree =1). For the focal team, I was looking to see if attitudes shifted. I wanted to be able to look for patterns in the data that (1) pointed to the focal classroom's development of more respectful ways for the teacher and aides to communicate in the classroom; and (2) for the teacher to more clearly define how structures would better support classroom management issues. Pre Survey: If the aides sensed the teacher was improving the classroom structure and the aides were able to offer feedback during team meetings, then the classroom environment would improve. Moreover, did the aides sense they were being valued as important members of the team based on the three thematic areas: shared understanding of the work, overall communication and relational trust. In the post survey I hoped to see that the aides' perceptions had changed in a positive way; that they felt the classroom teacher was providing the support they needed and evidence that the team function was more collegial.

### ***Impact Data Pre-Intervention Survey***

Aide survey data was collected from two school sites. I looked for patterns in responses between the aides working in the classroom where they had a teacher with multiple years of

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experience as an Autistic Preschool Teacher and a long working relationship with the classroom aides versus the focal classroom where the aides have similar years of experience as classroom aides but support a teacher who has no previous experience as a classroom teacher. Both classrooms serve students with autism. The Autism Program is a 5-hour program/5 days a week and each classroom has 3 fulltime aides. The survey focused on the aide's perceptions of the classroom management/structure and their working relationship with the classroom teacher. In addition, the aides were asked to respond to an open ended question at the end of the survey: "If you could change one thing about the classroom, what would it be?" Surprisingly, the aide response was equally split:  $\frac{1}{3}$  thought a change in the teacher was needed;  $\frac{1}{3}$  wanted smaller numbers of student in classrooms and  $\frac{1}{3}$  had no opinion. The survey questions were geared to address three common themes: shared understanding of the work, overall communication, and relational trust.

The data analysis involved looking at the focal classroom aides pre-intervention responses searching for evidence to gauge whether, aides in what appeared to be more collaborative classrooms, enjoyed more meaningful working relationships with their teachers.

### ***Focal Classroom Aides vs Non-Focus Classroom Aide***

For the pre-survey, I included another set of classroom aides to gauge their satisfaction with their classroom (**non-focus aides**) versus the focal classroom. The school I selected has classroom aides who work in an identical program in the district as does the focus classroom. Non-focus aides have worked as long as or longer than the aides in the focus classroom. In

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comparison, both classrooms support similar students. Outwardly, the non-focus classroom aides appear to have a more harmonious working relationship with the teacher. Each set of classroom aides seem to have great strategies for managing students with behavior challenges and demonstrate camaraderie amongst themselves. Each group felt they were well-versed in working the students they served. Most of the aides had worked at their respective sites for more than seven years.

My focal classroom aide's answered 6 questions out of 22 with 100% consensus (27%) versus the non-focus classroom where they responded to 7 of 22 questions with 100% consensus (32%). The non-focus classroom answered overall with 63% favorability towards their work and the teacher while the focal classroom's responses were only 36% favorable. The focal classroom's answers were more scattered; 2 of 3 aides in the focal classroom expressed that *"they did not trust the teacher to do the work they were assigned"* this was surprising because low inference data indicated that they felt that they were a team. But, collectively they agreed that the aides *"introduced new strategies into the classroom."* Both teams agreed 100% on two questions:

1. *Survey Question # 13- "When we experience challenges in our classroom, I offer suggestions to the teacher."*
2. *Survey Question # 20- "I request sub coverage when I am going to be absent."*

The answer to survey question #13 supports that classroom aides communicate suggestions to their teachers about classroom management when things are not working in the classroom. The focal team disagreed 100% with:

1. *Survey Question #2 - "I am comfortable making suggestions to improve our classroom's functioning to the teacher."*

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2. *Survey Question # - 3 “The teacher and I act like a team.”*
3. *Survey Question# 4 - I am satisfied with the amount of support I receive from my teacher.”*
4. *Survey Question #8 - “The teacher has good ideas to improve our classrooms’ functioning.”*

The non-focus classroom agreed 100% with survey questions 2, 3, 4, and 8. Upon on close examination of the data it appeared that the aides in the non-focus classrooms were generally happy with their situation, but the data reflected that even harmonious teams might have gaps in their understanding of expectations in the classroom. The non-focus classroom was not completely sure if the teacher fully understood their role in the classroom. However, the survey did not discern any overall trust or classroom management issues in the non-focus classroom.

The focus classroom clearly had issues with trust of the focus teacher as evidenced by their response to the open-ended question on the survey. Their underlying dissatisfaction was equally noted in other survey questions. The focus aides clearly felt that they were not getting the support they needed from the teacher, and they did not feel that they were functioning as a team; there are implications that they did not respect or trust the teacher to make sound decisions about the functioning of the classroom. The survey suggests that the lack of shared understanding of the work between the teacher and the aides increases their perceived dissatisfaction with their roles (Thompson, 1997).

### ***Process Data: Responses from Teachers: Focal, Non-Focus and Substitute Teacher***

Next, I looked at the responses of the three teachers (one teacher in a classroom where aides and teacher were perceived to have a collegial working relationship (non-focus classroom) and the focal classroom where the teacher was replaced by a substitute after March 30th) to a

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similar survey using the same ratings scale to examine data. In the analysis, I looked for patterns to examine how the teachers perceived the staff performance in their classrooms. As with the aide survey, I left room for the teachers to answer an open ended question at the end of the survey: “What would you change about the staff supporting your classroom? Why?” In response, 2 out of 3 teachers responded that they would like the aides to “communicate less amongst each other and increase their supervision of children, particularly, on the playground.”

Collectively, the teachers responded positively to 8 of 21 questions (38%) on the teacher survey:

1. *Survey Question #1 - “In general, I can rely on my classroom assistants when I need help.”*
2. *Survey Question #2 - “I am comfortable delegating tasks to my classroom assistants.”*
3. *Survey Question #11 - “I trust my classroom assistants to do the tasks for which he/she is responsible.”*
4. *Survey Question #12 - “When I feel frustrated or overextended, I can rely on my classroom assistants for support.”*
5. *Survey Question #14 - “If I experience challenges with a student, my classroom assistants provide valuable help.”*
6. *Survey Question #15 - “The “burden” and everyday stressors of our work are shared by my classroom assistants and me.”*
7. *Survey Question #18 - “When there’s a problem in my classroom, my classroom assistants asks for my advice.”*
8. *Survey Question #19 - “I follow my schedule, my classroom has a predictable daily routine.”*

What was surprising from the data was survey question #19. While every teacher felt they followed a predictable schedule, there was no consensus among the focal or non-focal classroom aides that they felt the teacher followed a predictable classroom schedule. It was most surprising because it pointed out that there was little difference between the two classrooms regarding a shared understanding of the schedule. The

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survey data confirms, that paraprofessionals often have role confusion, (Breton, 2010; Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012; Causton-Theoharis, Giangreco, Doyle, & Vadasy, 2007; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco et al., 2010; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Jones et al., 2012; B. McKenzie, 2011; Suter & Giangreco, 2009).

The survey suggests that all of the teachers felt that they assisted with problems in the classroom and shared in the stressful times with the aides. Teachers felt comfortable delegating responsibility and tasks to their aides. Teachers clearly perceived their was structure in the classroom; that routines in the classroom were predictable; that they were managing the classrooms effectively and there was a degree of trust between them and the aides. The survey data did not always support the teacher's beliefs. Aides often had differing perceptions.

### ***Focal Teacher and Classroom Aides***

Further review of the survey data examined the focal classroom teacher's perceptions and how they either aligned or did not align with the classroom aides. The focal teacher's perception of her working relationship with them was inconsistent with the aide's viewpoint. Focal teacher and classroom aides did agree that they introduced new ideas into the classroom and that she accepted advice from them when there was a problem student. However 100% of the aides disagreed with the teacher on the following survey questions:

- *"The teacher provides the support I need."*
- *"The teacher and I act as a team."*
- *"Teacher has good ideas to improve the classroom."*

In almost every other area of the survey, 2 of 3 focus classroom aides disagreed with the teacher with the exception of survey question #17 - *"The teacher and I agree about the work*

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*expected of me.*” There was no consensus among the aides around teacher expectations and the work. On informal observations in the classroom, I noted that the teacher might ask the aide to handle a specific task and in the next moment call the aide away from the task to handle a student behavior management issue she clearly could have handled herself. The inconsistencies point to a lack of respect for the aide’s position as the other “teacher” in the room. This contributes to the feeling that they are not acting as a team and highlights the lack of shared understanding around how teams should function and what the teacher expects from the staff. In the literature review, Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, & Epstein, 2005 points out the critical need for solidarity amongst team members in special education classrooms.

The focus classroom aides clearly felt that they did not get support from the teacher; that they acted like a team; the teacher did not have good ideas on improving the classroom; and they felt that she did not respond well to their suggestions on improving the classroom. The responses demonstrate that the focus classroom aides felt the teacher was not providing the structure/management strategies in the classroom. The lack of clear communications with the staff made them feel the teacher was not trustworthy.

### ***Impact Data: Coaching Cycle with Focal Teacher and Observations***

I met the focal teacher for several coaching sessions, as well as videoed circle time activities and instructional sessions in the classroom. I recorded a “wrap up” video focusing on the teacher reflecting on her experiences in the classroom at the end of her tenure. Teacher observations focused on Morning Circle and Learning Circle/Table Stations. The teacher’s objective was to improve the engagement of the children at these times.

As part of the intervention, I set up regular coaching cycles with the teacher to assist in bringing order to the classroom. We met three times during the intervention for pre- and post-

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debriefs. I observed the classroom informally at least six times during this period. At this point the teacher felt there was no support from the staff.

***Focal Teacher: "I know they are talking behind my back"***

***Focal Teacher: "Next year, I do not want...working in my classroom"***

My first conversations with the teacher were to gauge thinking of the problem in the classroom. I probed for why the teacher thought things were not working. "The staff does not want to listen. When I make a suggestion they do it their way." We agreed on a plan about what I should observe in the classroom and what in particular I should notice. The first observation was Morning Circle, an activity the teacher had been slow to assume. In the literature review, Schein, E. (2004) states that "transformative change means that the person or the group that is the target of change must unlearn something as well as learn something." I observed that the teacher held each child and sang "Hello, Good Morning" referencing each student's name. Aides sat behind students who showed the most need but demonstrated no further engagement with the teacher or the activity. None of the aides sang along with the teacher. The "Hello Good Morning" song took more than 10 minutes to complete. Aides softly redirected students who required support. Then the teacher incorporated a "Social Narrative" into the Morning Circle, which clearly threw the aides. The aides exchanged quizzical looks. Although it was unspoken, it was evident that the aides were not in agreement with the teacher and the activity.

Collection Tool: Aide A's journal:

***Aide A: "Morning Circle was too long and the "Hello, Good Morning" part was unproductive, it took a lot of time."***

***Aide A: "Story at Morning Circle should be eliminated."***

***Aide A: "Morning Circle needs to include a short Hello, Good Morning, calendar, weather, days of the week, and a song or two. It should not include "Aqua Ball." Morning Circle is approximately 35 - 45 minutes long."***

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During our debrief, I shared the observation notes with the teacher. My notes raised some of the same concerns raised in the journal kept by Aide A. The teacher shared thoughts on the Morning Circle. We agreed that I would observe once more and provide feedback. We discussed the lack the of a visible schedule for the classroom, and how it impacts the aides and classroom routine if no one can predict what is next. Materials were provided for the teacher to make a schedule with a model for classroom day/week. Specific interval for activities, and visuals of another classroom teacher's schedule were furnished. "Adults as learners require the deconstruction and reconstruction of information to learn" Hughes, C. (2000). In the literature review, Coghlan, D. (1996), states that "As long as learning anxiety remains high, one will be motivated to resist the validity of the disconfirming data or will invent various excuses why one cannot really engage in a transformative learning process right now."

These responses come in the following stages:

1. Denial. You will convince yourself that the disconfirming data are not valid, are temporary, don't really count, reflect someone just crying "wolf," and so on.
2. Scapegoating/passing the buck/dodging. You will convince yourself that the cause is lies in another department, that the data do not apply to you, and that others need to change first before you do. Schein, E. (2004) states that "disconfirming data are any items of information that show the organization that some of its goals are not being met or some of its processes are not accomplishing what they are supposed to."

Focal classroom aides did not feel that they had an effective working relationship with the focal teacher as evidenced by the response to questions about (1) working as a team, (2) accepting feedback and (3) implementing a consistent classroom routine. The focal classroom

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aide response to trusting the teacher to do her job was surprising. While I observed that some of the suggestions given by aides were resisted, this result surprised me. It really differed from the teacher's perception that the aides were comfortable with the amount of support they received as a team. The aides did not agree with the classroom management strategies, although the teacher claimed to understand how to work with students, the team felt the teacher did not. The literature review supports my observation and the aide's perceptions about the teacher's classroom management. "Classroom management is a major challenge for beginning teachers as indicated by a strong consensus among researchers and practitioners" (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Garrett, 2014; Goodwin, 2012; Greenberg, Putnam & Walsh, 2014; Jones, 2006; Simonsen & Myers, 2015).

Collection Tool: Aide A Journal

***Aide A: "During APE (adaptive physical education) today, the teacher took out PEZ candy in an attempt to motivate... to come back to his chair but it was the wrong time because it completely disrupted APE and everyone's attention was on the candy. This caused unnecessary behavior in another student. Needless to say the teacher reinforced at the wrong time and the wrong student."***

***Aide A: "Never once did the teacher offer... a break. He clearly needed a break. The teacher's demeanor was nonchalant, it did not seem like she tried hard enough when she's capable."***

***Aide B: "The teacher is making us look like the bad guys when we try to enforce student compliance."***

***Aide A: "The teacher does not redirect her group at breakfast, snack and lunch to stay seated. Approximately 85% of the time or more the students leave the table which cause the other students to follow suit."***

What is required for improvement DuFour et al, (2010) believes is timely feedback (frequent and precise) and ongoing support as they attempt to implement practices. The teacher did not hold regular meetings to discuss events in the classroom or communicate regularly with

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the aides when parts of the day would require a shift in the routine. Without sustained collaboration, the aides found it difficult discern changes on their own. Items such as the classroom schedule lacked sufficient details for the aides to denote the necessary changes. And, frequently when the aides were supporting students the teacher interrupted them with requests that left some students unsupported.

***“Aide A: “The teacher at breakfast, snack and lunch left her table unattended. (SIC) doesn’t communicate with aides to take over temporarily if she needs to step away.”***

In an exit interview, the focus teacher reflected on the time in the classroom. The data supports impact. “Given the range of vital roles paraeducators fulfill in special education (Rea, P. J. et al., 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2004), respect is critical to the functionality of the classroom environment and support of student learning.” The focus teacher clearly felt an effort had been made in the classroom to connect with the classroom aides, it was not substantiated in the post-reflective interview. These responses support the absence of relational trust among the team members and clearly demonstrate that the teacher and the aides did not have a shared understanding of many of the duties in the classroom. The teacher’s responses demonstrate why teams must collaborate continuously. Without sustained collaboration, classroom teams cannot develop a cohesive relationship.

***“Each Para has their speciality ... connects emotionally but misses a lot of time to take care of her family.”***

***“I felt that the job was hard so people needed to take off. I felt in the beginning it was a struggle because the aides did not want to do what I needed. I gained respect because I proved I was concerned about the safety of the children.”***

***“I wonder if the new teacher will be accepted. I feel it plays a big part in whether they want to stay. I had to fight hard for acceptance. I had to embrace them. I felt I got there but it took fighting and me continually embracing them. I recognized that they had problems. I felt sympathy.”***

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The focal teacher's comments also points to the research, Kratz et al., 2015, hypothesized that "teachers who experience higher levels of burnout have poorer working relationships with their classroom assistants and lower classroom cohesion." Change means work. Lunenburg, F. (2010), cites (Anderson, 2011; Duke, 2011; Harvey, 2010) and states that "resistance to change may be overcome. Six of the most popular and frequently used approaches to overcome resistance to change include the following: education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, negotiation and agreement, manipulation and co-optation, and explicit and implicit coercion."

*"I felt more criticized at every turn it has made it hard to come in each day. Support and working together would be helpful. Focus on the positive."*

*"Outside...Aides do not engage in game play with the children. They are always on the phone."*

*"Routine meetings would help. I did have short meetings. I did model behavior."*

*"Aides would say they were following directions but do not. Socialization is a huge focal point at snack for the aides – less focus is placed on communication with the children."*

*"I do not feel that aides are here to bond with the kids and it is more about them socializing with each other."*

*"IEPS are a burnout, there is a lot to do with the job."*

### ***Impact Data: Post Survey of Focal Aides and Substitute teacher***

In a final round of the data analysis, the post-survey was reviewed to determine if the perspective changed when a substitute teacher was introduced in the classroom. The focal aides collectively disagreed with the substitute teacher on the following survey questions:

1. *Survey Question #13 - "When we experience challenges in our classroom, I offer potential solutions to the teacher."*

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2. *Survey Question #14 - "If I experience challenges with a student, the teacher provides valuable help."*
3. *Survey Question #15 - "The "burden" and everyday stressors of our work are shared by the teacher and me."*
4. *Survey Question #16 - "The teacher and I meet regularly to discuss strategies for working with our students (e.g., what's working, what's not, etc.)"*

Journal reflections from Aide A demonstrate a lack of communication with the classroom team, parents and communication during the first two weeks the substitute teacher is in the classroom.

***Aide B: "We just work around her, we are here for the kids."***

***Aide A: "No interaction with the students and she did not introduce herself to the parents."***

***Aide A: "No support at breakfast, snack or lunch."***

***Aide A: "Teacher said she can tell I am bored. I tell her it is not about me. I tell her it is about the kids and how their attention span can only last so long. I remind the teacher of how long they have already been sitting. Teacher even said herself "Oh, the kids are getting loud and restless" prior."***

***Aide A: "Students were playing unsafe in front of the teacher but she did not intervene and react accordingly. Aides immediately stepped in."***

The substitute teacher clearly thought she was helping the classroom but continued journal reflections point to a lack of engagement with classroom management and supporting the aides in the classroom. The data clearly demonstrates the aides disagreement with the substitute teacher that she shares in the everyday stressors in the classroom when the burden of the classroom is falling on the aides. It was the aide's perception that they needed to guide the classroom work because the teacher was not managing the structure of the classroom. The survey data indicates the the aides did not trust the teacher to guide the running of the classroom

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Collection Tool: Aide A Journal:

*Aide A: “The teacher is starting to greet students but will not act with them otherwise.”*

*Aide A: “Still no support at scheduled eating times (Breakfast/snack/lunch). One aide is leading the higher functioning table and two aides are at the PECS table. Teacher is at her desk during these times even when it is clear additional assistance was needed at the PECS table. Hence, two staff at the PECS table when necessary/required.”*

Collection Tool: Aide A Journal

The survey does not validate the substitute teacher’s participation in the classroom (based on focal aides’ perceptions). But, passages from Aide A’s reflective journal does support that the substitute teacher did ask the opinion of the staff which supports respect for their opinions.

*Aide A: “Teacher asked aides opinions about having three different worktable stations. One for academics such as phonetics and coloring, another for puzzles and the the third for Play DOH, matching and or sorting shapes.”*

Another passage demonstrates that the substitute teacher took the lead on identifying ways to extend student learning outside of circle time.

*Aide A: “Teacher immediately looked for activities that are developmentally appropriate amongst the cluttered shelves.”*

*Aide A: “Table work went good. Will need some tweaking to make the transition of switching tables go smoother. Still in trial and error phase.”*

*Aide A: “Teacher has most interactions with the students thus far.”*

*Aide A: “Although the teacher is lacking in the interaction area, teacher is doing great job at finding and providing the students with developmentally appropriate tasks at table work.”*

*Aide A: “Teacher is constantly sorting through cluttered shelves looking for different tasks so the students are working on the same ones repeatedly.”*

### *Team Meetings*

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From the team meetings, I reviewed video conversations and research notes looking for trends in how team members surfaced their concerns, improved communication and classroom management strategies and dealt with conflict. Regular team meetings were envisioned as a way that team members would be able to move through “rough patches” to create a calm working environment and collaborate in a respectful manner. Regular team meetings created the space for all team members to regularly share ideas as well as problem solve. The focus aide’s attitudes aligned with the research which demonstrates that paraprofessionals express a desire to have ongoing input about the educational programs for the students with whom they work. They reported the extent to which their input was considered and acted upon by the educational teams as an indicator of how much or little they felt respected and valued. Paraprofessionals who worked with individual students reasoned that since they typically spent more time with a student with disabilities than any of the teachers or special educators...the “know the student best” and therefore should have their input seriously considered (Thompson et al, 1997).

“The mere presence of additional educators in the room is not enough to promote quality learning” (Lunenburg et al., 2007), a teacher must provide specific assignments for each team member. The more teams were united around a common goal, the more effective the team was at implementing evidence-based practices in autism classrooms (Kratz et al., 2015). During the intervention, I held regular team meetings (with the entire classroom staff before school). The focus classroom aides participated in 100% of the meetings. Teacher-Paraeducator Interactions ensure effective paraeducator involvement, including promoting supervision and training (Maggin et al., 2009); make time for meeting regularly with paraeducators (French, 2001), allow for effective delegation of classroom tasks (Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012), and treat paraeducators as respected members of the school community (Daniels & McBride, 2001). The focus aides

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reported that team meetings did not take place between them and the teacher. The lack of meetings left a significant gap in the flow of communication between the teacher and the aides, which created the opportunity for miscommunication amongst the team and lack of continuity and structural supports for the daily running of the classroom. “In order for teachers and paraeducators to provide students with quality instruction through the use of evidenced-based teaching strategies, they first must prepare an environment that is ripe for learning (Tseng & Seidman, 2007).”

I prepared meeting agendas in advance of meetings and shared them with the team. In addition, space was held for time to discuss concerns that might not have been on the agenda. Each meeting began with meeting rituals to hold space for all voices at the table and a brief check in to share a “statement of gratitude.” At first, team meetings were one-sided, one aide tended to comment the most but others participated at times.

*Aide B: “I am looking forward to Spring Break, it has been crazy!”*

*Aide B: “I want to offer some feedback on morning circle. I think we need to do a shorter circle because I believe students will be better engaged. I love doing circle.”*

*Focal Teacher: “The aides are good at identifying when the student’s moods are changing.”*

*Focal Teacher: “The aides are good at recognizing when strategies change with certain student's behaviors.”*

*Focal Classroom teacher: “I feel blamed for all of the problems in the room.”*

*Focal Classroom teacher: “Sometimes, I feel like an outsider because the aides are such a tight team.”*

*Focal Teacher: “The aides are very proactive at snack time- they quickly anticipate what the kids need.”*

*Aide C: “I like the folder work for high kids like... I feel we can get*

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*them ready for kindergarten. We need more.”*

*Aide C: “I like the cooking activities the teacher introduced.”*

*Aide B: “I am concerned about support for the classroom, we are getting more kids and some of them need more support with behavior.”*

*Aide B: “I know the teacher does not like it when we talk to each other. But it helps me get through the day when I can offer my teammates words of encouragement.”*

The focal teacher resigned at the end of March but the team meetings continued with the substitute teacher assuming the lead in the classroom. The substitute teacher joined the morning team meetings. The team discussed how to maintain the framework of understanding between the teacher and paraeducators and how the team would communicate. More aides finally entered the conversation at team meetings. There was a robust exchange about students who needs support since class numbers increase. The team discussed how the lack of a schedule that looks at the entirety of the week, including when service providers are working in the classroom is impacting the class and creating behavior management concerns for the team. When team members do not share the same role expectations, there is a greater likelihood that these mismatches will adversely affect a paraprofessional's job satisfaction (Thompson et al., 1997).

*Aide B: “We really need a better schedule, it is confusing when we do not know where we should be, it is confusing for us and the children.”*

*Aide B: “Shouldn’t we be taking data on the students? This should be what the teacher is doing. It is what the past teachers did in the beginning of the program.”*

*Aide B: “I know we have been told that it is not our role to communicate with parents, but they want to ask us questions because we are here everyday with their children.”*

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At a subsequent team meeting, the team discussed “what are the elements of an effective team?”

*Aide B: “The dynamics are automated, they do not have to work at it.”*

*Aide C: “Reading each other.”*

*Aide B: “We do not get stuck on that’s your job.”*

*Aide A: “Always working together.”*

*Aide B: “We always share information, it is important to communicate.”*

*Aide C: “We watch, we know what’s next, we understand how it is suppose to flow.”*

Team continued a discussion on communication:

*Aide B: “We have to know, we have to verbalize to the children that there is a change coming in order to prevent unnecessary behaviors.”*

*Aide C: “It’s helpful if we know at the beginning of the day. We have to Know.”*

Although the overall intervention did not work between the teacher and the aides, the team meetings portion of the intervention worked for the aides. Based on their regular participation in team meetings, their willingness to ask questions and exchange information at team meetings became an important connector for the aides.

“Irrespective of the time spent in general education settings or special education settings, too many paraeducators do not participate on teams or meet regularly with teachers. This does not reflect a lack of interest on the part of paraeducators” (Fisher, M., & Pleasants, S. L., 2012). These paraeducators want to be included as members of individual planning teams and the larger school community (Fisher, M., & Pleasants, S. L., 2012).

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*Aide C: “It is hard when the teacher calls us away from our duties to support a child with behaviors. It lessens our ability to do the job we were assigned and frequently impacts the other aides.”*

*Aide A: “Why was the former teacher going to the OT room instead of one of the aides? Shouldn’t the teacher always remain with the class?”*

Team meetings supported the focus aides validation of their roles within the classroom. In reviewing the videos, it was clear in listening to individual aides’ responses that they were passionate about their roles in the classroom.

### ***Aide Reflective Journal***

Additionally, I reviewed anecdotal notes collected by one of the focal classroom aides who kept a journal. The other aides did not follow through with the journals. The focal teacher did not keep a journal either as was part of the original agreement. Aide A, kept a journal on the classroom from March 5 through April 26. Much of the feedback was recorded when the substitute teacher assumed the lead in the classroom. Learnings from the aide’s journal demonstrated that in addition to working harmoniously with other classroom aides she was able to keep a connection with the substitute teacher. Journal reflections reveal specific instances where the aide offered support to the teacher or noted when the teacher connected with the students and the parents in the classroom. The aide does offer evidence that the substitute teacher did support individual student learning despite her aversion to leading circle or connecting with the aides as a whole. Despite a clearly defined shared understanding of the work between the aide and the substitute teacher, the journal indicates that there is a level of engagement and demonstrated respect.

### ***Other Low Inference Data From Researcher Notes***

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I held continuous meetings with the site Principal to keep him abreast of any issues with the classroom staff. The site Principal reviewed absence data for one focal aides and two aides who worked in another within the school. Collectively, the three aides missed an average fourteen days of work for illnesses.

Service providers (Speech and Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist and School Psychologist) also participated regularly in team meetings. Although no specific data was collected from the service providers, they offered a significant platform for the classroom aides to feel validated in their work. Service providers worked collaboratively with the whole team to look for strategies to support students as well as by helping to create a safe space for classroom staff to air concerns about the classroom challenges. When possible, the service providers extended their stay in the classroom to support the classroom.

*Aide A: “She speaks to us in such a disrespectful tone.”*

*Aide C: “Why should I come in to work today without... it is making it too difficult to do my job.”*

*Aide B: “She is not doing her job. We see what she needs to do but she will not listen.”*

*Aide A: “When I ask the Speech Provider about a skill I am working on with a student, the teacher thinks we are talking about her.”*

Cipriano et al, (2016), cite Cook & Friend, (1995) “Quality co-teaching has numerous benefits for students including the potential for improved academic performance and decreases in problem behaviors.” Cipriano continued by pointing out the differences between co-taught general education classrooms and the self contained classroom. “Given the status differential of the teacher and paraeducators in special-education classrooms, this working relationship may be subject to unique challenges.” “Support is needed to cultivate quality teacher-paraeducator

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interactions for self-contained special education classrooms.” No organization can continue to improve unless the people within it engage in ongoing learning (R. DuFour et al., 2010).

What needs to be in place for successful collaboration between the teacher and the team?

Due to the early departure of the focal teacher, the intervention was not totally successful. The lack of good relationships with aides continued and the lack of a following a consistent classroom routine did not improve. The literature review suggests that adult relationships improve when there is evidence of mutual respect, relational trust and a spirit of collaborative problem solving must in place. The aides never developed a shared understanding of the work with the focal teacher mainly due to the teacher’s inability to articulate her vision by providing a robust schedule of activities including aide’s roles across the day. The focal teacher did not define the aides’ roles or effectively assign tasks. The lack of clearly defined roles contributed to the lack of good relationships among the adults. Aides felt that they were frequently left to form their own interpretation of the the work, when it did not match the teacher’s expectations, there was friction between the aides and the teacher. With the abbreviated timetable, the focal classroom aides not able to improve their relationship with the teacher.

Unfortunately, the focal teacher was not able to implement the schedule to effectively manage/implement the classroom routine. Thus, the dysfunctionality of the schedule continued to undermine the predictability of the classroom routine. The lack of implementing the classroom schedule with fidelity increased some student’s behavior because there were gaps in the predictability of the routine. Continuous poor communications/relationships with aides impacted the implementation of the schedule and created missed opportunities for student

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engagement. Because intentions/expectations were not clearly communicated to the team, the teacher felt frustrated with the staff. In turn, the aides remained frustrated with the teacher when she spoke in what the staff perceived as a disrespectful manner or when the teacher did not observe challenges encountered by the aides with difficult students.

The early exit also impacted the coaching and observation cycle with the teacher. Prior to her departure, the teacher was not able to implement many of the strategies with fidelity. An inexperienced teacher can impact instruction and lack the necessary capabilities to effectively manage a special education classroom. If the teacher is a resistant adult learner, resists supports when offered, and does not reflect upon their practice as the leader in the classroom; it increases the difficulty to shift their behaviors towards instruction, classroom management and interactions with other adults in the classroom.

Team meetings were beneficial for the aides, it was the one area where the aides were able to demonstrate their commitment to the program and receive validation for their perspectives. Aides were given the opportunity to share their ideas about students in the program, to solicit/offer feedback about areas of the program that were challenging, and to share their experiences based on their prior knowledge of serving students in past years. At team meetings, the lines of communication were more open and evidence of demonstrated mutual respect was present during these conversations. As evidenced in the literature review, team meetings are an integral form of communication/collaboration in a special education classroom.

***School Psychologist -- “I am coming into the classroom to offer behavior management support to the teacher because I do not want the aides to quit. They are some of the best aides in the District.”***

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### Implications

#### *Limitations of the Research*

Due to the small sample size of the participants the results are based on the participant's perceptions from the survey; videos of teacher coaching sessions, classroom observations and team meetings; participant and researcher journals; and informal meetings with site principal and service providers. Future studies could yield different outcomes based on a sample size.

Given the number of students receiving instruction in special education settings, the quality of the interactions amongst educators working in these environments deserves more attention (Cipriano et al., 2016). Respectful interactions between educators are exemplified by the use of each other's name, making eye contact, displaying manners, or the use of a warm tone when interacting (Conderman, 2011; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend et al., 2010; Walther-Thomas, 1997). There are several promising studies looking at teacher/paraeducator relationships but more investigation is needed. The studies address cohesive relationships with classroom aides and a framework for teacher aide communications. As more children are being identified for special education services in the large metropolitan areas, it is clearly a problem that must be addressed.

What I have noticed thus far is the teacher's perception of the classroom differed from the aide's perceptions. Teachers need support (1) to learn effective classroom management strategies and (2) how to effectively manage other adults working in their classrooms.

**Recommendation:** Special education teachers should be familiar with the aide handbook and familiarize themselves with the trainings available to aides in the in the District. Aides need (1) appropriate training to work with the student population they support and (2) clear communication and feedback from special education teachers about roles/expectations and classroom structure. There are a variety of ways to measure respectful communication,

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classroom management and structural supports in the classroom. Time for teacher and aides to collaborate and team build promotes mutual respect (Jones et al., 2012; B. McKenzie, 2011). The lack of a shared understanding between the teacher and the aides does impact all of the adults working in the classroom. **Recommendation:** All team members must have the same understanding about the roles and expectations of the paraprofessional in the classroom (Giangreco et al, 2001). Teachers must maintain respectful tone in communicating with their classroom aides and provide explicit directions when assigning classroom duties. Poor adult interactions can impact the flow of the classroom. The data confirms that routines and activities with greatest potential for developmental intervention are those activities that keep the child engaged and interested (Dunst, 2001). Current teacher programs do little to prepare teachers to work with other adults in the classroom. The literature reviews supports this finding, Jones (2006) reports, many beginning teachers state that they were inadequately prepared by their teacher preparation programs to deal with classroom management. Without training, how does a novice teacher develop the skills to implement the process within the classroom to ensure that all adults understand their roles and maintain a respectable working environment?

**Recommendation:** If teacher programs do not provide the training, then Districts must do more to support novice teacher in developing the tools to manage the adults working in the classroom. Districts must assign highly skilled mentors to help untrained teachers develop management skills. Special education classroom teams benefit when collaboration is in place. Regular teams meetings must be held with classroom aides and service providers to communicate change, provide staff development and to problem solve as a team. Routine team meetings support collegiality amongst team members and provides a space to surface concerns and to share important information. Whether it is special education or general education consistent routines

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support student learning. However, it is imperative, in a special education ASD classroom, that teacher develops a consistent schedule and follows it with fidelity. Teachers must provide detailed steps of the classroom schedule to the entire staff including service providers to prevent miscommunication. Lack of structure impacts all areas of the classroom: student independence; student behavior; student engagement and, in general, the attitudes of the classroom staff and the service providers.

### ***Important for Paraprofessionals (Aides)***

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), mandates that all paraprofessionals are trained and supervised to work with the students they serve. However IDEA leaves it to the states to establish and maintain standards to ensure that paraprofessionals and assistants are appropriately and adequately trained and supervised. Ongoing staff development opportunities for aides are missing. One aide shared that in the past, teachers who were *skilled practitioners* shared their knowledge and provided aides with trainings not furnished by the District.

**Recommendation:** Regular aide trainings need to be reinstated. The literature review validates McKenzie, B. (2011) report substantiating the need for continuous staff development prior to the start of school every year for all aides and specific trainings for a newly onboarded aides.

Giangreco, M. et al, (2005), cite “some paraprofessionals are unskilled or under- skilled in the academic subjects in which they are asked to support students” (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002). These trainings should be specific to the aides work-related duties and the children they serve (Chopra, R. (2018). Although aides might participate in other staff development opportunities with multiple team members, Mckenzie states that aides benefit from their own unique trainings. Paraprofessionals benefit from paid training days on subjects they feel are important in their jobs (McKenzie, B. (2011). Training helps raise satisfaction and lowers

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turnover (McKenzie, B. 2011). Time for collaboration with the teachers they assist promotes teamwork and mutual respect (Jones et al., 2012; B. McKenzie, 2011). All new aides need some form of training before being placed in special education classrooms. Highly trained aides can be a reliable resource for recruitment of new special education teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2002). It is important for teams to delegate responsibilities so expectations between aides and teacher are clear Cipriano et al., (2016). Regular staff meetings for all team members creates opportunities for classrooms to strengthen communication and to discuss changes in routine and programming. In addition, regular meetings helps the team stay clear on leadership roles in the classroom. Role clarity is a must.

R. Chopra (2018) defines aides roles as follows:

- Implement instruction in various environments, based on lesson plans provided by the teacher
- Reinforce learning with individuals or small groups
- Assist individual students- personal care, mobility
- Assist with observations/data recording/charting
- Assist with ongoing behavior management
- Participate in building level duties as assigned by building administrator
- Score tests /papers & assist in data collection
- Perform clerical tasks
- Prepare, produce & maintain instructional materials
- Maintain and operate instructional equipment
- Help develop schedules

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- Team participation

### *Important for Special Education Teachers*

More than 75% of teachers working in special education classrooms supervise one or more aides in their classrooms (Kratz et al., 2015). Delegation of responsibility is key, Cipriano et al., 2016, reiterates that “delegation of staff represents how the lead classroom teacher incorporates the support of the additional paraeducator(s) to enable or hinder the smooth functioning of the classroom” (Giangreco, Halvorsen, Doyle, & Broer, 2004). Teachers need support on how to work effectively with their aides. Aides must be taught how to manage behavior of individuals and groups in addition to basic underlying principles of why and how to teach (Jones et al., 2012; Keller, Bucholz, & Brady, 2007; O’Keeffe, Slocum, & Magnusson, 2013; Wasburn-Moses, Euljung, & Kaldenberg, 2013). Unfortunately, a primary place that teachers seek support is with their site principals who frequently have little training as well. Findings in the literature review supports Chopra’s view on the importance of clarifying roles in the classroom and teacher responsibility to aides working in their classrooms.

R. Chopra (2018) states the following about what teachers should know about supervising aides:

- Legal, liability, and ethical issues associated with hiring, training, supervising  
Paraeducators
- Appropriate / Inappropriate Roles
- Professional Team Member Skills
- How to Provide Orientation to educational assistants
- How to create specific job description for each hired paraeducators
- How to (Why) Delegate Tasks

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- How to Plan for Self and Others
- Managing schedules for multiple people
- How to Provide On-the-Job Training specific to assigned duties
- How to Monitor Performance
- How to Manage the Work Environment

### ***Important for Districts***

Lack of skilled teachers affect the most needy students. College level special education programs need to do a better job of training teachers who serve in special education classrooms. What college level special education programs lack, Districts must make up by building strong collaboratives to support teachers with learning the skills to train and supervise their classroom aides. Once teachers are at a district school site, they must be paired with seasoned special education teachers as mentors. Often, Principals at school sites shut special education teachers off from meaningful engagement with other educators at the school site; this leaves special education teachers feeling even more isolated in what is one of the most stressful assignments at any school.

In the literature review, Giangreco et al., (2004), suppositions that, retaining paraprofessionals who are satisfied with their work is key and lays out why it is important for sustaining a pool of qualified aides. “Districts can make great strides in aide retention/job satisfaction when resources are set aside funds to support trainings that aides want and need when they are related to their jobs. Additionally, supporting outside classes or trainings demonstrates that District value these employees and it strengthens teamwork” (B. McKenzie, 2011). Where paraeducator unions are involved, Districts and their Non Certificated HR departments need to clearly delineate which department has the responsibility to ensure that all

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aides are properly trained to support the classrooms they are assigned. There is little paraprofessional role understanding amongst administrators (Dillon & Ebmeier, 2009).

Chopra, R. (2018) define the following as the executive function Districts must be consider in managing aides:

1. Providing Orientation
2. Planning for Paraeducator
3. Scheduling
4. Delegating
5. Promoting Paraeducator  
Growth and Development
6. Monitoring Performance
7. Managing the Workplace

Findings from the literature review affirm what Chopra states that Districts must have in place to build cohesive interactions between teachers and aides.

R. Chopra (2018) recommends that District consider:

- List and define the range of appropriate responsibilities that should be a part of each role teachers, paraeducators, related service providers....
- Clarify the amount of and lines of authority for each position and role
- Clarify the levels and types of support available for each position and role

Where specific trainings are needed for special education aides, **Recommendation:**

Districts need to team with the Classified Human Resources Department and the Special Education Department to determine which entity will provide specific trainings at the beginning of each school year for aides. Often, the lines are blurred between HR and special education

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about regular trainings. Districts and Special Education departments need to clearly define who will hold the responsibility for specific aide trainings and maintain them with fidelity.

R. Chopra (2018), states that Districts must have policies governing the following in response to the supervision of aides in classroom:

- Establish supervision as a legitimate part of the teacher's position
- Differentiate between supervision and evaluation
- Create support systems for teachers who have not been trained to supervise
- Determine the logistics of training teachers to supervise (what, when, where)
- Identify how administrators provide coaching and support to teachers who supervise educational assistants
- Plan how you will monitor the quality of supervision as part of them teacher's role

Additionally, trainings should be offered throughout the year. No Child Left Behind mandates that qualified aides are assigned to special education classrooms. Emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that properly trained aides support special education classrooms. Districts need to monitor more closely attendance unsubstantiated time cards. Aides need to come to work regularly; full accountability must be in place to monitor abuses. One aide in my District has missed more than 49 workdays. Special Education classrooms cannot function without a well trained paraeducator staff support. Classrooms become dysfunctional when the needed support is not present throughout the school day.

I concur with R. Chopra's (2018) recommendation that Districts review Paraeducator Training Policy Components to determine the following:

- Determine who (teachers & paraeducators) gets what training and when
- Create tools for determining paraeducator training needs

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- Paraeducator and teacher training together is great but is only useful for topics that are of equal relevance to both positions.
- Keep specific roles of each group in mind as you plan training.
- Plan for logistics (when and how training is delivered)
- Other considerations – incentives and compensation for paraeducators
- Determine how you will get current employees trained on relevant topics
- Make explicit the relationship between job responsibilities and training
- Plan for sustainability
- Determine how the training program will continue
- Where resources will come from
- Who has responsibility for running the program

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**APPENDIX**

## Managing Adult Relationships in an Autism Classroom

### Teacher Survey

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
1. In general, I can rely on my classroom assistants when I need help.					
2. I am comfortable delegating tasks to my classroom assistants.					
3. My classroom assistants and I act like a team.					
4. I am satisfied with the amount of support I receive from my classroom assistants.					
5. My classroom assistants have a schedule that we agreed upon that he/she follows every day.					
6. My classroom assistants and I agree on the best ways to work with our students.					
7. My classroom assistants know what he/she needs to do without my having to ask him/her.					
8. My classroom assistants has good ideas to improve our classroom's functioning.					
9. I often feel like I am working alone in instructing my students.					
10. I am open to the suggestions from my classroom assistants.					
11. I trust my classroom assistants to do the tasks for which he/she is responsible.					
12. When I feel frustrated or overextended, I can rely on my classroom assistants for support.					

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<b>13. I successfully lead the staff that work in my classroom.</b>					
<b>14. If I experience challenges with a student, my classroom assistants provide valuable help.</b>					
<b>15. The “burden” and everyday stressors of our work are shared by my classroom assistants and me.</b>					
<b>16. My classroom assistants and I meet regularly to discuss strategies for working with our students (e.g., what’s working, what’s not, etc.).</b>					
<b>17. My classroom assistant agrees about the work expected of him/her.</b>					
<b>18. When there’s a problem in my classroom, I ask for my classroom, assistants for advice.</b>					
<b>19. I always follow a predictable daily routine.</b>					

Total Scores

Adapted from: Kratz, H. E., Locke, J., Piotrowski, Z., Ouellette, R. R., Xie, M., Stahmer, A. C., & Mandell, D. S. (2014, 11). All Together Now. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 33(4), 329-338. doi:10.1177/0734282914554853

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### Staff Survey

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
1. In general, the teacher helps me when I need it.					
2. I am comfortable making suggestions to the teacher to improve our classrooms' functioning.					
3. The teacher and I act like a team.					
4. I am satisfied with the amount of support I receive from my teacher.					
5. The teacher and I have a schedule that we agreed on that we follow every day.					
6. The teacher and I agree on the best ways to work with our students.					
7. It is clear what tasks in the classroom I am responsible for leading.					
8. The teacher has good ideas to improve our classrooms' functioning.					
9. I often feel like I am alone in working with the students in our classroom.					
10. I often introduce new strategies and ideas to work effectively with our students.					
11. I trust the teacher to do the tasks for which he/she is responsible.					
12. When I feel frustrated or overextended, I can rely on the teacher for support.					
13. When we experience challenges in our classroom, I offer potential solutions to the teacher.					

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<b>14. If I experience challenges with a student, the teacher provides valuable help.</b>					
<b>15. The “burden” and everyday stressors of our work are shared by the teacher and me.</b>					
<b>16. The teacher and I meet regularly to discuss strategies for working with our students (e.g., what’s working, what’s not, etc.).</b>					
<b>17. The teacher and I agree about the work expected of me.</b>					
<b>18. When there is a problem in our classroom, the teacher asks for my advice.</b>					
<b>19. My teacher always follows a predictable classroom routine.</b>					
<b>20. I request sub coverage when I am going to be absent.</b>					
<b>21. I come to work when I do not feel well because i do not want my classroom to be without support.</b>					
<b>22. I take a mental health day when I feel my teacher does not listen to my input.</b>					

Open Response: If you could change one thing about the classroom, what would it be?

Adapted from:Kratz, H. E., Locke, J., Piotrowski, Z., Ouellette, R. R., Xie, M., Stahmer, A. C., & Mandell, D. S. (2014, 11). All Together Now. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 33(4), 329-338. doi:10.1177/0734282914554853