



PennState Experiences of Paraeducators Supporting Individuals who use AAC – Preliminary Results

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INTRODUCTION

- Paraeducators are defined as adults who support children with disabilities in the educational setting (No Child Left Behind, 2001). While children encounter many communication partners throughout the day, paraeducators are often the most frequent communication partner for children who require AAC in the school environment (Medler, 2012).
- Paraeducators provide one-on-one instruction for the students with whom they work. However, despite often working with children with the most severe disabilities (Medler, 2002) they receive limited training (Giangreco, Bloor, & Edelman, 2002).
- Given the importance of paraeducators in the lives of individual who use AAC in the educational environment and the limited research to date, this study solicited the views and experiences of paraeducators in regards to job responsibilities, current training provided, and recommendations for training.



AIM

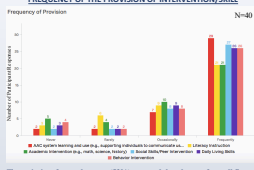
- The overall aim of this study was to investigate these experiences to inform AAC service providers, including speech-language pathologists, on recommendations for improved paraeducator training, and the potential impact on the students who will benefit from the training of these frequent communication partners.

Method

- Design: Online survey within Qualtrics; 20 Questions
- Survey Development:
 - Developed based on stages of partner instruction by Kent-Walsh & McNaughton (2005) and areas of focus for EIPs for individuals with severe disabilities outlined by Browder and colleagues (2014).
 - Input from individuals that have been paraeducators
 - Piloted with 5 paraeducators
- Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics
- Participants:
 - N = 48; 15 different states
 - Educational background - 4 had a high school degree, 15 completed some college, 20 earned a bachelor's degree, 4 earned a master's degree, and 3 completed a technical degree in an unrelated field.
 - Work Experience - average of 6 years of experience; range of 1 to 18 years

FREQUENCY OF THE PROVISION OF INTERVENTION/SKILL

Frequency of Provision N=40

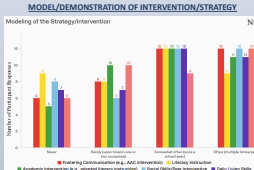


The majority of paraeducators (53%) reported that they perform all five areas of instruction frequently (defined as once or more per day).

- Most common area of support was AAC, system learning and use
- Least common was literacy and academic intervention

MODEL/DEMONSTRATION OF INTERVENTION/STRATEGY

Modeling of the Strategy/Intervention N=40



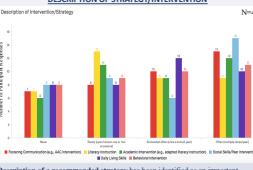
Demonstration of a recommended strategy/intervention is an essential step in AAC partner training (Kent-Walsh & McNaughton, 2005).

- The majority of paraeducators surveyed reported that they receive models of interventions either monthly or once twice a year.
- Demonstration of AAC related interventions/strategies occurred: 31% of the monthly or once a year; 23% once or twice since hire; 14% never received a model or demonstration.
- The least common area to receive a demonstration of the strategy was in the area of literacy instruction, with 25% reporting they have never received a model in this area.

RESULTS

DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGY/INTERVENTION

Description of Intervention/Strategy N=40

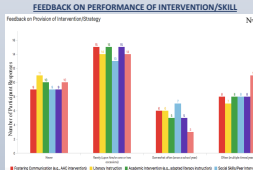


Description of a recommended strategy has been identified as an important component to partner training (Kent-Walsh & McNaughton, 2005).

- Most frequently provided in the area of social skills/peer interaction
- Least frequently provided in literacy instruction
- AAC Intervention Strategy Description/Design: 34% monthly, 26% once per school year, 21% one or two times since hire; 18% never received description of practices related to the strategy/skill they are providing since working as a paraeducator.

FEEDBACK ON PERFORMANCE OF INTERVENTION/SKILL

Feedback on Provision of Intervention/Strategy N=40



Feedback on controlled practice of the skill was identified as an imperative component of AAC partner training (Kent-Walsh & McNaughton, 2005).

- The majority of paraeducators (79%) reported that they received feedback on just 1 or 2 occasions since hire.
- The most common area to receive feedback during controlled practice was in the area of behavior management, with 28% reporting monthly feedback in this area.
- The least common area to receive feedback during controlled practice was in the area of literacy instruction, with 25% reporting they have never received feedback in this area.

DISCUSSION

The majority of paraeducators working with students who use AAC are required to support these individuals with CCN through a range of skills on a daily basis.

	Daily Use of Skill	Weekly Use of Skill
AAC Instruction	79%	90%
Literacy & Academic Intervention	53%	78%
Daily Living Skills	65%	88%
Social Skills	67%	88%
Behavior Management	65%	85%

- Compared to the frequency of provision, paraeducators receive limited training in these areas (table includes % of any training occurred within a school year)


	Percent that Received Strategy Description	Percent that Received Demonstration	Percent that Received Feedback Training
AAC Instruction	57%	60%	95%
Literacy Intervention	52%	52%	82%
Academic Intervention	52%	57%	82%
Social Skills	52%	60%	87%
Behavior Management	57%	52%	85%

- Findings are similar to the majority of the research - indicating paraeducators continue to be untrained or insufficiently trained to perform their basic daily duties (e.g., Bligham et al. (2007), Carter, O'Rourke, Sison, & Peltuse, 2009, Giangreco, 2009, Malmgren, Cautous-Theoharis, & Trzask, 2005).
- Brock and Carter (2013) found that the majority of professional development packages included description of practice, modeling, and provision of performance feedback.
- Findings differed in frequency of types of instruction (Zheng, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS/FUTURE RESEARCH

- Despite providing a range of supports to individuals who use AAC, many paraeducators report that they have received minimal training to provide evidence-based practice in these areas, specifically in the area of feedback.
- Gernain et al. (1997) argued that without specific feedback, learners will not correctly implement targeted strategies.
- Preliminary results are reported. Data collection is ongoing in order to gain a greater sample of the range of knowledge of the experiences of paraeducators working within individuals who use AAC.
- When asked to provide recommendations for training, 79% of participants stated that they felt training, including education, demonstrations, and feedback on performance should be provided monthly in AAC use and strategies to foster communication.
- Increased instructional training to paraeducators could improve the degree to which they are able to support students who require AAC.
 - Future research will investigate translation of the delivery of EIPs by paraeducators.
 - Future research will investigate the use of interactive webinars as a training mechanism.

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The authors do not have any disclosures.