

Cultivating Effective Teacher–Paraprofessional Collaboration in the Self-Contained Classroom

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Abstract

Teacher–paraprofessional collaboration plays an important part in the daily functioning of self-contained classrooms serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Unfortunately, few training opportunities are provided to teachers on how to supervise and collaborate with paraprofessionals in the classroom setting. In this article, we present best practices for developing effective teacher–paraprofessional collaboration.

Keywords

collaboration, paraprofessionals, teachers, emotional and behavioral disorders

Imani is a special educator at Wilbur Elementary who has been teaching for 3 years in a self-contained classroom for students with emotional disturbance in Grades 3 through 5. There are currently six students in the class and one paraprofessional, Katie. Katie is a paraprofessional who has been working at Wilbur Elementary for the last 5 years. Her placement for the last few years has been in the self-contained classroom for Kindergarten through Grade 2 students with varying exceptionalities, where she served as a one-to-one paraprofessional for a student with significant physical disabilities.

This is Imani and Katie's first time working together and they have had a rough start. Imani is frustrated because she feels that Katie is not actively engaged in the academic and behavioral instruction of the class. In Imani's mind, Katie never seems to know what she should be doing and with all that Imani already has on her plate, she resents having to take the time to train Katie.

Katie is frustrated because her responsibilities in this new setting seem unclear. In her old class, she worked with one student throughout the day providing physical support while the teacher provided instruction. In this class, it seems like the teacher wants her to take a more active role in instruction, which is not something for which she feels prepared. In addition, Katie is not used to dealing with the severity of problem behaviors exhibited by the students so she often leaves behavior management to the teacher. While Katie would be willing to receive training to help in her role, there does not seem to be time available in the school day. Katie also works a second job, so she does not have time to take on the extra training during her evenings and weekends.

Like Imani and Katie, teachers and paraprofessionals in self-contained classrooms face many challenges to effective collaboration. We focus our discussion in this article on self-contained classrooms, which serve primarily students with disabilities. These classrooms may be housed within a general education school or may be part of a special education school or district serving primarily students with disabilities. Roughly 34% of students with emotional disturbance (hereafter referred to as emotional and behavioral disorders; EBD) receive most (60% or more) of their instruction during the school day in a self-contained classroom setting (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Self-contained classrooms are characterized by small class sizes, low educator–student ratios, and highly specialized resources (Blazer, 2017). In addition, a key distinguishing feature of the self-contained special education classroom is the regular presence of multiple educators, namely a special education teacher and one or more paraprofessionals (Cipriano et al., 2016).

Paraprofessionals are essential members of the special education team and effective teacher–paraprofessional collaboration has the potential to support student learning and behavior (Biggs et al., 2016, 2019). In this article, we discuss the benefits and common challenges related to

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teacher–paraprofessional collaboration and provide strategies that special educators can use to support effective collaboration practices. Although the examples reported here are specific to self-contained classrooms, the benefits, challenges, and strategies presented are generalizable to teacher–paraprofessional collaboration in inclusive classroom environments as well.

Self-Contained Classroom Environments

Self-contained special education classroom placement is considered best practice when students require a specialized setting that allows for intensive academic and social supports that are not readily available in general and inclusive classroom environments (Algozzine et al., 1988; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Maggin et al., 2011). Benefits of self-contained classrooms include smaller classroom sizes that allow for more individualized instruction, classroom arrangements that optimize space and reduce potential conflicts for students, and specialized teachers and paraprofessionals to support student needs (Maggin et al., 2011). Disadvantages of self-contained classroom placements include the potential isolation of students with disabilities from their typically developing peers, a possible reduction of students' access to the general education curriculum, and concerns that these placements tend to be permanent with few students who return to a general education classroom (Jones & Hensley, 2012; Lane et al., 2005). Likewise, researchers have found mixed results concerning the academic and social outcomes for students receiving instruction in self-contained settings (cf. Evans et al., 2012; McMahan et al., 2016; Siperstein et al., 2011).

For example, some studies show that students receiving special education services in general education settings have lower academic functioning compared with students receiving instruction in self-contained special education classrooms (J. A. Wagner, 1995; M. Wagner et al., 2005), while others have found that students with special education needs who receive instruction in inclusive settings have greater academic scores and fewer behavioral problems than students in self-contained special education classrooms (Evans et al., 2012; Lane et al., 2005; Ryndak et al., 2010).

In most studies of self-contained classrooms, classroom processes such as collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals have not been considered (Cipriano et al., 2016). It is possible that interactions between teachers and paraprofessionals in both self-contained and inclusive classroom settings contribute significantly to student academic and social outcomes, given the evidence from the co-teaching literature (Friend et al., 2010). However, this relationship remains largely underexplored in self-contained settings (Barnes et al., 2018).

Benefits of and Barriers to Collaboration

Collaboration is the ability to work cooperatively to attain a shared goal (Gerzel-Short et al., 2018). When educator collaboration is done well, it benefits teachers, paraprofessionals, and their students. Both teachers and paraprofessionals tend to view collaborative relationships as professionally beneficial because they can result in increased self-efficacy, professional support, and opportunities for professional growth (Biggs et al., 2016; Gerzel-Short et al., 2018; Reddy et al., 2020). Contrarily, when paraprofessionals lack collaborative relationships with the classroom teacher, classroom functioning can suffer. Moreover, a lack of collaborative relationships with team members may result in paraprofessional turnover, which continues to be a concern in schools (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012). Paraprofessional turnover can add additional strain on special educators and other classroom staff, result in understaffed special education programs, and ultimately affect student learning in the classroom (Butler, 2019). Alternatively, paraprofessionals feel a sense of commitment to their jobs in classroom environments characterized by respect and collaborative work with the teacher (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007).

Student outcomes associated with successful collaborative relationships include both the potential for improved academic performance and decreases in problem behaviors (Gerzel-Short et al., 2018). Successful collaborative relationships play an important role in high-quality programming for students with disabilities (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007). Students have also been found to benefit from the modeling provided by teachers as they work together to manage and instruct the co-taught classroom (Conderman, 2011). We argue that this modeling would also be beneficial among teachers and paraprofessionals. As a function of their diagnoses, students with EBD who are more likely to be served in self-contained settings, moreover, those verified with emotional disturbance, autism spectrum disorder, and intellectual disabilities, may be particularly sensitive to the effects of modeling among the classroom educators (Valenti et al., 2019). Thus, it is important to prepare teachers and paraprofessionals with knowledge of collaborative skills and practices and the training and support they need to promote effective collaboration in the classroom.

Unfortunately, there are many barriers to effective teacher–paraprofessional collaboration. As Imani and Katie experienced, common barriers teachers and paraprofessionals face include challenges related to a lack of time to communicate, train, and work together effectively. Meeting the needs of individual student learning plans takes careful coordination and time, a benefit that is not unanimously afforded to educators in self-contained classrooms.

In many cases, paraprofessionals generally start and end their work days alongside the student schedules, including their first day of school. They often have little, if any, time allotted for training with the classroom teacher or support in carrying out student learning plans before and during the school year. Moreover, paraprofessionals are often responsible for implementing students' behavior management programs although several studies have shown that paraprofessionals often lack sufficient training to fulfill these responsibilities (Wills et al., 2019). Busy schedules during the school day pull the teacher and paraprofessional in opposite directions, decreasing the likelihood of sustained productive communication between the educators.

Federal law requires that paraprofessionals receive appropriate training and supervision by a certified professional. Several studies have shown that with adequate training, paraprofessionals are able to support student academic learning and behavior (Sobeck et al., 2020; Wills et al., 2019). In most cases, this training and supervision falls on the teachers, who are often unprepared for this additional responsibility (Yates et al., 2020). As a result, paraprofessionals report feeling underprepared to take on their roles in the classroom (Douglas et al., 2016). Coupled with a general lack of support and guidance from leadership, as well as limited to no training regarding the supervision of paraprofessionals, the barriers to effective collaboration can undermine and diminish the effects of collaboration on teachers, paraprofessionals, and students.

Best Practices for Teacher–Paraprofessional Collaboration

A good relationship between the classroom teacher and the paraprofessional, along with their interactions with other members of the classroom team, is a pathway to success for students in any learning environment (Friend et al., 2010). Effective collaboration in self-contained learning environments involves building solidarity between teachers and paraprofessionals, clarifying roles among teachers and paraprofessionals, and demonstrating respect (see Table 1). The best practices for teacher–paraprofessional collaboration presented in this article were developed and tested by the Recognizing Excellence in Learning and Teaching Project (Barnes et al., 2018). Each of these best practices is described next.

Solidarity

Solidarity is the consistent presentation of teamwork between teachers and paraprofessionals. When solidarity is evident, it promotes uniformity in the messaging in the classroom and, as a result, supports overall classroom and behavior management (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). Similar to how children may try to position parents against one another

to get their way, students in self-contained classrooms with multiple adults may seek to get approvals, permissions, and directions from the alternate educator in the classroom. For example, it would not be uncharacteristic for a student in Imani and Katie's classroom to ask Imani if they can use the computer, and after receiving a "no," wait until Imani is out of earshot to ask Katie the same question in hopes of receiving a different answer.

When educators are on the same page and reflect this to their students, there are benefits to both educators and students. For educators, having their authority supported and reinforced by their classroom team has demonstrated positive effects on educator job satisfaction and self-efficacy (Friend et al., 2010). Promoting teamwork through interactions that are in solidarity with one another also improves the relationship between educators, insofar as educators may feel more invested in their classroom community, may be less likely to leave, and may be more likely to avoid conflict through proactive conversation and interactions (Gerzel-Short et al., 2018). Furthermore, when educators have a more positive working relationship, it can have a positive effect on teaching and learning (Bauml, 2016; Gerzel-Short et al., 2018). Solidarity can result in more concise instruction and less wasted instructional time.

Strategies for solidarity. Educators can enact a number of strategies to promote solidarity in their classrooms. These strategies include deferring to one another, using "we" language, active listening, and demonstrating teamwork. We unpack each of these strategies below.

In deferring, the teacher and paraprofessional consult and check in with each other before proceeding with students. Engaging in this behavior reduces instances in which students receive mixed messages due to a failure (on the part of the teacher and/or paraprofessional) to check in and consult with one another (Reid et al., 2004). For example, while helping a student select an answer for the morning math assignment, Katie can ask Imani if the answer is suitable before allowing the student to write down his response to the question. Later that day, a student stands by the door to wait for Katie to take him to the library. Before taking the student to the library, Katie confirms with Imani that this is a good time to go. Deferring can also occur from the teacher to the paraprofessional. For example, while Imani reviews each student's self-reported progress for their behavior charts throughout the day, she can ask Katie to confirm that students are providing accurate information about their progress.

The use of "we" language in developing a united front among adults in a classroom is an important but often overlooked strategy to promote solidarity (Murawski & Lochner, 2018). In classrooms using this best practice, the educators consistently use the word "we" when speaking to students to show that the teacher and paraprofessional are on the

Table 1. Best Practices for Effective Collaboration.

Components	Strategies	Examples
Solidarity	Deferring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking the teacher before taking the student to the library • Checking with the paraprofessional about student's information and progress
	Use of "we"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the word "we" to show they are on the same team • Including each other's name to explain that a request or a point
	Active listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforcing a point by repeating words • Demonstrating agreement by nodding, or by saying phrases like "yes", "right", or "absolutely"
	Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both actively engaged in classroom instruction • Both clear about their own and team member's roles and responsibilities • Establishing and using a clear communication system
	Rapport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking at each other and smile • Laughing together when something funny happens in the classroom • Sharing personal information with each other
Clarity of roles	Role division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking guidelines of role assignments from school or district • Learning about paraprofessional's strengths, weakness, and interests
	Administration involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers can participate in interviews • Providing administrator with a list of roles for prospective paraprofessional to take on in the classroom • Asking administrator to share information about top candidates
	Consistent communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with paraprofessional in preparation time • Staying connected and clarifying needs via communication system
	Training and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering inservice opportunities provided by your district • Seeking out resources and opportunities provided by organizations
Respect	Verbal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using each other's name • Using warm tone in conversation • Demonstrating manners such as "please" when making request • Offering compliments by expressing "great job"

Note. The examples in the list serve as illustrations rather than recommendations.

same team. The educators may also use the word "us" or simply include the other's name to explain that a request, or a point, is coming from both of them. For example, Imani can ask their students if they need help and then say that she and Ms. G (Katie's last name), whom she addresses by name, are there to help. Or, when speaking to a student, Imani can say, "Ms. G and I think that you should try to stand in other people's shoes when you are mad and we believe that you would react differently to the situation." Ideally, the teacher or paraprofessional should rarely specify that the other adult is making a request of students. Instead, all requests are ideally presented on behalf of all the adults in the classroom.

Active listening is inferred when the teacher and/or paraprofessional echo what the other has said, therefore creating a consistent message for students throughout the school day (Vostal et al., 2015). Active listening can be manifested when a paraprofessional reinforces a point that the teacher is making to the class. This reinforcement may be done by repeating the teacher's words or by demonstrating agreement with the teacher by nodding to the students or by saying phrases like "yes," "right," or "absolutely" after the teacher makes a

point. For example, in Imani and Katie's class, a student expresses hesitation in completing a math problem on the whiteboard after Imani tells him to try the problem. Katie can reinforce Imani by encouraging the student with statements such as, "It does not hurt to try." Or, after Imani redirects a disruptive student behavior, Katie approaches the student and tells him that this is his second instance of misbehavior and restates what Imani expressed about appropriate behavior.

Teamwork is exemplified when the educators effectively work together to manage the classroom and meet their students' needs (Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012). The teacher and paraprofessional are both actively engaged in classroom instruction and are clear in their (and their team member's) roles and responsibilities. For example, during a language arts lesson Imani explains to the students what a fluid sentence is and then asks the students to provide an example. After one student gives an incorrect example to the class, Katie interjects and explains why the given example does not work, and after she is finished with her point, Imani continues to explain what a fluid sentence is. As the students then move into the group work portion of their language arts lesson, Imani teaches a group of students while

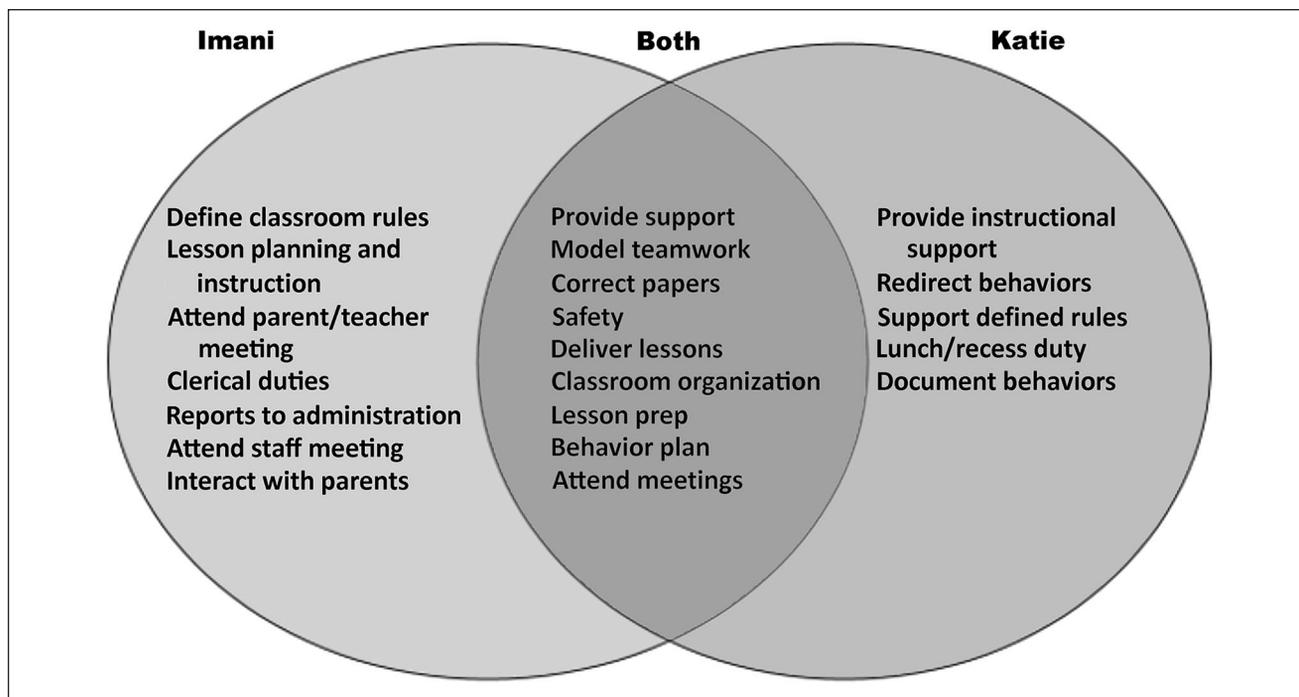


Figure 1. Venn diagram of shared and separate roles and responsibilities for Imani and Katie.

Katie walks around the room to check on the other groups and help as needed.

Clarity of Roles

Another key area that is illustrated in the example above and that also supports teacher–paraprofessional collaboration is clarity of classroom roles. Picture a classroom setting in which every adult is clear on what they are supposed to be doing throughout the day and, as a result, all classroom time is efficiently utilized to support student learning and engagement. We define this type of classroom as one in which the educators have clarity of roles. Teacher–paraprofessional roles are clarified when the lead classroom teacher reflects on needed classroom roles, effectively communicates these roles to paraprofessionals in the classroom, and provides any needed training to complete the roles. There are several steps a teacher can take to help in clarifying classroom roles.

Strategies for clarity of roles. The first tip is to determine what the key roles are in the classroom and to consider who would take on those roles (Ratcliff et al., 2011). When considering role assignments, there may be guidelines put forth by the school administration or district. In addition to these guidelines, teachers are encouraged to communicate with the classroom paraprofessional to learn more about their strengths, weaknesses, and interests. Knowing this information can help in determining

what roles paraprofessionals may take on in the classroom. Imani and Katie both filled out a Venn diagram of roles that they felt each person could take on in the classroom. They then used this Venn diagram as a starting place to negotiate and determine roles (see Figure 1 for an example of how roles might be divided).

In circumstances where the teacher does not currently have a paraprofessional assigned to their classroom because of a job opening, asking school administration to involve the teacher in the hiring process is a strategy that can be used to ensure that the paraprofessional hired for a particular classroom is a good fit (Biggs et al., 2016). Ideally, the classroom teacher may have an opportunity to participate in interviews and have input on the match of potential candidates to the classroom needs. If this is not possible, however, there are still ways that the teacher can be involved. One is that the classroom teacher could provide the administrator with a list of roles that the prospective paraprofessional would take on in the classroom so the administrator has a clearer picture of what to look for. Another possibility would be for the administrator to share information about top candidates with the teacher and get input from the teacher on who from the list would be the best candidate for the position.

Consistent communication between the teacher and paraprofessional can help in ensuring clarity of roles throughout the school year (Biggs et al., 2016). When possible, teachers can take advantage of preparation time at the beginning of the school year to meet with paraprofessionals. This preparation

time is rare, however, as most paraprofessionals' first day is the day that students arrive. If this is the case, we encourage teachers to work with administrators to see if it is possible to have some time to prepare with the paraprofessional before the school year starts for students. Having even a few hours prior to the first day of classes could go a long way in making sure everyone is on the same page.

In a similar vein, we encourage classroom teams to create a communication system so they are able to stay connected and are clear about what needs to be done throughout the day. Teachers and paraprofessionals report the use of walkie-talkies, texting if phone use is allowed, and creating a classroom communication log as ways they stay connected throughout the day. For Imani and Katie, they noticed that they were missing information concerning behavior triggers that had occurred during the school day for a new student. After some discussion about possible communication tools, they decided to create a communication folder to track the student behavior and classroom tasks that they were both able to write in and check throughout the day.

One of the most vital ways to increase the clarity of roles in the classroom is to provide adequate training for paraprofessionals (Giangreco et al., 2010). As stated earlier, paraprofessional training and supervision is a challenge for many classroom teams although this training and supervision is a necessity (Douglas et al., 2016). For example, for those working within the guidelines of the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB, 2012), there are requirements to design and use competency-based training for staff members who are carrying out behavioral assessment and behavior-change procedures. Due to concerns expressed by teachers concerning their lack of supervisory experience, we encourage teachers to seek out training and information on best practices for supervising paraprofessionals. Consider reviewing best practices and engaging in inservice opportunities provided by the district along with resources and opportunities provided by organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children and the Paraprofessional Resource and Research Center (see Table 2 for a list of resources). Administrator support is vital for ensuring adequate training and support for teachers and paraprofessionals. Administrators can be supportive in the following manner: (a) examining the training needs of their staff through a needs assessment; (b) providing opportunities, resources, and time for district-level, school-level, and on-the-job training based on the results of the needs assessment; and (c) advocating for policies, procedures, and practices that will strengthen teachers' supervisory skills and paraprofessionals' competencies (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Wallace et al., 2001).

Respect

A culture of respect among teachers and paraprofessionals is critical to promote solidarity and sustain clarity of roles

among classroom teams (Burdick & Causton-Theoharis, 2012). Respect in the classroom is illustrated when educators hold one another in high regard and acknowledge each other's work in the classroom. One benefit of respect among educators relates to productive teamwork and collaboration. In daily practices, respect provides a positive and commutative platform for the development of teacher–paraprofessional relationships. Another benefit of a respectful teacher–paraprofessional relationship is that it increases job satisfaction (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2017). For example, paraprofessionals consistently report being included and valued as essential in building a productive team and a sense of belonging within the broader school community (Gerzel-Short et al., 2018; Giangreco et al., 2001). As these elements work together, they can further contribute to the increase of paraprofessionals' overall job satisfaction and reduce educator turnover rates (Giangreco et al., 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

Strategies for promoting respect. Fostering respect begins at the school level and includes an examination of how school staff members are viewed within the school climate. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, we feel it is important to reflect on (a) whether all staff roles are valued in the school and (b) your own views of the value of all staff roles. We encourage schools to create positive climates that value all members of the team and to take on a team approach to work together. In addition, for teachers, respectful relationships with paraprofessionals can be built and maintained both verbally and nonverbally at an individual level.

Showing respect in verbal communication includes all discourse between teachers and paraprofessionals. Respectful communication is reflected by referring to each other by name and by using a warm tone in conversations. Respect is also illustrated by demonstrating manners such as expressing “please” and “thank you” when making requests and offering compliments such as “great job” about one's work (Giangreco et al., 2001). Several weeks into the school year, Imani notices that Katie is making more effort in supporting student behavior in the classroom. After watching Katie redirect a student and review the classroom rules with him, Imani tells Katie that she sees and appreciates her support in redirecting students.

A respectful relationship also can be strengthened through elements of nonverbal communication. Examples of nonverbal communication include making eye contact when listening and co-instructing, using gestures and body language, and delivering compliments via a thankful note or memo are all ways to invoke respect through nonverbal means (Giangreco et al., 2001). Engaging in these behaviors can be helpful in promoting effective communication and potentially avoiding unnecessary conflict in the classroom and school environment (Gerzel-Short et al., 2018).

Table 2. Teacher–Paraprofessional Collaboration Resources.

Resources	Titles/site URL
Books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lombardi, T. (1997). <i>Supervising paraeducators in school settings: A team approach</i>, A. L. Pickett & K. Gerlach (Eds.). PRO-ED. • Cramer, S. F. (2006). <i>The special educator's guide to collaboration: Improving relationships with co-teachers, teams, and families</i>. Corwin Press. • Nevin, A., Villa, R., & Thousand, J. (2009). <i>A guide to co-teaching with paraeducators: Practical tips for K-12 educators</i>. Corwin Press. • Pickett, A. L. (2007). <i>A training program: To prepare teachers to supervise and work effectively with paraeducator personnel</i> (6th ed.). City University of New York, National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Special Education and Related Services. • Fitzell, S. G. (2010). <i>Paraprofessionals and teachers working together</i>. Cogent Catalyst Publications.
Articles/book chapters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Da Fonte, M., & Barton-Arwood, S. (2017). Collaboration of general and special education teachers: Perspectives and strategies. <i>Intervention in School and Clinic</i>, 53(2), 99–106. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451217693370 • Douglas, S., Chapin, S., & Nolan, J. (2016). Special education teachers' experiences supporting and supervising paraeducators: Implications for special and general education settings. <i>Teacher Education and Special Education</i>, 39(1), 60–74. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406415616443 • Douglas, S. N., & Uitto, D. J. (2021). A collaborative approach to paraeducator training. <i>Beyond Behavior</i>, 30(1), 4–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1074295621997177 • Gerzel-Short, L., Conderman, G., & DeSpain, S. (2018). Supporting paraprofessionals: Tips for enhanced collaboration. <i>Kappa Delta Pi Record</i>, 54(4), 152–157. https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2018.1515542 • McGrath, M. Z., Johns, B. H., & Mathur, S. R. (2010). Empowered or overpowered? Strategies for working effectively with paraprofessionals. <i>Beyond Behavior</i>, 19(2), 2–6. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24011752 • Stivers, J., & Cramer, S. (2015). New metaphors for teacher/paraeducator relationships. In D. Chambers (Ed.), <i>Working with teaching assistants and other support staff for inclusive education: International perspectives on inclusive education volume 4</i> (pp. 27–47). Emerald Group Publishing.
Web-based resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blog post on teacher-paraeducator collaboration: http://www.gtlcenter.org/blog/teacher-paraeducator-student-success • RELATE Project: www.therelateproject.com • The National Resource Center for Paraeducators: http://www.nrcpara.org/ • Para-teacher partnerships: https://www.nea.org/tools/34018.htm • The Paraprofessional Resource and Research Center at the University of Colorado Denver: http://www.paracenter.org • Teachers' tools for building productive relationships with paraeducators: https://education.wm.edu/centers/ttac/documents/packets/teacherstools.pdf • Tips for working as a team: https://www.careertechpa.org/Portals/0/docs/Resources/Teachers%20Desk.pdf

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After attending a professional development training on supervising paraprofessionals, Imani requests time from her school's administrator to train Katie on classroom roles and expectations. The administrator obliges and provides them with a 2-hr block on an early release day and pays for Katie's time outside her contracted hours. In this meeting, Imani discusses the classroom roles and engages Katie in a discussion around her strengths and areas that Katie feels she needs additional training in. Together, they come up with a plan that provides opportunities for Katie to learn new skills "in the moment" while supporting students in the classroom. Katie and Imani also develop a communication system that they can use throughout the school day to keep one another informed on student needs and classroom to-dos. Imani encourages

and empowers Katie in her role in a new classroom. As Katie becomes more comfortable in her new role, she engages more in academic and behavioral instructional support of students, which helps Imani feel less frustrated and more committed to providing additional training and learning opportunities for Katie.

Conclusion

As illustrated with Imani and Katie, effective teacher–paraprofessional collaboration can be beneficial to teachers, paraprofessionals, and their students. Like other interpersonal relationships in our schools, there can be challenges to engaging in productive interactions for teacher–paraprofessional teams. By engaging in best practices to create a

solid classroom team, clarifying roles in the classroom, and encouraging respectful interactions between teachers and paraprofessionals, it is possible to build and maintain positive and productive working environments that benefit everyone in the self-contained classroom.

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