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A Critical Analysis of a Paraprofessional Training Program: Teacher Aides Managing Their Journey to Self-Sufficiency

Linda Thornton Lockett

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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF A PARAPROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM:
TEACHER AIDES MANAGING THEIR JOURNEY TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Instructional Leadership

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Linda Thornton Lockett

December 2008

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Linda Thornton Lockett

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**DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Department of Instruction and Leadership**

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

Instructional Leadership Excellence at Duquesne

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Bachelor of Science in Education, Clarion State College, 1977

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October 10, 2008

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF A PARAPROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM:
TEACHER AIDES MANAGING THEIR JOURNEY TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY**

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ABSTRACT

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF A PARAPROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM: TEACHER AIDES MANAGING THEIR JOURNEY TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY

By

Linda Thornton Lockett

December 2008

Dissertation Supervised by Professor Dr. Ruth G. Biro

This study is a critical analysis of a paraprofessional training program that was located in southwestern Pennsylvania. The program was designed, developed and implemented to train and provide employment placement assistance and employment retention services to adults designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged. There were two research questions: (1) How did the paraprofessional training program components impact the trainees' capacity to successfully complete the program and retain employment and (2) How did the paraprofessional training program components affect the trainees' ability to manage their journey to self-sufficiency? The subjects in this study were a purposive sample. At the time of enrollment into the program, all participants were either unemployed or underemployed. This qualitative research included case studies of five trainees who were identified as successful and distinguished graduates of the paraprofessional training program. Their journey of

transitioning from the position of paraprofessional trainees to employed instructional assistants in educational settings was documented through their stories. The audio taped interviews consisted of a set of questions and responses identifying the trainees' expectations of the program, experiences as a participant, evidence of their performance, and evaluation of the training received. The demographic survey obtained background information about each participant. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the training and employment of unemployed and underemployed participants designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged by (1) understanding elements of the training that assisted in their successful workplace transition and retention, (2) identifying unaddressed issues in their transition, and finally (3) identifying practices, procedures and accommodations for expediting increased economic independence. The data set revealed all five participants met their goal of training, employment acquisition and retention, and characteristics of self-actualization and self-transcendence in their quest for self-sufficiency. The study also revealed that the training program model was highly effective in meeting the participants' needs to embark on their journey to self-sufficiency.

DEDICATION

Through Christ all things are possible.

Dedicated to my wonderful parents

James E. and Emma M. Thornton

Mom and Dad, this is for you because of whom you have guided me to be throughout my life. I could not have imagined parents who would bring as much joy to my life as you have over my lifetime. You are caring, nurturing and loving parents to all of us. Thank you so much. I am also grateful for the unity, humility, inspiration, and wisdom you bring to our family. God has blessed us, and I love and appreciate you dearly for your continuous participation and presence in my life

In memory of my loving grandmother

Everlean Hardaway

Your love and teachings live on in my life and in our family. We are better today because of the wisdom you expounded and the loving kindness you shared in words and deeds. Oh, what a blessing to have had you in our lives. We miss you and love you. The values you taught live on in your children and grandchildren. Thank you!

In memory of my loving aunt, nephew, and niece

Aunt Gene, James, and Janine

I cherish your memories and am thankful to have had you in my life. I love you and miss you. Your presence certainly made a difference. You are in my heart and mind forever. Often I think about all the special people in my life and you are at the center.

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My Family Legacy: *Thornton, Hardaway, Freeman, and Jennings*

You are the greatest measure of eternal love, devotion, and support. I love you, and I am eternally grateful for being a part of such a wonderful family as ours.

You are truly a joy and inspiration to me!

My Husband

Larry

My Parents

James and Emma Thornton

My Siblings

Areva, Lovell and Ora (sister-in-law), and Rodney

My Nieces, Nephews, and Cousins

Aurielle, Antoine, Andre and Keisha, and Alia

Ajane, Andre, Jr., Amirion, Avante, Amaude, Auza, Amara, CaNy,

Aziya, Casmir, Ahna, Antoinette, Anthony, Joshua, Arissa, Chantel, and Nikea

In Loving Memory of Those Who Shaped My Life, Heart, and Thoughts

Your legacy lives on in all of us. We love you and miss you!

Everlean and Lawrence Hardaway, my grandparents

Ora and Joel Thornton, my grandparents

Imogene Freeman, my aunt

James and Janine Thornton, my nephew and niece

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery.

(Mann, 2008, no. 498)

This study is a critical analysis of a workforce paraprofessional education and training program that was funded, designed, developed, and implemented for adults designated as economically and or/academically disadvantaged. The paraprofessional program located in southwestern Pennsylvania was granted funding through a human service agency dedicated to providing services to its residents who were identified as low-income and vulnerable. One of the services offered by this human service agency was employment and training opportunities to expedite its clients' capacity to enter the workforce and to become self-sufficient. To this end, contracts were awarded to educational agencies to assist adults in acquiring and applying skills in the development of job readiness, employment acquisition, employment retention, and career exploration.

The paraprofessional training program was the product of a human service proposal to train and employ adults who were designated as low income. A proposal from an educational agency was approved and funding was granted to support a ten-week training and employment placement program. The first award was granted during the 1998-1999 program year. This paraprofessional training and employment program prepared participants to become employable by schools and other educational entities as paraeducators. The participants in the program represented adults who were receiving public assistance through the county's welfare agency, unemployment compensation

from the Department of Labor and Industry (L & I), and other households whose earnings were at or below 125% of the federal guidelines for poverty.

From November 1998 through June 2006, the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) had been the primary funding sources for participants in the paraprofessional training program. The Single Point of Contact (SPOC) clients were Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients whose tuition was supported by the program's line item budget that was approved and funded by the local human service agency. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) clients were dislocated workers or other designated low-income adults who were funded by Individual Training Accounts (ITA) managed by the Workforce Investment Board, Inc. and administered by the local CareerLink offices (Workforce Investment Board, 2004, p. 1). Local workforce investment boards (WIBs) were created as a provision of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which consolidated the numerous employment and training programs. Under this legislation, WIBs were not permitted to deliver services, but became "responsible for establishing local performance standards, chartering one stop service delivery centers and satellites (referred to as the "CareerLink Network" in Pennsylvania), selecting qualified service providers, and monitoring performance to ensure accountability" (Workforce Investment Board, 2004, p. 1).

The majority of the participants in the paraprofessional training program received cash and/or food stamps only. The human service agency identified these individuals as needing training, education, employment placement assistance` and case management services to maximize their potential for program completion, employment acquisition, and employment retention. In 2001, the program extended its training services to include

other unemployed and underemployed adults in its outlying communities rather than just locally. The additional sources of tuition for trainees included funds from other human service organizations, job-training entities, dislocated workers, corporate pre-paid tuition plan, and fee-based payments. These additional funding sources augmented the program's client-base and revenue resulting in increased student enrollment, reduction in cost per student, and supplemental income for program operation. As a result, approximately one hundred individuals designated as academically and/or economically disadvantaged transitioned into the labor force as skilled and trained paraeducators in schools and educational centers throughout the host region in southwestern Pennsylvania.

Candidates were admitted to the paraprofessional training program after being determined eligible by the individual funding sources' guidelines for training and after having satisfied the paraprofessional training program's enrollment criteria. To enroll into the program, a potential student receiving public assistance was determined eligible for training by the local county welfare division for training and employment and approved for the designated funds for tuition. Other individuals of low income who were not receiving cash assistance from the public welfare department submitted their application for training to their local CareerLink office for eligibility determination and to receive tuition through funds allocated for dislocated workers and other unemployed and underemployed individuals. Other interested candidates satisfied the eligibility requirements established by their specific agency of funding. The paraprofessional training program and the referring case management staff of the various funding entities worked closely to verify a potential candidate's appropriateness for the paraprofessional training course. It was through these partnerships that enrollments for the program were

secured and the capacity for participant retention and successful completion was monitored. The participation goal was for trainees to utilize the paraeducation training program as a venue to become employed in the field of training at an established wage and to retain employment.

The research study encompassed a paraprofessional training program, which was an outgrowth of the host education agency's Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program that operated under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) from April 1984 through 1998. JTPA focus was to prepare "... unskilled adults for entry into the labor force and to afford job training to those economically disadvantaged individuals facing serious barriers to employment, who are in special need of such training to obtain productive employment" (Red Lake Nation, JTPA, 2004). Each year the program met or exceeded the performance standards for successful programming as outlined by the local federal program department and/or human services department's proposal and grant requirements (Local Education Agency, Statistical Report, 2006). During this period (1984-1998), "JTPA offered an experience in training, retraining and upgrading job skills levels, job placements and referrals services, job development and work experience" (Red Lake Nation, JTPA, 2004). At that time, the program offered educational and employability skills that led to the GED, acceptance into post-secondary training, and/or job readiness.

In 1998, the human service agency became the contractor of services for the adult basic education program. During the 1998-1999 program year, the local education agency's workforce development program responded to an employment and training proposal to serve the economically disadvantaged populations in southwestern

Pennsylvania. The local education agency submitted the paraprofessional training program as an industry-driven model that would expedite public assistance recipients' seamless transition into the workforce. The human service's proposal request solicited agencies that had a demonstrated history and capacity to successfully provide services to recipients of public assistance with cultural sensitivity and efficacy. Because of the local education agency's success in administering adult education and workforce development programs for the economically and/or academically disadvantaged populations in literacy development, GED preparation, remediation for post-secondary education and training, and job readiness, the paraprofessional training model (see Appendix A) was selected and funded by the human service agency as a provider of education, training and employment services.

In November of 1998, the local education agency (see Appendix B) located in southwestern Pennsylvania implemented its first paraprofessional cohort of the paraprofessional training program. At the conclusion of the ten-week training and the subsequent job placement assistance, all seven of the successful completers were employed at wages that exceeded the minimum requirements specified in the Request for Proposals (Local Education Agency, Statistical Report, 2006). Six of the seven trainees were employed as paraprofessionals in educational settings. During the 1998-1999 fiscal year, three additional cohorts completed the training and transitioned into the workforce.

In 2002, under the advisement of the human service agency, the open-entry and open-exit enrollment process was instituted to accommodate and expedite the entrance of public assistance participants into training and subsequently into the workforce. This concluded the formal cohort model, and new enrollees were admitted to the program

weekly rather than every ten weeks. Understanding the need for teamwork and a cooperative spirit of a paraprofessional position, the training classroom fostered an environment that encouraged cooperative and collaborative learning. This was integral in developing skill sets that would be expected and advantageous in the workplace. During the 2004-2005 program year, aspiring paraprofessionals continued to enroll into the paraprofessional program with 100% of the successful participants attaining unsubsidized employment in the field of training according to the PA CareerLink Workforce Investment Board's Provider List. In the final year, 2005-2006, trainees continued to meet the requirements for successful program completion and employment at a 100% placement rate for successful program completers. The paraprofessional training program was included on the WIB's 2003 select provider list for the top twenty-five programs in the county. The program continued to be as successful in subsequent years as documented on the WIB Provider List for eligible training and educational programs. Despite the success determined by the funding source, the paraprofessional training program ceased operations as a result of insufficient funds June 30, 2006.

The paraprofessional training program served a dual purpose of meeting and matching the employment needs and requirements of both the unemployed and underemployed paraprofessional trainees and school's compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) mandates. The approximately 325-hour comprehensive paraprofessional training course endeavored to be customer-centered, industry-driven, design-appropriate, standard and research-based, best practice-oriented, and legislatively responsive by being proactive in meeting the requirements of the United States of America's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act

(PRWORA) of 1996 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. These federal regulations provided the framework for the programmatic goals of the paraprofessional training program.

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act

The PRWORA is commonly referred to as welfare reform, which was designed to move families from welfare rolls to the workforce. The state plan for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) encourages “personal and parental responsibility, emphasizes self-sufficiency through employment, strengthens child support requirements, and increases penalties for welfare fraud” (Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2005, p. 3). The provisions of this plan in accordance with federal statute and regulation seek to meet one or more of the following purposes:

1. Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
2. End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
3. Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
4. Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. (p. 3)

Short-term assistance is available to families if one or both parents’ support is interrupted or if the family income is insufficient to meet their basic needs. “It [TANF] is not intended to provide long-term support or become a way of life” (Pennsylvania DPW, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, TANF State Plan, 2005, p. 3). The TANF state plan

also includes “stringent work activity participation rates and a lifetime limit of five years for the receipt of benefits” (p. 3). PRWORA was highly debated in America’s politics at its adoption and implementation because of the potential negative impact it would have on America’s population designated as impoverished (Carcasson, 2006).

No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires paraprofessionals to be highly qualified for the law states,

Title I paraprofessionals whose duties include instructional support and who were hired after January 8, 2002, must have (1) completed two years of study at an institution of higher education; (2) obtained an associate’s (or higher) degree; or (3) met a rigorous standard of quality and be able to demonstrate, through a formal State or local academic assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing reading, writing, and mathematics (or, as appropriate, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness) [section 1119(c) and (d)]. Paraprofessionals hired on or before January 8, 2002 and working in a program supported with Title I funds must meet these requirements by January 8, 2006. (U. S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 2)

The NCLB requirements for paraprofessional employment infused the educational community with great concern. Prior to NCLB, the minimum requirement for paraprofessional employment was a high school diploma or its equivalent. Now the minimum requirement is an associate’s degree or its equivalence. Paraprofessionals who were currently employed, some for more than twenty years, were now required to fulfill stringent educational requirements. Aspiring paraprofessionals had to rethink how to

become highly qualified. School administrators strived to create and/or adopt a rigorous assessment to deem their paraprofessionals as highly qualified. Even though this law did not apply to special education, schools throughout the county began to require all paraprofessionals to be highly qualified. Trainees in the paraprofessional training program who did not have an associate's degree could become highly qualified by passing a locally designed or commercially produced assessment adopted by the specific school district. One district adopted the paraprofessional training program's completion certificate as documentation for highly qualified status.

Paraprofessional Training and Employment Program Goals

The developers and designers of the paraprofessional training program incorporated the capacity for the participants in the program to meet the qualifications for hire as defined by NCLB for local school and countywide districts through its academic regiment, paraeducation curriculum and practicum placement experiences. As funders, employers, and legislators instituted and amended policies and procedures for programming and student participation, it became incumbent upon the paraprofessional training program staff to be flexible in the program administration and to offer real-time solutions and accommodations to remain in compliance with PRWORA regulations and NCLB employment requirements.

Statement of the Problem

To effectively address the condition of those who are experiencing impoverishment in our society, it is necessary to address their education, training and employment needs. If they are given the tools to become self-sufficient, they will also have the knowledge and skills to increase and sustain their economic independence. As a

result of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and the rise in unemployment, there was a concerted effort to minimize income dependence on governmental agencies and to maximize self-sufficiency. There was a radical movement to transition individuals who were unemployed and underemployed into the workforce because of their vulnerability in meeting their basic needs. Those who were unemployed or underemployed and receiving public assistance benefits were plagued by the stringent requirements for receipt of benefits and imposed lifetime limits. The dislocated and displaced workers were plagued by short-term financial assistance. Therefore, their need to enter the workforce was crucial and immediate. In all cases, clients required intense and short-term employability and vocational training to obtain initial and sometimes minimal economic independence. They were seeking opportunities to become gainfully employed in a field of interest and potentially career-directed.

The Pennsylvania State Plan for TANF (DPW, 2005) states, “The primary goal of Pennsylvania's TANF Program is to provide support to families as they make the transition from dependence on welfare to self-sufficiency and, finally, to long-term self-support” (p. 3). The paraprofessional training program was one of the support systems for TANF and other low-income participants to make the transition to the workforce, to retain employment, and to initiate self-support.

The primary focus of the study was to discover how a paraprofessional training and employment program contributed to the participants’ move toward self-sufficiency while documenting elements of self-actualization and self-transcendence. The research documented the journey of TANF and other low-income individuals’ transition and

retention in the workforce as a result of participating and successfully completing the paraprofessional training program. Pennsylvania state plan for welfare roll reduction records the urgency of providing work opportunities for TANF. State and national research documents that many TANF recipients have not retained their jobs and have found it necessary to seek TANF assistance again. This study focused on the elements of the paraprofessional training program that assisted the clients in obtaining and retaining employment as a means to self-sufficiency.

The Pennsylvania Department of Labor of Labor and Industry (2001) expressed the need for workforce development to be relevant in its services to globally enhance the workforce. “To remain competitive in the global economy, Pennsylvania must connect workforce development more tightly to the demands for the market. By engaging businesses within the clusters, professionals can aggregate training needs for multiple firms with similar skill needs and help drive a market-based approach to workforce development” (p. 2).

As society demanded accountability and highly skilled personnel for our educational system, it increased the urgency to provide effective training services and personnel for the workforce. The need to provide quality education for all children impacted our educational society and school systems. Since the 1950s, paraprofessionals have been an essential part of the education community. Today the paraeducators’ roles and responsibilities have given credence and realization to their capacity to serve in a more professional position. Furthermore, a century later, the position was being inundated with standards, credentialing, and training requirements. This was indicative of the important roles and responsibilities that they have been permitted and expected to

assume. As the paraeducator worked alongside of the certified teacher, the need to be skilled, knowledgeable, competent and confident became increasingly important for the paraprofessional. At the same time, the paraprofessionals were articulating elements of self-actualization and transcendence.

Rationale for the Study

This study was designed to understand the phenomenon of workforce transitioning of paraprofessional trainees designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged. Reason (1994) suggests that the best way to discover meaning of a phenomenon is to ask those who are experiencing it to tell their stories. Through the voices of five participants, their journey to self-sufficiency and making a difference in their own lives as well as others was revealed.

This study was essential because it gave insight into one of our nation's most vulnerable population's capacity to embark on their journey to self-sufficiency. It also demonstrated the extensive impact they have had on schools, communities, and the society-at-large as a result of their accomplishments as a paraprofessional. According to a claim by the human service agency in its proposal request in 2004, welfare reform had significantly increased the number of public assistance clients who were working. The remaining welfare dependent clients were primarily long-term recipients who were termed hardest to serve because of their deficiency in basic education and employability skills, lack of work history, or serious drug dependency.

To remain functional under its existing grant, the paraprofessional training program had to meet the needs of clients who might have been designated as hardest to serve. An understanding of the paraprofessional program's successful graduates' journey

from welfare to work or underemployment to potential self-sustaining work would give insight into key elements of their successful program completion, employment transition, employment retention, self-sufficiency, and self-fulfillment.

Need for the Study

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Fremstad, 2004) has issued the following research findings as of January 2004 regarding families who have left welfare.

1. Families who have left welfare since 2000 are less likely to be working than those who left welfare in the 1990s (p. 2).
2. Welfare caseloads remain low but families who are leaving welfare increasingly do not have stable employment. Even when they have jobs, their earnings remain extremely low — many remain below the poverty level — in both the short- and long-term (p. 11).
3. A longitudinal study of welfare recipients in Philadelphia found that “the percentage of women who worked full time in jobs that paid \$7.50 per hour or more and that offered employer-provided health insurance increased from 1998 to 2001, but only about two out of five working women had such a job in 2001” (Michalopoulos, et al., 2003, p. 18).
4. While the unemployment rate of low-income single mothers remained well above the national average, it fell by 3.8 percentage points—more than twice that of the overall rate—from 13.6% in 1996 to 9.8% in 2000 . . . to 12.3% [in 2002]. After falling faster than the national unemployment rate over the boom [last half of the 1990s], the jobless rate of low-income single mothers rose faster than the overall rate between 2000 and 2002 (Chapman and Bernstein, 2003, pp. 2-3).

5. Studies from the 1990s indicated that the poverty rate among welfare leavers was high. The studies also found that after two to three years of leaving welfare 50 to 75 percent of the leavers remained poor (Blank, 2002).
6. Most welfare leavers with incomes above the poverty line still have very low incomes. State-level leaver studies have found that about 90 percent of leavers have income below 185 percent of the poverty level according to Acs and Loprest (as cited in Fremstad, 2004).

What elements of the paraprofessional training program have assisted the trainees in this research to either overcome these odds or to address them effectively? Research continues to show high poverty rates and very modest growth in income for families that leave welfare. To better understand this phenomenon, the researcher studied the transition to employment of public assistance and other low-income clients from a paraprofessional training program.

To better understand the need of the public assistance and other low-income clients and their relevance to participating in the paraprofessional training program, the research has outlined the critical elements associated with the administration of the program and its relevance to the participants.

Federal legislations have influenced the lives of low-income individuals who are preparing to be paraprofessionals in educational systems. In 1996, President Clinton authorized Welfare Reform. This law had a great impact on the research participants' economic condition. In 2001, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act that increased the educational requirements for paraprofessionals. Even though there were concerted efforts to ease the transition to the workplace by making

available accessible training programs, participation incentives, and other supporting subsidies, the picture cannot be completed until we hear the voices of the economically and/or academically disadvantaged recipients who were affected.

Significance of the Study

The paraprofessional training program was evaluated monthly and annually to determine if performance standards were being met according to the human services' proposal guidelines. The statistical analyses document and support continued funding and participant referrals by the funding source, but it did not analyze the perceived value to and impact on the program participants. It is imperative to explore and to gain a deeper understanding of how this population was impacted by a program that was designed specifically for their economic and employment transition and well-being. Through the study, the researcher discovered and explored qualitative data that helped to explain how the paraprofessional training program assisted participants in attaining the goals of the training program, directing participants to attain and sustain employment, and potentially fostering career development. The data set demonstrated evidence of self-actualization and transcendence as the participants moved toward self-sufficiency as a result of their successful completion of the training program. The research was designed to explore, discover, interpret and understand the paraprofessional training participants' transition to earners of income in career potential employment.

Statistically the program was sound according to documented outcomes posted on the WIB and submitted to the human service agency as the contractor of services. This study gave insight into the elements of the program that helped trainees to be successful according to the participants' perspective. This qualitative data was valuable in

understanding and preparing training services for participants designated as economically or educationally disadvantaged.

The paraprofessional training program fulfilled the employment requirements for regular and special education paraprofessionals within the county and the surrounding region. A local school district adopted the paraprofessional program as a means to deem their paraprofessionals as highly qualified. Educational employers and potential students identified the program as a valuable resource to address employment needs. Employers enjoyed the bank of available qualified personnel for hire and articulated the difference the paraeducators made in the lives of their students and the school culture as a whole. Students and potential students identified the paraeducation training as a means to fulfill their longtime interest and desire to assist children in educational settings. To partially articulate the rationale, significance and need for this study, Edie Holcomb's (2001) program inquiry design model was used as it pertained to trainees and the program. Holcomb equated this five-step inquiry method to a journey. She cited the importance of understanding the existing conditions and mapping the journey for the desired destination.

Step one was the analysis phase. "Knowing the starting point is just as important as knowing the destination, if the journey is to be safe, accurate, timely, and cost-effective" (Holcomb, 2001, p. 7).

1. Where are we now? (p.14). The program was proactive in meeting the requirements of the funding source, the employment market, and the clients. The program was listed on the Workforce Investment Board's top twenty-five service providers in the county (Workforce Investment Board, 2003). Ninety-

five percent of the successful paraprofessional graduates accepted employment in the field of training. Schools and educational entities actively assisted in the program's mission by serving as practicum sites and employment placement opportunities. Client satisfaction was noted by student referrals and an increased interest by the more than 500 inquiries made in one year. Increased recognition and request for services was generated. With the increasing demand for highly skilled paraprofessionals, this program offered low-income individuals the opportunity to make a difference in their own lives and the lives of school children. The cycle of dual development not only improved the lives of the participants but also society as a whole. The design of this research was developed to allow for the discovery of the far-reaching effects of the program that had yet to be identified. As dollars for training become scarce, it was important for the program to deliver optimal training and employment placement assistance services that clients may not have secured without the paraprofessional training and employment program.

Step two was the planning phase. This stage was important in determining where the organization or school change was needed. Identifying priorities was the key to this step.

2. Where do we want to go? (Holcomb, 2001, p.15). The program anticipated continuing its status as a select service provider for economically and/or academically disadvantaged populations and for the educational institutions that hire them as employees. Through the voice of the successful graduates of this program, the research documented and increased the understanding of

how to best serve the participants' needs in expediting their transition into the workplace. It was the intention of this training program to expand and incorporate relevant services that would allow the trainees to be productive and contributing members in society and to progress toward self-sufficiency.

Step three continued the planning phase. "Although change processes must be flexible enough and adjusted often enough to be considered evolutionary, the initial implementation plan must be specific enough to let everyone know what's expected" (Holcomb, 2001, p. 65).

3. How will we get there? (Holcomb, 2001, p.15). We will get there by listening to the research participants, understanding their plight, and being willing to adapt wherever and whenever possible to achieve maximum success. This study was the venue for achieving this step. The research study was a vehicle for developing the plan that will generate the data and tools for successful planning. If the program provided competent and qualified employees, additional opportunities for growth and development were anticipated for the program and each of the successful participants. Despite the closing of the program in 2006, the effects of the programs will continue as the participants make a difference in their lives and the lives of others as a result of education, training and employment.

Step four clarified the destination and gave specific criteria for meeting the objectives and goals.

4. How will we know we are (getting) there? (p.15). By examination of the program through the eyes and voices of its participants, we now have a clearer

understanding on how to move toward the mark of seamless employment transition and increased participant development.

Step five concluded that continuous growth was contingent on evaluating and celebrating accomplishments, recognizing acquisitions have been attained, and knowing that this phase is not the end but a new beginning that fosters longevity. It was anticipated that this phase would not only manifest a positive difference, but also sustain and renew the vision.

5. How can we sustain the focus and momentum? (p.16). It was anticipated that this study would generate information that would increase the capacity to generate additional program development for paraprofessionals and implementation of similar programs. The need for relevant student-centered and career-oriented training and employment programs for those designated as economically and/or educationally disadvantaged continues to exist.

This study was significant and timely because the paraprofessional training program was aligned in terms of purpose, conditions and outcomes of complementary entities including the local education agency that hosted the program, the human service agency that distributed the program funds, the county welfare offices that supported some of the low-income participants, and workforce education that articulated the work mission. The time is right and conditions are optimal to support the education and employment of adults defined as economically disadvantaged.

Mission and/or Vision Compliant

The human service agency, public welfare department, workforce education, and the local education agency align in their missions to serve those who are disadvantaged

and vulnerable in our society. To embark on a journey of self-sufficiency, the participants required temporary support subsidies, career-oriented opportunities, employment readiness skills, and employment placement assistance. As these basic needs were met, the participants were better equipped to address their potential and the potential of others. A synopsis of the agencies' vision and/or mission is recorded in Appendix C.

Demonstrated History

The local education agency's adult education programs had a twenty-two year history of working with the economically and/or academically disadvantaged population. It had been designated as a select service provider in the past and appeared on the Workforce Investment Board's top twenty-five providers list for its excellent program performance (Workforce Investment Board, 2003). The paraprofessional training program had the unique experience of providing employment options to residents in their home community. The idea of giving back to their community made a difference. The training program also had a high interest as noted by the more than 500 inquiries in one year.

Employment Growth Market

The need for this study was justified in the labor market statistics. This was an optimal time for addressing and preparing to meet the market projection as reported by the Department of Labor's 2000-2002 labor market report, which listed education as having the second highest positive growth average. Funding for workforce education and training targeted labor market growth areas. Education was one of the major growth areas according to the Labor Statistics Report from the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (2004). This information was relevant for the paraprofessional training program

to capitalize on this training market for its participants. This study recorded the participants' experiences through their transitional stage of classroom training to school employment. If successful graduates of this program could transition into positions that would foster career laddering, they would move closer to total economic independence.

Stakeholders Appropriate

Trainees are prepared to accept meaningful positions that they might not have secured without training and employment placement assistance. The schools were able to access to a bank of well-trained and qualified paraprofessional employees. The funders had a higher return on investment dollars as a result of participant employment and employment retention. This program met many needs, and it was important to understand the elements that fostered successful participant completion and evidence of self-actualization and transcendence as they moved toward self-sufficiency.

Effective Program Design

The program was designed and structured to meet the needs of the economically and/or educationally disadvantaged population. The location of services were readily accessible by public transportation; the class schedule modeled a regular school day limiting the need for childcare; course content was aligned with national, state, and local requirements; the staff was certified and experienced; case management services were available onsite and in external locations; and the facilities were conducive to an adult learning environment. The program continuously responded to feedback for a comprehensive and accountable design. Best practice based orientation to education and training were used. The program endeavored to be student-centered, experiential,

reflective, authentic, holistic, social, collaborative, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist and challenging in its best practice services (Daniels & Bizar, 1998).

Legislative Compliant

This study was also significant and timely because of its connection to two major federal legislations – Welfare Reform of 1996 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 – that directly impacted the lives of participants in this program in terms of personal economics and required employment qualifications respectively. This paraprofessional training had the capacity and demonstrated history of fulfilling the current vision and mission of many workforce education and human services related agencies that address issues of the populations designated as low-income.

Legislatively, the program endeavored to be proactive in discovering the best strategies to ensure that the program remained a viable option for the populations that are economically and/or academically disadvantaged. It met the participation requirements for trainees as it pertained to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and other legislations governing individuals of low-income. Former President Clinton’s Welfare Reform Act of 1996 mandated a five-year lifetime limit and stringent work requirement for recipients of welfare. This mandate generated an influx of jobseekers who often needed knowledge and skill development to be competitive and qualified candidates in today’s labor market.

President Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) mandated strict requirements for accountability in educating school children. The intent was to leave no child behind, which resulted in explicit requirements for Schoolwide Title I programs and Title I paraprofessionals. These advanced education requirements had a direct impact on

the paraprofessional training program, for this law entailed paraprofessionals meeting the following criteria, which many participants in the paraprofessional training program did not possess.

1. All Title I paraprofessionals must have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent. This includes paraprofessionals who serve as translators or who conduct parental involvement activities.
2. Title I paraprofessionals whose duties include instructional support and who were hired after January 8, 2002, must have (1) completed two years of study at an institution of higher education; (2) obtained an associate's (or higher) degree; or (3) met a rigorous standard of quality and be able to demonstrate, through a formal State or local academic assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing reading, writing, and mathematics (or, as appropriate, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness) [section 1119(c) and (d)]. Paraprofessionals hired on or before January 8, 2002 and working in a program supported with Title I funds must meet these requirements by January 8, 2006. (U. S. Department of Education, 2002)

It was anticipated that the pending reauthorization of the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) would potentially align with the No Child Left Behind Act. This would directly influence the special education paraprofessionals who were currently exempt from NCLB requirements. The special needs population was the largest employer of the paraprofessionals graduating from this program. This gave rise to ensure the program had the capacity to meet at least the minimum requirements for hire in terms of credential and continued development of knowledge and skills competencies.

As a result of these two major legislations, it was increasingly important that the program remained viable to the training and employment industry and the unemployed citizens in our communities.

Self-Sufficiency Potential

This study discerned and dictated how to best assist this population in initiating career paths and moving closer to self-sufficiency. Most TANF and other low-income clients, according to Diana Pearce (2001), are not able to achieve self-sufficiency through stopgap measures, short-term-solutions, a single step, in isolation or without work supports and time. Pearce (2001) further states, “True self-sufficiency involves not just a job with a certain wage and benefits, but rather income security for a family over time” (p.4). It is not a one-time achievement, but a “process that one is engaged in” (p. 4). Pearce (2001) further states, “... self-sufficiency increasingly necessitates investments that enhance skills and adaptability” (p. 4).

The paraprofessional training program was designed to transition its clients into the workplace as competent paraeducators and as wage earners. Education and training opened the door to greater independence in terms of economics, civics, and democratic opportunities and responsibilities, which fostered participatory, contributing, productive, and self-actualizing societal members.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework encompassed Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs as it examined the self-sufficiency journey of those designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged. The subjects in this study had a pressing goal to become

employable and employed. The paraprofessional training program was the venue to expedite their goals of making a difference in their own lives as well as others.

Those who have been determined economically and/or academically disadvantaged have a difficult time in addressing or fulfilling their potential. They are so engrossed in satisfying their daily needs of adequate food, clothing, shelter, and safety that little time is left for seeking other fulfillments of life. Their sense of priorities is often directed by moment-to-moment and day-to-day survival. The implications have been to label this population as unmotivated and lackadaisical. While this viewpoint may hold some truth for some, it is not supported by humanistic theory.

Self-Sufficiency Defined

Individuals who are affected by negative life situations cannot look ahead to planning a brighter future until they have satisfied specific basic needs. This aligns with Abraham Maslow's (1970) theory of hierarchal needs that governs how people move through life as a result of satisfying or not satisfying these needs. According to his theory, the needs are sequential; certain needs must be addressed before other needs can be given consideration.

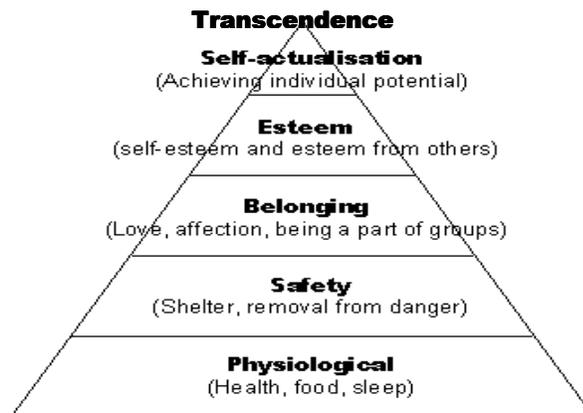


Figure 1: Maslow Hierarchy of Needs

Note: Maslow's Hierarchy. ChangingMinds.org: Retrieved March 15, 2008, from <http://changingminds.org/explanations/needs/maslow.htm>.

The first four needs are physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem. They are referenced as deficiency needs or D-needs, which cause anxiousness when not met, but dissipate when they are met. The fifth need in this sequence is known as the B-needs or the being needs; it is at the apex of Maslow's pyramid of descriptive needs. This is the period where individuals exhibit self-actualization and transcendence characteristics. They are at a point in life where they can begin to concentrate on fulfilling their potential and helping others fulfill theirs, respectively. The apex symbolism is highly applicable, for it portrays a peak time in the lives of those affected; it gives them an opportunity to address their future and heart desires. When self-actualization is being addressed, individuals are motivated to go further (Boeree, 2006).

Self-actualization and Self-sufficiency

The subjects in this study decided to make a difference in their lives by enrolling and completing a ten-week paraprofessional training program. According to Maslow, making a difference reveals self-actualization, which few people reach. It is individuals fulfilling their potential or at least attempting to fulfill their potential.

The paraprofessional training program was designed to assist economically and/or academically disadvantaged adults, ages 18 and over, to secure employment and thereby their journey to self-sufficiency. Individuals who are challenged by economic and academic conditions often find it difficult to attend school and to find meaningful work experiences. As noted in Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs, if the basic physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem needs are not met, then other needs such as self-actualization will never be attempted. It has been noted that only a select few ever reach self-actualization, which is at the summit of his needs chart.

Maslow's (1970) description of self-actualizer culminates at the highest level of needs where people begin to realize their potential. One of the most crucial points for those in this study was their ability to be self-supporting. Self-sufficient is included as one of the characteristics of self-actualization. Self-actualizers do not want to be dependent; they have the need to be independent. Self-sufficiency has been described as a journey or something that happens over time to generate economic independence. Pearce (2001) states, "True self-sufficiency involves not just a job with a certain wage and benefits, but rather income security for a family over time" (p.4). Neither self-sufficiency nor self-actualization is a single act; they happen over time. The subjects in this study are striving for economic independence, which may lead to independence in other areas of their lives.

Self-actualization and Transcendence

Self-actualization was divided to include transcendence. Transcendence is the ability to assist others to fulfill their potential, which becomes possible after addressing personal fulfillment. These individuals demonstrate a desire to help others in meaningful ways.

Program marketing strategies and materials for the paraprofessional training program encouraged individuals to apply if they were interested in making a difference in the life of a child. Those answering the call to make a difference were cognizant of this program mission. In accordance with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the trainees first needed to satisfy their own basic needs.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory was employed to understand the subjects' journey to self-sufficiency as a result of training and employment. The paraprofessional

training program and its participants desired to make a difference, to foster change, and to increase sustained economic independence.

Opposition to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Even though theorists have accepted and applied Maslow's theory of Hierarchy of Needs, there are concerns raised by others. Some theorists have challenged his idea of self-actualization. C. George Boeree (2006) cites the lack of rigor in Maslow's methodology in the selection of subjects, chronology of needs, and the identification of self-actualization characteristics. Maslow (1970) recognized limitations of his study and stated, "...these studies have proved to be enlightening to me, and so laden with exciting implications, that it seems fair that some sort of report should be made to others in spite of its methodological shortcomings" (p. 199). For the purpose of this study, the characteristics that have been identified by Maslow are appropriate and useful in describing the subjects' journey to self-sufficiency and the attributes of fulfilling their potential.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to conduct a critical analysis of the paraprofessional training program. It examined the impact of the program on successful graduates. The study focused on five successful graduates who are currently employed as paraprofessionals within regular and special education classrooms. The study gleaned an insight into the training and workplace transitioning of the economically and/or academically disadvantaged participants by collecting and analyzing data involving participants' expectations, experiences, evidentiary materials and an evaluative summation of the paraprofessional training program. Through this process, the researcher

was able to document an (1) understanding of the program elements that contributed to trainees' successful workplace transition, (2) identification of issues and barriers in their transition, and (3) review of practices, procedures and accommodations for expediting workplace transition and the clients' journey to self-sufficiency. It also was able to identify and document self-actualizing and self-transcending tendencies of the subjects. It was crucial to view the training from the participants' perspectives to have an authentic understanding of their journey to the workforce as a result of successfully completing the paraprofessional training program.

Assumptions

The researcher identified the following assumptions for this study:

1. This study is a valuable employment and training resource for the human service agency (funding agency), the local education agency (educational/training service provider), the county welfare office and its division of employment and training, school districts, and the trainees who participated in the paraprofessional training program.
2. The information is pertinent in identifying and supporting the training needs of TANF and other unemployed and underemployed individuals who may or may not be designated as hard to serve.
3. The study can generate increased interest, recognition, and financial support for a similar paraprofessional training program.
4. Similar workforce education and training programs should be designed and implemented as a result of the study.

5. An in-depth understanding of the TANF and other economically and/or academically disadvantaged populations was revealed and can be used as a catalyst for articulating and communicating appropriate services to expedite and achieve their self-sufficiency.
6. The data provides research-based information for the training and employment of TANF and other economically and/or academically disadvantaged participants.
7. The findings are a tool for policymaking and policy analysis locally and nationally for the benefit of workforce and workplace development initiatives.

Research Questions

Through scientific inquiry, this research study discovered and defined the effects the paraprofessional training program had on the economically and/or academically disadvantaged populations including Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) and other unemployed and underemployed participants. It recorded their capacity to successfully complete the training, transition into the workforce, retain employment, cope with the events that result from their journey to self-sufficiency, and document their self-actualization and transcendence characteristics. There are two basic research questions.

1. How did the paraprofessional training program components impact the trainees' capacity to successfully complete the program and retain employment?
2. How did the paraprofessional training program components affect the trainees' ability to manage their journey to self-sufficiency?

The research model included expectation, experience, evidence and evaluation as the tools for securing answers to the research questions. Through this model, the researcher was able to hear and record the voices of the five research participants for analysis in an effort to understand what elements of the paraprofessional training program assisted them in being successful graduates and employees.

The research questions served as the mechanism for collecting information as it pertained to the paraprofessional training program. For the purpose of this study, successful program graduate meant successfully completing the training curriculum, entering the workforce as a paraprofessional, retaining consistent employment for a minimum of two years, and continuing to be employed in the field of training at the time of this study.

This study focused on the program goals and objectives and on how the program impacted the trainees' capacity to complete the training program and how the training components affected the ability of the trainees to retain employment.

1. Expectations: What did trainees anticipate achieving by participating in paraprofessional training program?
2. Experiences: How did trainees' experiences in the program affect their ability to complete the training, enter the workforce, and retain their position as a paraprofessional for at least one year?
3. Evidence: What were the indicators that demonstrated how trainees met their expectations and the program's expectations? What was different in the trainee's life now as a result of attending and completing the training?

4. Evaluation: How has the program met the trainee's needs and what recommendations can they offer?

The Self-Sufficiency Standard measures the amount of income required “for a family of a given composition in a given place, to adequately meet its basic needs without public or private assistance” (Pearce, 2001, p. 1).

5. How have the trainees managed their journey to self-sufficiency?
 - a. What, if anything, did the trainee do to complete the program that she could not/did not do prior to program completion?
 - b. What, if anything, would the trainee like to do that she has not done since completing the program?

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations addressed “how the study will be narrowed in scope” (Creswell, 1994, p. 110). The study sample was purposive and was limited to five trainees who successfully completed the paraprofessional training program as distinguished graduates. Because this is a purposive qualitative case study, the sample size is sufficient to note the experiences associated with the trainees' journey to self-sufficiency as a result of the paraeducation training and case management services. The selection process for identifying subjects conformed to the rigor that constituted the selection of trainees as nominees for success stories, awards, and program publications. The potential subjects' performance and disposition in the classroom and in the workplace were primary considerations. This study can only be generalized for participants in similar workforce education programs.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations identified and articulated potential weaknesses of a study as noted by John Creswell (1994). The data collected in this research study was primarily depended on human reflection, recall, and personal interpretation of events. The researcher could not control participants' responses and articulation, their ability to effectively reflect, or the accuracy of event recall as a result of passing time and personal biases. The researcher was the coordinator of the paraprofessional training program and exercised caution to minimize any impact of that position. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the research design addressed potentially limiting issues including appropriate and meaningful question development, identification and articulation of potential research bias, and the capacity of the researcher to translate respondents' perceptions and voice into accurate and meaningful script for analysis.

The researcher has interacted in a professional capacity with most participants in the paraprofessional training program, including student enrollment, practicum placement, employment placement and retention, and case management. Only graduates who know the researcher in the role of program coordinator received an invitation to participate in the study to minimize any concerns of personal intrusion and/or violation of privacy. Since the program ceased all operations as of June 30, 2006, the research sample had no real or perceived obligation to participate in the study.

Definition of Terms

Definition of terms was included to provide appropriate meaning as it applied to this study. Terms were defined according to their application to the paraprofessional

training program, its participants, and human service agencies. Acronyms were included for immediate referencing.

Adult Education and Workforce Development Program

Voluntary education and training program designed for unemployed and underemployed adults to fulfill personal, financial, educational, career, and employment goals. It included instruction of theory in the traditional adult education classroom and practical training in schools under the supervision of a certified teacher and/or principal. A certificate of training was awarded.

Pennsylvania's Department of Labor and Industry (L & I)

Administers unemployment, workers' compensation and vocational rehabilitation benefits to individuals to allow them as job seekers to obtain education, training and employment.

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996:

Known as welfare reform, the PRWORA replaced the former Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). This changed the aim of public assistance benefits from an entitlement program for unemployed single mothers to temporary assistance while expediting their transition into the workforce through short-term training and education. TANF limits the receipt of benefits to five years.

Paraprofessionals in Education

Usually non-certified educational personnel who work under the supervision of a certified teacher to assist students

	with special needs. They are sometimes referred to as instructional assistants, aides, or teacher aides.
Self-Sufficiency Standard	The income required for a specific family composition in a specific location to meet its basic needs without public or private assistance.
SPOC I Clients (Single Point of Contact)	Pre 24-month TANF recipients who have completed a Work First activity prior to enrolling into the program. No work activity is required during training.
SPOC II Clients (Single Point of Contact)	Post 24-month TANF recipients who must participate in a work related activity to enroll into the training program. Work activity (subsidized or unsubsidized) must continue while in training.
Local Human Service Agency	This agency approved the proposal and funding for the paraprofessional training program.
DPW	Department of Public Welfare. The source of income of the paraprofessional training program trainees.
RFP	Request for Proposal. Proposal submitted to human service agency to fund the paraprofessional training program.
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).
Workforce Education	Education related to the development of workforce skills, knowledge, and dispositions to enhance productivity, job advancement, and safety for individuals.

Summary

The research was a critical analysis of a paraprofessional training and employment program located in southwestern Pennsylvania. The study encompassed the education, training, employment transition, and employment retention of those designated as economically and/or educationally disadvantaged. It attempted to understand and to identify the participants' journey to increased economic independence as told by five successful graduates of the paraprofessional training program. This training program was funded by a grant administered through a human service agency sponsoring programs for those who may be categorized as vulnerable and hard to serve.

The research questions proposed to shed light on how the paraprofessional training program assisted participants in successfully completing the training program and subsequently securing and retaining their employment positions as instructional assistants in district and/or center-based schools. The accumulated data assisted in interpreting and understanding the issues of the training participants' transition into the workplace, the impact of the paraprofessional training program on their successful transition, and implications for future research to increase the efficacy of workforce training and employment transitioning of the economically and/or academically disadvantaged population. The resulting data and analysis were a resource for the Department of Public Welfare, Department of Labor, workforce development, and adult education in an effort to expedite self-sufficiency for this population.

During its existence, the paraprofessional training program was a resource for various agencies. For the human service agency, it served as a source for training and employment placements for individuals who were designated as economically or

academically disadvantaged. The Department of Public Welfare utilized the service to reduce the welfare roll as outlined in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996. Schools and other educational entities, including the local education agency, employed successful graduates to assist in staffing their classrooms with qualified paraprofessionals and to address the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 that required highly qualified paraprofessionals. The local education agency also extended its capacity to fulfill its strategic plan of promoting student achievement and providing community outreach services that touched the lives of parents, families and society-at-large.

The research employed qualitative methodology to document the transitional workforce journey of the five subjects in this study who have demonstrated the capacity to complete the paraprofessional training program, to be employable and to retain employment in the field of training. How the research subjects were able to accomplish this goal was defined in the data analysis. Through the participants' oral accounts and reflections, this research study recorded, transcribed, documented, analyzed and reported the subjects' expectations, experiences, evidentiary documentation, and evaluation of the training program. The resulting information is a source of knowledge that describes authentic and personal accounts of those designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged as they embarked on the journey of self-sufficiency as a result of a short-term specialized vocational training and employment program.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examined a vocational training and employment program designed for adults who had been designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged. The program was a ten-week paraeducator training that taught the knowledge and skills for successful employment and self-sufficiency.

The local education agency administered the training program through a contract with the county's human services agency. The initial sources for determining eligibility for participation were the Department of Welfare's Single Point of Contact (SPOC) and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The paraprofessional staff in accordance with the program's entrance criteria made the final determination for student enrollment. All participants had to have Act 33 and Act 34 clearances, minimum seventh grade reading skills to be remediated to ninth, and a desire to work with regular and special education students in an educational setting,

To effectively meet the needs of the clients, the guidelines of the contract, and the needs of employers, this review articulated the purpose and mission of key partnerships, which led to a cohesive and responsive collaboration for meeting the trainees where they were and moving them closer to economic independence. The applicable literature for achieving results with efficacy will be included.

Study Perspective

The need to provide quality education for all school children has impacted America's educational system. Schools and students' performances can no longer be hidden or ignored. The education of children has generated a vigilant eye that requires a

commitment from all stakeholders to ensure the efficacy of the nation's education system. Educators at all levels, parents, learners, the community, government, business and industry must connect to optimize the learning of our nation's children through shared resources. It is crucial that all members of this stakeholders' network cooperate to achieve the goal of (1) maximizing student learning and its application to the real world in which the student lives and functions, (2) closing the achievement gap immersed in socioeconomic and racial divides, and (3) leaving no child behind, for all students can learn with the appropriate support services and systems.

This research study focused on the paraprofessional who is an essential member in the teaching and learning process. It encompassed an examination of the preparation of paraprofessional trainees who successfully completed a ten-week paraprofessional training program. The program was designed for those designated as academically and/or economically disadvantaged who were in need of training to obtain employment. At the time of training, most students were affected by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, which required TANF clients to enter the workforce. TANF clients and other unemployed and underemployed clients enrolled into the training program, met the requirements for successful completion, and obtained employment as paraprofessionals in schools and other educational settings.

Paraprofessionals are designated by various titles including teacher aides, instructional assistants and paraeducators. Paraprofessionals traditionally assumed nonprofessional roles and assisted teachers with clerical-type projects. Today, they are recognized as an essential member of the educational team who may directly work with students in academic areas under the supervision of a certified teacher. The No Child Left

Behind Act of 2001 has legislated specific requirements for Title I paraprofessionals and Title I Schoolwide paraprofessionals, which included an associate's degree or its equivalent or passing a rigorous examination. The increase in educational requirements, standards, and credentialing of paraeducators was indicative of the important roles and responsibilities that they have been permitted and expected to assume. As the paraeducator works alongside of the certified teacher, the need to be skilled, knowledgeable, competent and confident is increasingly important to the paraprofessional. Equally important is their ability to work as a team member and to discern and perform their roles and responsibilities with efficacy.

The necessity to provide quality education in regular and special education classrooms have been documented by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 that maintained accountability for all students and inclusion for those with disabilities within the least restrictive environment respectively. While Wolfensberger's (as cited in Gutek, 2000) idea of normalization was instrumental in providing equity for the student with disability, Prosser's (as cited in Gutek, 2000) Life Adjustment was a catalyst for the regular education student who was "underserved by public schools" (p. 69). Even though these movements did not experience longevity in terms of activities, they did lay the groundwork for an all-inclusive model for addressing students at all levels, interests and needs.

Expectations have an integral role in providing optimal opportunities for students within the classroom and in the workplace. John Punkiewicz (2003) succinctly states, too often the focus is on the disability of an individual rather than the person's ability. He

believes with adaptations or modifications weaknesses can be improved for those with disability and those who have not been identified as having a disability. This holds true in school and in the workplace.

Workforce Education

The National Institute for Literacy Workforce Education Special Collection (Center for Literacy Studies, 2004, p. 1) states workforce education is “work-related learning experiences” that encompasses “foundation skills, technical knowledge and computer skills.” The services are designed to enhance personnel in productivity, job advancement, and safety. It also serves the employed or unemployed workers in obtaining and retaining good jobs. Workforce education is conducted within the workplace or at external locations. The training model being studied was an independent training and employment program for those designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged. Knowledge, skill sets, disposition development, and intensive case management services were integral components to address educational needs and reduce barriers for program completion.

The national, state and local governments have allocated dollars to create self-sufficiency opportunities for those who are unemployed or underemployed. The funds were provided through the human service agency’s community services office and delivered to local agencies for education and training services. The resulting problem is the “tradition of fragmentation and competition among the various training providers” (Swinney, 2001). There must be a built-in mechanism that will allow for countywide participation. For we know that “Building our region’s workforce is the key to future economic growth and success” (WQED Multimedia Education Resource Center, 2003).

More training opportunities and options would be possible if competition for dollars, enrollments, and resources were minimized and sharing of resources to prevent duplication was maximized.

Workforce education is education for the workforce. It is incumbent that local organizations and institutions bridge the gap of academic programs and workforce training to solidify the education of the economically and/or academically disadvantaged adults. Bridging this gap will create opportunities that are marketable and affordable. Workforce development programs were developed as stand-alone programs through various nonprofit agencies. They were also incorporated into community colleges, but often were not integrated in a way that would provide a meaningful support structure to working adults. Income gains for the working adults are manifested in postsecondary degrees and certificates rather than a collection of courses or coursework (Kazis, et al., 2007). Research suggests that federal and state governments need to redesign policies governing student aid “not to reduce support for traditional students in need, but rather to offer more direct assistance to working adults and to use financing policies to foster innovations in program design and delivery” (Kazi, et al., 2007, p. 39) by

1. Recognizing more adequately in Pell grant distribution formulas the educational costs facing working adults and their interest in year-round study.
2. Using aid policies to encourage short-term, intensive programs and innovative delivery mechanisms that will help underprepared working adults rapidly acquire postsecondary credentials with immediate labor market impact.

3. Providing federal loans, subsidized for the most needy, for working adults who have demonstrated their commitment and capacity for postsecondary study but are unable to complete college on a half-time or more basis.
4. Encouraging states to apply their aid programs to working adults in ways that complement federal support.
5. Modifying the Lifetime Learning Tax Credit (LLTC) to offer working adults parity with the more generous credits available for traditional students through the Hope program.
6. Making the LLTC credits available to low-income working adults through new “refundability” provisions similar to those of the Earned Income Tax Credit. (p.39)

Workforce education’s attachment to relevant and affordable higher education opportunities is a venue to income and career gains for the studied population. This increases their transition to self-sufficiency.

Workforce Investment Act

The federal government has an active role in workforce development. The government has initiated and passed legislation to assist the unemployed and underemployed with the tools to become gainfully employed. Currently the Workforce Investment Act serves as the means for the unemployed and underemployed to seek training and education for self-sufficiency.

Department of Public Welfare

Historically, private charities provided for the widows, orphans, and the poor in a community. However, it became increasingly expensive for these entities to provide the

level of support and care needed for those who were impoverished. Attention was drawn to the local, state and national governments to assist in the care of the less fortunate in society. As noted, America has a historical tradition of providing for the unmet needs of her citizens. In 1676, the Duke of York's law called for the provision of the poor. Following suit, in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania, William Penn invoked the Great Law, which stated,

...if any person or persons fall into decay or poverty, and not being able to maintain themselves and children with their honest endeavors, or shall die and leave poor orphans, that upon complaint made to the next Justices of the Peace of the same County, the said Justices, finding the complaint to be true, shall make provision for them, in such a way as they shall see convenient, till the next County Court, and that then care be taken for their future comfortable subsistence. (Pennsylvania DPW, 2003)

The Department of Public Welfare's mission is calling for the same. Its mission is to "promote, improve and sustain the quality of family life; break the cycle of dependency; promote respect for employees; protect and serve Pennsylvania's most vulnerable citizens; and manage our resources effectively" (Pennsylvania DPW, Homepage, 2006).

A drastic change within the welfare system occurred in 1996 with the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The focus of America's poor shifted. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) ceased and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) was created. The goal was to end dependence on welfare and to increase self-sufficiency of TANF clients. It

imposed a five-year lifetime cash assistance limit and stricter work requirements for most DPW recipients unless granted exemption for limited reasons (Potter, 2003; U. S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, 2003). Because of specific mandates governing work requirements, educational and social service agencies have collaborated with business and industry to provide training and employment opportunities for Pennsylvania's unemployed and underemployed populations. Its purpose is to provide opportunities for job acquisition and retention.

Laura Connolly and Christine Marston (2005) state,

Families who rely on public assistance often live below the poverty line, so achieving this goal [of economic independence and self-sufficiency] will require more than the simple replacement of public assistance income with earnings; it will require a substantial increase in recipients' total incomes. . . . If the goal of ending welfare dependence is to be achieved without eroding current standards of living, income levels must remain constant. Further, if welfare recipients are expected to exit from poverty, incomes will need to increase. Neither of these outcomes is guaranteed because public assistance benefits decrease as earnings increase. (p. 493)

Welfare-to-Work

Welfare to work initiatives were set forth to assist those receiving assistance from the Department of Public Welfare to acquire employment and to become self-sufficient. Since its implementation the following data has been documented.

1. In 1995, 88% of poor children received food stamps, but by 1998 the figure had dropped to 70%.

2. The welfare caseload stood at about 2 million recipients, which is approximately a one third drop since the welfare reform bill was enacted. (On the Issues, 2006)

To serve the economically disadvantaged population at its best, the need for education and training is paramount. Specific criteria for effective programming have been documented. Judith Gueron and Gayle Hamilton (2002) states that there are few programs that offers a combination of adult education and vocational training. The debate centered on what types of programs to offer recipients of welfare – education or training first, job search first, or a mixed strategy. The results from their study on The Role of Education and Training in Welfare Reform concluded:

1. All three strategies increased single parents' work and reduced welfare receipt compared to what would have happened in the absence of the programs, but they did not increase people's income or have many or consistently positive or negative effects on children, except for adolescents.
2. People in job-search-first programs took jobs sooner. Those in education-or-training-first programs eventually caught up, but the larger up-front investment had no clear payoff in higher wages or income, or in improved outcomes for children, relative to job-search-first programs.
3. The best results came from programs that used a mix of initial activities, where some people started with job search and others with short-term, work-focused education or training. These findings hold true for high school graduates and nongraduates alike. (p. 3).

The implications are the following:

1. Whether the goal is reducing poverty, reducing dependency, saving money, or helping children, there is no evidence to support a rigid education-or-training-first policy. The findings are particularly discouraging for mandatory basic education.
2. There is a clear role for skills-enhancing activities in welfare reform.... a balanced approach, which emphasizes employment but uses some work-focused, short-term education and training.
3. The solution to low earnings is not more of the same kind of training used in the past.... [where] training programs have often had no direct link to jobs in demand in the local economy or to local employers. They have also often shut out the most disadvantaged.... The approaches should include training that fosters career advancement, integrates basic education and skills training, and engages local employers.... [and] access to support services that will increase program retention.
4. ... while well-designed welfare-to-work programs can substantially increase earnings and reduce dependency, there are limits to this approach....Recent research showing that children do better in school when work leads to higher income points to the importance of services and policies, like the Earned Income Tax Credit, that augment the efforts of the working poor to support themselves and their families. (Gueron & Hamilton, 2002, pp. 6-7)

Nontraditional Education

Its mission and purpose to accommodate adult learners distinguish nontraditional education. It has a two-fold agenda that includes expanding adult students' awareness of

the value of lifelong learning and an understanding by educators that learning can extend beyond the classroom (Cross and Valley, 1974).

Its greatest departure from traditional education is its explicit recognition that education should be measured by what the student knows rather than how or where he learns it. Beyond that it builds upon two basic premises – that opportunity should be equal for all who wish to learn and that learning is a lifelong process unconfined to one's youth or to campus classrooms. (Cross and Valley, 1974, p. 1)

The utility of knowledge is integral in nontraditional education. Abraham Carp, Richard Peterson and Pamela Roelfs' research (as cited in Cross and Valley, 1974) concluded that respondents were most interested in the following.

Knowledge that leads to better jobs, that helps in practical daily living, and that teaches the skills and pleasures associated with leisure-time activities holds greater interest for the typical American adult than the subjects that colleges and universities are most interested in teaching. (p. 2)

William A. Mahler (1974) commenting on the Commission on Non-Traditional Study reported the following findings.

Non-traditional study 'is more an attitude than a system' – an attitude that 'puts the student first and the institution second, concentrates on the former's need than the latter's convenience, encourages diversity of individual opportunity rather than uniform prescription, and de-emphasizes time, space, and even course requirements in favor of competence and, where applicable, performance. (p. 175)

Retention of students is a relevant issue in nontraditional programs.

Benseman, Coxon, Anderson, and Anae (2006) identified negative and positive factors on student retention in their study on Retaining Non-Traditional Students: Lessons Learnt from Pasifika Students in New Zealand. The negative factors identified include motivation and attitudes, pressures from family groups, peer groups and finances, lack of support services and language issues, while the availability of Pasifika staff, promoting a Pasifika 'presence' in institutions and positive role models, together with appropriate pedagogy and readily available information, were all positive factors in increasing retention. (p. 161)

Overall research on nontraditional education notes that adult students are more successful when a program is specifically tailored to their needs and recognizes their existing competencies. The programs must be administered to the students in locations and under circumstances that are most conducive to authentic learning and will incorporate their life experiences and understanding of events in real-time situations along with ensuring linkages to the community and the workplace. (Benseman, et al., 2006)

The Adult Learner

The human being is an incredibly complex and sensitive organism, constantly undergoing change as he is confronted in daily life with diverse situations to which he must in some way respond. Some of the change, quite obviously is physiological; some is primarily behavioral.

(Hale, 1972, p. 23)

Senge (1990) comments that deep down we are all learners and we love to learn. As a result, we must seek the environment to ensure these learning events. We must also be cognizant of what we want to learn. Zemke (2002) says that our training must involve creating expertise not just gaining knowledge. Realizing there is not just one learning theory but a combination that supports specific learning environments and objectives.

Alan Tuckett (2001), director of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), states that, “Adult learning begins at the point where an individual’s interest and enthusiasm is tapped” (p. 3). In addition he says, “Adults need motivation to learn, but they also need imaginative and flexible support whether it is from a college, at work or through distance learning” (p. 3).

As we consider these needs and institute best practices for teaching and learning, Daniels and Bizar (1998) reiterate, “The real business of education, which is nurturing the growth of individual students’ thinking, over years, across disciplines, and among collaborators” (p. 204). Also, they state. “A key trait of effective thinkers, writers, problem solvers, readers, researchers, and other learners is that they constantly self-monitor and self-evaluate” (p. 208).

The adult learner has some very specific characteristics that make them unique students to teach. Andragogy incorporates the defined attributes and experiences of the adults to provide the best learning environment. According to Malcolm Knowles there are seven components of andragogical practice, which should

- (1) Establish a physical and psychological climate conducive to learning,
- (2) involve learners in mutual planning of methods and curricular directions,
- (3) involve participants in diagnosing their own learning needs,
- (4) encourage

learners to formulate their own learning objectives, (5) encourage learners to identify resources and to devise strategies for using such resources to accomplish their objectives, (6) help learners to carry out their learning plans, and (7) involve learners in evaluating their learning. (Knowles in Michael W. Gailbraith, pp.6-7)

The specific attributes of the adult learner and environments where learning takes place best include voluntary participation; engaging in learning of their own volition; and fostering respect among participants for each other's self-worth (Brookfield, 1986). It involves a facilitative approach of collaboration and critical reflection where, "learners and facilitators are involved in a continual process of activity, reflection upon activity, collaborative analysis of activity, new activity, further reflection, and collaborative analysis, and so on" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 10). The aim of facilitation is the nurturing of self-directed, empowered adults. (Brookfield 1986 in Gailbraith, p. 7).

Marion Terry (2006) in a study entitled *Self-Directed Learning by Undereducated Adults* contends that those who are termed undereducated are less self-directing than those who have higher education levels. Therefore, programs should "...consider learner self-selection of subject areas, assignment topics, learning pace, and attendance schedules, as means to nurture self-direction by adult literacy students and other adult learners" (p.9).

Knox (1986) articulates that adults vary in their reasons for program participation, proficiencies, needs, confidence, experiences, abilities and resources. Adults also choose to enroll in programs based on specific orientations. The goal-oriented learners seek specific objectives; the activity-oriented and learning-oriented learners participate for the sake of the activity and learning respectively (Houle as cited in K. Patricia Cross, 1981).

The most effective teaching practice is being responsive to the specific needs of the learners and determining what they know about the subject matter (Knox, 1986). The Responsiveness Teaching Styles include:

1. Respect for participants. Responsive teaching styles are supportive and encourage participants to be resources for the learning of others as well as active agents of their own learning.
2. Reasons. Reasons and proficiencies vary with adults. Responsive teaching styles accommodate participant needs and expectations that fit program purposes, let participants know early where their reasons and program purposes match, and help them seek resources and assistance to meet needs that some learners may want to pursue beyond your program.
3. Options. Responsive teaching styles will help participants understand their characteristics related to learning and will provide options for individuals as well as the group... Self-assessments of preferred learning styles help adults to select learning strategies that they prefer and to broaden their repertoire.
4. Proficiencies. Information about adults' current proficiencies related to program objectives is especially valuable. There are also procedures that will enhance the learning environment.
5. Presentation. What emphasis do you give to presenting content and your ideas?
6. Active learning. What opportunities do you provide for participants to engage in active learning such as discussion, practice, and problem solving?

7. Meanings. How do you assist learners in their search for meaning related to the topic of your program?
8. Variety. How varied are the methods you use?
9. Stages of the program. How does your role shift from beginning through the middle and end of your program?
10. Affective and cognitive elements. In what ways do you attend to both cognitive and affective educational objectives and aspects of your role?
11. Interpersonal relations. How much and what type of attention do you give to interpersonal relation with and among participants?
12. Past and future. How do you help participants relate content to their current proficiencies and to the applications they intend?
13. Purposes. How do you discover and respond to the reasons that participants enrolled?
14. Support and challenge. How do you combine an informal supportive climate for learning with content and procedures?
15. Models. How do you provide models and examples of the proficiencies you hope participants will acquire?
16. Self-direction for learners. What attention do you give to helping participants learn how to learn, explore, and assume responsibility for direction of their learning activities?
17. Confidence among learners. How do you help participants become more confident in their roles as learners?
18. Feedback. How do you provide for feedback to learners?

19. Flexibility. How flexible are you and your plans and procedures to adapt to opportunities or problems that arise? (Knox, 1986, pp. 44-47)

These are key points in recognizing the significance of planning, designing and implementing training.

Teachers as Mentors for Adult Learners

Teachers act as mentors and models to ensure adult satisfaction in their learning process. As with any role, there are some key attributes in being a positive mentor.

Laurent Daloz (1999) states, “The question for us as teachers is not whether but how we influence our students. It is a question about a relationship: Where are our students going, and who are we for them in their journey?” (p. 5). Within this journey metaphor, there are notable differences but also some common threads or themes such as direction, common syntax and passing signposts marking progress (Daloz, 1999).

The term mentor is defined as a wise, loyal adviser, a teacher or coach (Guralnik, 1970). In many ways and for various purposes, mentors have been an integral part of life-changing events for protégés. In earlier times, including the time of Odysseus, men have assisted each other in developing and discovering his or her potential and capabilities. In workforce education, we need to have the same intense involvement, which will lead clients to personal growth.

The mentor will need to adhere to a balance that will allow successful transitions on this journey. There must be a balance between play and work, excitement and long-term motivation, and compliance and commitment (Bell, 1998). This is a long journey and it will sometime become weary and laborious. To be prepared for these times, it is

necessary that the partnership understand the nature of the adult learner. Bell has listed five axioms to adult learning (1998, pp. 25,26).

1. Adults are motivated to learn as they develop needs and interests.
2. Adult orientation to learning is life- or work-centered.
3. Experience is the richest resource for adult learning.
4. Adults have a deep need to be self-directed.
5. Individual differences among adult learners increase with age and experience.

Research has shown that the most effective mentoring includes purpose, appropriate resources and support, and assessment of the program. Research also finds that “Really good mentoring is really good teaching” (Johnson, 1999). In a trusting environment, growth is achieved by healthy risk-taking and sharing of ideas.

Daniels and Bizar (1998, p. 1) report common threads of best practices in teaching and learning consist of “student-centered, experiential, reflective, authentic, holistic, social, collaborative, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist, and challenging” environments.

Pushing students forward is a common phrase in terms of articulating students’ growth and development, but Daloz (1999) points out that, “People develop best under their own power. As teachers, we have a lot to say about the conditions under which our students may find the power, but we must remember that the power itself is theirs” (p. 182). It is delusional to think that teachers or mentors have the power to supersede what an individual wants to do. Therefore, it is important that we become the facilitators of the search for meaning.

Peter Senge (1990) encourages the building of learning organizations, “Where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (p. 3).

Marketing and Recruitment

Marketing is an integral part of a program. It is important that eligible and appropriate candidates be attracted and selected for training. Encouraging inappropriate student participation is a crucial flaw that may affect student success as well as the overall program success. Knox (1986) reminds us “when you help adults learn, your main concern is how you can benefit the participants” (p. 202). Additionally, he states, “The underlying concept of marketing is that it should produce a mutually satisfactory exchange of value” (p. 203). The student and the program should benefit as a result of participating and serving respectively. Providers must be cognizant that what is being offered to learners warrant their participation and that the receipt of “enrollments, income, participation, and application on which your program depends” (p. 203) may predicate its continued existence.

Recruitment is a driving force in marketing as it seeks appropriate candidates to participate in the training and to fulfill participation goals while preparing for their future as productive employees.

Almost by definition, the easier-to-reach adults have the highest motivation, the lowest barriers, and the most varied benefits of participations. By contrast, similar adults for whom your program is intended but who are harder to reach or to attract typically have less formal education, are older, are less recent participants, receive

less encouragement to participate from friends and associates, recognize fewer benefits of participation, depend less on media and experts for pertinent information, are less optimistic about advancement, and are aware of fewer opportunities to participate (Knox, 1986, p. 203).

It is important that the appropriate venues for communicating to the targeted population be used to attract participants. It is important to understand, “What channels of communication are the adults most likely to use for information about such programs” (Knox, 1986, p. 204). Many choose programs that are feasible, competitive in price, readily accessible, conveniently scheduled, and able to meet their educational needs. To retain and assist a high proportion of those recruited, Knox (1986) contends that the program must recognize and have an “. . . appreciation of multiple influences on initial and continued participation . . .” (p. 39).

The adult learner is a unique student. They possess life experiences that are an integral part of who they truly are. Through the nontraditional classroom structure, they should be able to bridge the gap that defines them as students in a specified learning environment with their prior experiences, knowledge, and skills.

Paraeducators and the Historical Perspective

For this research study, the terms paraprofessional and paraeducator will be used to refer to the traditional titles of teacher aide, teacher assistant, and instructional assistant. Because of increased accountability, rigorous educational requirements, greater involvement in instruction and more specialized roles and responsibilities, the terms paraeducator and paraprofessional are most appropriate.

A paraeducator has been defined as one who assumes specific roles and responsibilities to assist classroom educators with students who have specific or special needs. As one who works alongside of a certified teacher, the paraeducator serves as a mentor, coach, facilitator and instructor to either a classroom or to an individual child with disability.

Paraeducators have an extensive history that dates back to the 1800s, which offered mentoring through tutelage. Paraeducators, as we know them today, evolved at the height of necessity during world and historical crises. In the early 1950s, the shortage of certified teachers created the need for non-certified personnel to assist teachers in non-instructional activities. In the 1960s, paraprofessionals became increasingly beneficial as a result of addressing social unrest. Beginning in the 1970s, people with disabilities were encompassed by legislations that would translate into promoting and requiring their educational integration in a least restrictive environment. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) was a major civil rights legislation, which prohibited programs receiving federal funds from discriminating against persons based upon their disability. This set the tone for creating environments with the least restriction for students with disability.

Highly Qualified Paraprofessionals

Properly trained paraprofessionals can play important roles in Title I schools where they can magnify and reinforce a teacher's effect in the classroom.

(U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 1)

Students' deficits in reading and math in our nation is at an alarming stage. To bridge the gap and to prepare for a globally competitive society, the nation has had to turn to legislation that will factor all children's learning potential. It also had to address

the economic situations in the various states and school districts. In an attempt to provide more funds to bridge the gap in academic achievements, Title I funds were provided to areas with high concentration of students designated as poor. Carey and Roza (2008) in their report entitled, *School Funding's Tragic Flaw*, state that the formula used to determine distribution is flawed because it provides "more money to poor students in wealthy states than to poor students in poor states" (p. 11). The amount of federal funding received by a state was directly dependent on the average amount spent per student by the state and local funding. "The problem with this approach is that interstate differences in per-student spending are primarily a function of differences in wealth, not cost" (p. 11). Not only does discrepancy in funding per student exist at the state level, but it also affects the local school districts. Teachers often choose to work in schools that are less impoverished. This often results in schools having a high turnover rate of teachers, inexperienced staff, and lower paid employees (Carey & Roza, 2008).

To ensure quality professionals and paraprofessionals for programs, the No Child Left Behind Act has included stringent requirements for employment. For the purpose of this study, only the paraprofessionals are being addressed. The NCLB requires all paraprofessionals serving as Title I aides and those in Schoolwide Title I programs are highly qualified. Special education has also followed with this requirement. The definition and criteria for paraprofessionals are listed.

For the purposes of Title I, Part A, a paraprofessional is an employee who provides instructional support in a program supported with Title I, Part A funds. This includes paraprofessionals who (1) provide one-on-one tutoring if such tutoring is scheduled at a time when a student would not otherwise receive

instruction from a teacher, (2) assist with classroom management, such as organizing instructional and other materials, (3) provide instructional assistance in a computer laboratory, (4) conduct parental involvement activities, (5) provide support in a library or media center, (6) act as a translator, or (7) provide instructional support services under the direct supervision of a teacher [Title I, section 1119(g)(2)]. (Also see items B-11 through B-16) Individuals who work in food services, cafeteria or playground supervision, personal care services, non-instructional computer assistance, and similar positions are not considered paraprofessionals under Title I. Title I paraprofessionals are primarily responsible for assisting in remedial instructions in schools identified as economically distressed based upon the population served. In contrast, the special education paraeducator is responsible for administering to those who have been identified with special needs including personal care, assistive needs and learning support. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 1)

Studies (Chambers, et al, 2000) published by the U. S. Department of Education indicate that paraprofessionals are used in many Title I schools for teaching and assisting in teaching when their educational backgrounds do not qualify them for such responsibilities. The No Child Left Behind Act has incorporated higher standards for professionals and paraprofessionals to ensure that students are receiving instruction from highly qualified personnel. The increased educational requirements were designated to ensure the best learning environment for all students. The No Child Left Behind requires paraprofessionals to meet the following requirement for hire.

All Title I paraprofessionals must have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent. This includes paraprofessionals who serve as translators or who conduct parental involvement activities. Additionally, Title I paraprofessionals whose duties include instructional support and who were hired after January 8, 2002, must have (1) completed two years of study at an institution of higher education; (2) obtained an associate's (or higher) degree; or (3) met a rigorous standard of quality and be able to demonstrate, through a formal state or local academic assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing reading, writing, and mathematics (or, as appropriate, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness) [section 1119(c) and (d)].

Paraprofessionals hired on or before January 8, 2002 and working in a program supported with Title I funds must meet these requirements by January 8, 2006.

Paraprofessionals should be able to demonstrate knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing in the areas of reading, writing, and math, or in "school readiness"[section 1119 (c) (1) (C)]. Paraprofessionals are expected to have a working knowledge of these academic areas. (Also, see item C-2.)

The requirements in B-1 apply to all paraprofessionals with instructional duties in a schoolwide program, without regard to whether the position is funded with Federal, State, or local funds. In a schoolwide program, Title I funds support all teachers and paraprofessionals. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 2)

Districts could develop the formal academic assessment locally to be administered to paraeducators who do not meet the minimum requirement of possessing an associate's

degree or the completion of two years of higher education study. Any paraprofessional to be hired after January 8, 2002, must pass the rigorous assessment prior to employment.

Ensuring that all paraprofessionals have the qualifications required in section 1119. The paraeducator must pass the local assessment, which will indicate their (1) knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing, reading, writing and mathematics, or (2) knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness, as appropriate [Title I, section 1119(c)(1)(C)]. The following guidelines should be used:

1. SEAs and LEAs have flexibility to determine the content and format of any assessment of paraprofessionals.
2. The content of the assessment should reflect both the State academic standards and skills expected for a child at a given school level (elementary, middle, or high school), as well as the ability of the candidate to assist in instructing students in the content.
3. The assessment should be rigorous and objective.
4. Each evaluation should have a standard that the candidate is expected to meet or exceed. These standards for evaluation must be applied to each candidate in the same way.
5. The results of the assessment should establish the candidate's competence as a paraprofessional relative to the standards in section 1119(c)(1)(C), or target the areas where additional training and staff development may be needed to help the candidate succeed at meeting the standard before they are hired. The results should be documented and the LEA should retain that documentation.

6. An SEA may wish to go on record establishing which assessments it has determined meet the statutory requirements, to what extent State policies permit LEAs to develop, select or implement their own assessments for paraprofessionals, and what requirements, if any, the State places on any local assessment. Keeping such formal approvals on file, along with an explanation as to how the State (or local) assessments meet these requirements, would be one way of making sure that the State (or local) assessments on which LEAs rely comply with the law. The SEA could then communicate this information to LEAs, so that each LEA is clear as to what the options are when it comes to assessing paraprofessionals. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, pp. 9-10)

The rigorous assessment for paraprofessionals was to evaluate paraprofessional candidates at a level equivalent to the second year of college. Having skills at the level of the second year of college is the intent of the law. [See section 1119(c) and (d)].

Locally, one of Pennsylvania's twenty-nine intermediate units, along with paraprofessionals, educators and supervisors, developed an assessment to evaluate the skills and knowledge of paraprofessionals. This rigorous assessment was to qualify paraeducators as highly qualified if they did not have a two-year degree or its equivalence.

Valuing Human Resources-The Paraeducator

The nation's most valuable resource is its people and that full development of potential comes only with full utilization of personnel.

(Brotherson and Johnson, 1971, preface)

Human resources are major assets in any workplace. It is crucial that personnel are employed in positions that match ability to job responsibilities with room for growth. In educational facilities, paraprofessionals are key employees who have diverse backgrounds. They include (1) mothers who are receiving public assistance whose educational levels are below the tenth grade, (2) certified teachers who do not want the full responsibility of a classroom, (3) community college students with one or two years of study, (4) untrained volunteer mothers whose economic condition is reflective of the community, and (5) college students who are participating in work study programs funded by the federal government (Brotherson and Johnson, 1971).

Personal Qualities and Characteristics of Good Paraprofessionals

While applicants for paraeducator positions may come from various walks of life, there are some common characteristics that make an applicant viable (French, 2003). When teachers talk about the characteristics of the best paraeducators, they cite flexibility, willingness to take direction and listen, and a genuine affinity for doing things with children and being around children. They also recognize that paraeducators who take initiative, show responsibility, and recognize what needs to be done are more valuable than those who only respond to teacher direction. Education for students with special needs requires paraprofessionals who are sensitive “to students whose academic, social, and physical needs are different from those of the typical student” (French, 2003, p. 66).

While sensitivity and affinity for students are important qualities, teachers have concerns about paraprofessionals who need to be “needed.” Sometimes applicants whose personal needs are great tend to smother students with their good intentions. For example,

a one-to-one paraeducator working with a child who has physical needs may tend to provide a lot of physical support rather than allowing the child to develop independent skills to enhance the capacity for self-care (French, 2003). Instead of allowing the child to learn to do the task, the paraeducator will do it. The paraeducators' job is to enhance and/or develop the capacity of a student with special needs to extenuate his ability.

All paraprofessionals must possess specific knowledge and skills to be successful in improving student achievement and student learning. They must understand human growth and development and its implication for effective teaching and learning. They will need to develop application and adaptation skills that would prove beneficial to the students' progress. Equally important, they must possess the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills to be a successful member of the educational team to maximize student learning and their own job performance. Effective communication skills are necessary to provide accurate documentation of student's progress and behavior.

Without effective listening and speaking skills, a paraeducator may be unable to follow directions or relay adequate and pertinent information to the teacher. The level of written communication skills may vary by position according to the need of the students being assisted particularly students whose primary tasks involve reading and writing. The same is true for students in middle and high school who require assistance with math.

It is important to match paraeducators' abilities and propensities with a specific job to maximize effectiveness and performance. Some paraeducator positions require strong organizational skills or personality styles that thrive on methodical. A paraeducator hired to process paperwork for special education must be detail-oriented, thorough, and habitual in performance. "Finding the right candidate is the key and you

are more likely to do so if you put the preferred characteristics in the posted job description” (French, 2003, p. 66).

Employing Paraeducators

School districts and other educational entities have hired paraprofessionals to support the learning of specific students as one-to-one aides and for classroom assistance. These assistants address academic, physical, social, and emotional needs of students. Additionally, students who are part of the special education system might also have medical needs requiring use of assistive devices.

Increasing complexity of student-population, increased need for instructional support, cost-effectiveness, effectiveness of paraeducators in delivering instruction, enhanced community connections, individualized supports for students with disabilities, legislation that permits or requires paraeducator assistance, need to provide related services, improved teacher-student ratios, and shortages of qualified professionals” (French, 2003, p. 9).

According to French, there have been problematic circumstances with hiring paraprofessionals for all levels, early childhood through grade 12 classrooms. The following problems have been shown to be problematic (1) paraeducators perform only clerical work, (2) paraeducators are hired with no minimum qualifications or prior training, (3) paraeducators are not given appropriate on-the-job training, (4) paraeducators are not provided direction or guidance by the teacher, and (5) teachers feel threatened by the presence of the paraeducator” (French, 2003, p. 24).

The major issues of paraprofessional accountability and preparedness have been addressed through No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The others can be addressed

through effective measures of supervision. Training the supervisors who will be working directly with the paraprofessionals is necessary. Along with this, schools will need to alleviate some of the distracters that make the job of a paraprofessional unattractive. The barriers include, but are not limited to “features of the job itself, low pay, part time status, poor benefits, and few promotion opportunities” (French, 2003, p. 55).

Supervision of Paraeducators

The No Child Left Behind Act and the Reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 “... compelled states and districts to create personnel development and supervision systems to support the paraprofessional workforce” (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007, p. 21). Often paraeducators are placed with teachers who are not comfortable or knowledgeable about assigning responsibilities. Also the roles and responsibilities of the teacher and the paraprofessional are not clearly delineated nor communicated. It is crucial to address this issue, for “the development of an effective paraprofessional workforce begins with the employment of well-qualified applicants, followed by the provision of a coherent and relevant induction process, then extended with ongoing direction that supports continuous development in the context of a collaborative culture” (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007, p. 31).

The supervision of paraeducators is key to their performance and ability to be successful as classroom assistants. The Seven Executive Functions of Paraeducator Supervision are (1) Orienting paraeducators to the program, school, and students; (2) planning for paraeducators; (3) scheduling for paraeducators; (4) delegating tasks to paraeducators; (5) on-the-job training and coaching of paraeducators; (6) monitoring and feedback regarding paraeducator task performance; and (7) managing the workplace (communications, problem-solving, conflict management)” (French, 2003, p. 43).

Paraeducators as Adult Learners

Paraprofessionals are traditionally adult learners who did not pursue higher education upon completion of their secondary education for various reasons but choose to work in a school environment. As nontraditional adult learners, their course curriculum or training should follow the principles of andragogy. Their learning must be relevant, useful, and nontrivial. The training should be problem-based, realistic, and translates to the real world of school employment. It is best to address the academic and the practical within less formal environments and to capitalize on their prior knowledge and life experiences. French (2003) continues by encouraging the inclusion of information about teamwork, problem solving, conflict management, how to follow lesson plans, and techniques for managing groups in structured and unstructured settings within the school building and outside of the building.

Paraeducation Training Materials

Paraeducation materials are readily available, but it is important to ascertain their value in teaching the knowledge and skills necessary for paraeducators to be successful in the classroom. The variety of materials also poses variance in quality. With the host of training materials readily available and easily accessible, key questions arise. First, how are appropriate programs chosen and cost-effectiveness determined? Secondly, are the courses and programs offering what is needed to make the greatest impact on teaching and learning? Thirdly, are the materials relevant to the specific standards and competencies that have been identified? Finally, are the paraeducators aware of the program of services and standards to be met and how will they know when they have met

them? To better understand these questions, French (2003) cites ten principles for selecting commercially produced material.

1. Need. Choose a curriculum that is consistent with the knowledge, skills and concepts needed in the workplace. To make this selection, “. . . requires a careful job analysis and a clear recognition of what paraeducators are being asked to do” (p. 131).
2. Consistency. Select content materials that are consistent with the school’s philosophy and mission.
3. Integrity. Use research-based materials that are free from “. . . biases and personal agendas disguised as common practice”(p. 132).
4. Relevance. Implement a curriculum that teaches essential skills required in the workplace by understanding and knowing the expected roles and responsibilities.
5. Depth. Ensure that the time spent and activities included are appropriate and relevant to the concept and skills being taught.
6. Role Legitimacy. Align the training with the legitimate role of a paraeducator and “. . . be sure the materials prepare the paraeducator to follow and clarify directions, to participate as a legitimate and important team member, but not to usurp the authority of the teachers’ (p. 134).
7. Practicality. The curriculum should be practical and problem-focused. It should not involve extensive theoretical material designed to educate scholars or prepare for field research. Practicality is immediate applicability of the skills or concepts.

8. Instructional Quality. Curriculum materials should include specific goals and objectives; instructional materials including lecture notes, demonstration materials, activities and discussion guides; opportunities for feedback; and recommendation for effective coaching.
9. Accountability. Competencies and skills should to be attained should be explicitly specified to be used as the “basis for performance monitoring and evaluation later on” (French, p. 133).
10. Cost. The cost value is predicated on the cost of administration and the anticipated student outcome as a result of using the materials. Ensure that the materials’ cost is aligned with delivery and outcome before investing.

Delivering Training to Paraeducators

Paraeducators are technicians, not scientists – they require know- how and application level materials rather than theoretical framework

(French, 2003, p.133).

As a result of staff development research of teachers, five essential training components were identified including theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, and coaching (French, 2003). The same components are identified for paraprofessional training.

Theory includes teaching, knowing and understanding specific concepts so that paraprofessionals will know when and why to “use certain instructional, behavioral, literacy, social, and language learning techniques” (p. 134). Demonstration is the modeling component where trainees experience authentic application of concepts. This is the opportunity for them to see examples in real situations. Practice allows for application

of ideas and concepts in a controlled and safe environment. Feedback permits the instructor to give constructive feedback on how well the trainees perform as a result of understanding concepts and strategies. Coaching is traditionally implemented on the job while the paraeducator work directly with students under the supervision of the classroom teacher. Coaching is used as a tool to refine the paraeducators' skills and application of concepts.

Research shows that practice with low-risk feedback and coaching has the greatest impact on the paraprofessional development and application. However, coaching is the most successful at 90% for application of concepts and skills on the job (French, 2003, p. 135).

Documenting Paraeducator Training

Documentation is an integral part of training programs. The four reasons cited by French (2003) includes:

1. Paraeducators are more valuable to the district, school, program, or classroom when they acquire more skills. They also deserve to be recognized and honored for increased skill levels as their value to the district increases. Without documentation, however, it would be impossible to fairly recognize or dignify the training paraeducators have received (p. 139).
2. It could serve as a safeguard if an employee is unable to meet the assigned standards or performance and termination may be considered. "It is more expensive to terminate and rehire than it is to provide training. Therefore, it makes sense to begin by providing training, including the important coaching component, and then documenting the effort" (p.140).

3. To reassure “parents and families that their children are safe at school” (p. 140), documentation of trained personnel is essential.
4. In case of legal defense issue, “showing that the paraeducator has received training that is appropriate to his or her job responsibilities and that the training covered safe and ethical behaviors may absolve the district of legal responsibility for actions outside those prescribed in training sessions and save money otherwise spent on a legal defense” (p. 140).

Career Development for Paraeducators

Paraeducators have been named as the most potentially recruitable group of people to become teachers.

(French, 2003, p. 141)

When the nation experienced a shortage of teachers, the use of paraeducators increased. To bridge the gap of student achievement, to address the student at risk for failure, and to provide for bilingual and special education, the need for qualified teachers increases. “It is increasingly true that districts are hiring emergency credentialed teachers to meet the growing student population and to fill the gaps left by retirements and attrition” (French, 2003, p. 141). Paraeducators are considered the most recruitable because of their status in the community and school.

Paraeducators typically live nearby and are a part of the community. Often, they share the native language and culture of the families served by the school.

Paraeducators tend to begin their employment in schools during the years that they are raising their children, thus tending to be a bit more mature than the typical beginning teacher. Also, unlike younger, more traditional teacher

candidates, paraeducators already know and understand what it is like to work in a school, so working conditions will come as no surprise to them. Finally, because paraeducators already work for extremely low pay, teaching salaries look attractive by comparison. (p. 141)

Even though recruiting paraeducators as future teachers seem reasonable, it is not readily accomplished. Many would be considered nontraditional students who did not seek higher education for various reasons including “marriage and family responsibilities took precedence, limited financial options, little encouragement, and lack of guidance” (p.141). Guidance counselors and teachers discouraged minority paraeducators from pursuing education as a career because these school personnel “believed they had little chance of succeeding in college” (p. 141). Minorities also doubted their own academic abilities and capacity for scholarship. Despite the reasons for not attending college as a traditional student, skilled and knowledgeable paraprofessionals are ideal candidates in terms of workplace experience and realistic view of the educational system in which they work.

Paraprofessional Training Opportunities

There is a concerted nationwide effort to prepare paraprofessionals to assume their roles and responsibilities in the classroom as result of No Child Left Behind Act. To develop a workforce of qualified individuals aspiring to be highly qualified paraprofessionals, educational institutions have designed specific trainings to meet required standards and competencies. Colleges, universities, online education, government-sponsored organizations and other educational entities have championed the

cause and have provided services to the paraprofessional and those responsible for supervising teacher aides.

Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN), provides a variety of educational services to professionals and paraprofessionals working with students in Special Education. This is an initiative of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education with locations in Pittsburgh, King of Prussia, and Harrisburg. Staff development is offered on location and as online distance learning to ensure paraprofessionals are “highly qualified to work with students with disabilities” (PaTTAN, Paraeducators, 2008). PaTTAN has developed training to assist paraeducators to attain the *Pennsylvania Special Education Paraeducator Credential of Competency* from the Pennsylvania Bureau of Special Education. This credential documents the paraprofessionals’ knowledge and skills based on the standards identified by the Council of Exceptional Children (CEC) for effective instructions in special education (see Appendix D). Training includes but is not limited to behavior management, assistive technology usage, inclusion support, and assessment and progress monitoring. Regular education personnel also participate in these training sessions to accommodate learners in an inclusive environment.

Standards for the Council for Exceptional Children

The Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education has endorsed the Council for Exceptional Children’s ten performance-based standards. These standards identify the knowledge and skills “that define the basic content for initial preparation and practice of special education paraeducators” (2007, p. 1). This is strictly voluntary for the paraeducator and is supervised by his or her supervisor/administrator.

Standard 1: Foundation of Special Education

Standard 2: Development and Characteristics of Learners

Standard 3: Individual Learning Differences

Standard 4: Instructional Strategies

Standard 5: Learning Environment and Social Interactions

Standard 6: Language

Standard 7: Instructional Planning

Standard 8: Assessment

Standard 9: Professional and Ethical Practice

Standard 10: Collaboration

Each standard can be met in either one of the four methods of class/in-service training, interview, observation/demonstration, or portfolio with the achievement rankings of entry, intermediate, or advanced. The levels of attainment are indicative of higher order thinking that ranges from knowledge and skills to application and adaptation. These higher levels of competencies translate into higher order thinking and processing by the paraeducator. Upon completion of all ten standards, the paraeducator is issued the Credential of Competency for Special Education Paraeducators in Pennsylvania.

Project PARA (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2007) is an online version of training that provides a host of information and a system for networking in the field of paraeducation, which addresses the needs of paraeducators and their supervisors. Project PARA is committed to offering training that is comprehensive, widely accessible, and beneficial to paraeducators and the teachers who supervise them. This training is intended

to provide support for newly developing paraeducators or to increase the capacity of veteran paraprofessionals.

Locally the county's community college offers a 31-credit fast track program leading to a teacher assistant certificate. The courses are condensed and attempt to focus on core disciplines at an introductory level. Exposure to topics of importance to the developing paraprofessional is offered in a weekend format (Friday evening and all day Saturday). Coupled with experience, this could prove to be a viable link to meeting standards, but most importantly, significant in addressing the needs of adult learners.

Utah State University's Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation has developed a research-based program entitled *Enhancing the Skills of Paraeducators: A Video-Assisted Training Program*. The program was funded by U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, No. H029K10031 grant. It was designed to provide general information and practical skills for use in the classroom with students who have disabilities. The program's topic includes general principles that span from mild to severe disabilities and preschool to high school age levels. The significance of this project is its ability to address typical and pertinent issues for the paraeducator and the articulations of its limitations. This program supplemented by other curricular materials and internships served as the core curriculum for the paraprofessional training program.

The training options are numerous, standards are available, administrators are gaining an increased understanding of requirements, and the paraprofessionals are beginning to understand the need for appropriate training to increase effectiveness. .

Project STAR

Project STAR, Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio, was a four-year longitudinal study funded by the state legislature of Tennessee in 1985. The project studied the “value of reducing class size in the early elementary grades for the purpose of improving student achievement” (Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 1998, p. 1) and to evaluate “the effects of using full-time teacher aides on student achievements” (p. 1). The study noted two major findings relative to paraeducators. The first major finding states,

Students who are taught in small classes of 15 students in the early primary grades achieved more in reading and in math than students taught in regular-size classes of 25 students or students taught in regular-size classes of 25 students with a full-time teacher aide (p.3).

The second finding regarding student achievement in regular classrooms with an aide versus regular classes . . .

Found no statistically significant evidence that providing teachers in regular classes of 25 students with a full-time teacher aide improved student achievement in either reading or math at any grade, K-3, with some possible exceptions of small effects in 1st grade (p. 3).

The STAR report indicates that having an aide within a classroom does not make a significant difference in student achievement. However, it has been noted that, “Children learn more effectively in small groups where one-to-one relationships can be developed” (Brotherson and Johnson, 1971, preface). Perhaps it is important to note how and when paraprofessionals are used rather than their mere assignment to a classroom.

Return on Investment

Frederick Douglass (1996), the abolitionist, boldly and eloquently (profoundly and passionately) stated in an address marking the 24th anniversary of the emancipation in April 1886 that, “Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is in an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob, and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.” The return on investment in administering workforce education and training programs will be actualized in the population’s self, family and community development. “After all, poverty causes crime, and prosperity equals less welfare equals fewer welfare recipients” (Elder, 2000, p. 3). Wood and Paulsell (2000, p. 104) reiterate this thought by saying, “Welfare reform policies have resulted in shrinking case loads but have failed to address the growing costs to society of the long-term poverty and social problems associated with being ‘flat broke.’” It should be viewed as an “investment in human capital” (Soroan, 1993, p. 11).

Paraprofessionals are an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Even though this was a once unskilled and less demanding position in terms of impacting student learning and achievement through direct instructional assistance, it is now a position that is recognized as important to fulfilling the educational plan of students. Therefore, all paraprofessionals must be equipped with the tools to be successful in instructing learners both in the regular and special education domains. They must possess basic and advance skills that address the total student.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Good research should change our thinking . . . It asks us to accept a new idea, or in the strongest case to rearrange our system of beliefs in fundamental ways.

(Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 1995, p. 111)

“Considerate researchers always ask themselves whether they need to explain why their data are not just reliable but relevant” (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 1995, p. 111). This study was undertaken because of its relevance to today’s economics and societal issues that have resulted in financial hardships for many Americans. The economically disadvantaged individuals in our society must be equipped to assume the role as a productive and contributing member of society. To reduce the number of individuals receiving public assistance and other government subsidies, employment opportunities must be available and recipients must be prepared to fulfill the requirements for hire. This two-fold resolution makes this study timely and significant as low-income individuals prepare for their self-sufficiency journey through education and training.

METHODOLOGY

This research was qualitative in nature and employed case study methodology. Qualitative research is rooted in the idea of naturalistic and phenomenological research. It involves discovering the essence and substance of a given situation of study. It goes deeper than mere quantitative measure, for it endeavors to bring a deeper and meaningful view to the sometimes most obvious thoughts and practices. Shank (2002) states, “The goals of qualitative research are insight, enlightenment, and illumination. . . . We [researchers] are searchers and discoverers and reconcilers of meaning where no meaning

has been clearly understood before, and we do not feel that our understanding of meaning is complete until we discover and understand its role in practice and experience” (p. 11). Sharan B. Merriam (1998) notes characteristics of qualitative research that are prominent in case study research.

Qualitative researchers are primarily concerned with process rather than outcomes or products. . . . Researchers are interested in meaning - how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences, [and] how they structure their social worlds. . . . The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. . . . [that] usually involves fieldwork. . . . In qualitative research one is interested in process, meaning, and understanding. . . . [that] is largely inductive (pp. 19-20).

“The defining feature is the exploration of complex real-life interactions as a composite whole” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). Carol Weiss (1998) encourages the researcher to “think creatively about where significant information might reside and then follow its tracks” (p. 261).

A case study approach was used to discover the uniqueness of those participating in workforce education and training, specifically a paraprofessional training and employment program. Through this study, relevant and imperative themes emerged that were critical in the participants’ quest to be self-sufficient and to be productive and contributing members in educational settings in the region. The methodology was designed, developed, and implemented to seek meaning and to discover elements that would not be readily discerned through a quantitative study. The selected methodology was case studies involving semistructured interviews conducted by the researcher. Data

was also gathered through a 19-question demographic survey. All data collected was subject to strict confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used and no identification markers appeared. The data was analyzed for independent and aggregate reporting. Portraiture was employed as a method for reporting the findings. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) state that in portraiture,

The researcher - even when vigorously controlled - is more evident and more visible than in any other research form. She is seen not only in defining the focus and field of the inquiry, but also in navigating the relationships with the subjects, in witnessing and interpreting the action, in tracing the emergent themes, and in creating the narrative. At each one of these stages, the self of the portraitist emerges as an instrument of inquiry, an eye on perspective-taking, an ear that discerns nuances, and a voice that speaks and offers insights (p. 13).

Research Design and Procedure

A qualitative approach consisting of a case study methodology was employed for this research. The researcher contacted each of the five participants to request their participation in this study. The study consisted of an approximately 45-minute semistructured interview with each participant. The interview was conducted first to ascertain concrete data about the subject's program experience and workplace transition. Next, the participant completed a 19-question demographic survey created by the researcher to gather data about her pre- and post-experience as a student and graduate of the paraprofessional training and employment program. The researcher and the subject conversed during the completion of the survey to ensure clarity of questions and responses. The survey took approximately 15 minutes. The researcher made notes during

the interview and completion of the survey, which became a part of the data collection. The five subjects used pseudonyms either chosen by them or the researcher. The researcher and an employed transcriber transcribed the data. The transcriber did not have access to identifying markers. She submitted a signed and notarized confidentiality form to the researcher. The data was then analyzed using portraiture, a method that incorporates narratives as it identifies themes, symbols, and metaphors (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). "Portraits listen for a story" rather than to a story (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 13). From this design and procedure, the research rigor was maximized and the subject's journey unfolded for recording, analyzing, and reporting.

The research procedure included receiving permission from the local education agency's executive director to conduct the study after meeting and discussing the research. The executive director requested to preview the agency's written description to be included in the document, which she read and approved. A proposal to conduct the study was presented to and accepted by the dissertation committee in December 2007. It was then submitted to the Duquesne University's Institutional Review Board. Upon receipt of approval from the university's IRB in December of 2007, the researcher sent correspondence to those paraprofessional trainees meeting the participation guidelines enumerated in the participation criteria section. The correspondence included an explanation of the research and an invitation to participate. The request was for participants to return their consent form within 5 business days. Follow-up letters, e-mails and/or telephone calls were made as needed. The return of the consent form acknowledged their willingness to participate. Only original signatures were accepted for participation. Interviews were scheduled and conducted during December 2007 and

January 2008. The surveys were completed with each participant after the interview session. Data analysis and reporting of findings followed in the subsequent months.

Historical Perspective of Program

National, state and local governments have allocated funds to create self-sufficiency opportunities for those who are unemployed or underemployed. Funds from a human service agency were distributed to local educational agencies for the training and employment of those designated as economically and/or educationally disadvantaged. A local education agency received funds for a paraprofessional training program that addressed a two-fold issue. One was to provide employment opportunities for TANF clients, and the other was to provide quality paraprofessionals for classrooms in a region of southwestern Pennsylvania. To meet requirements for school employment, the program addressed the guidelines of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requiring Title I paraprofessionals and paraprofessionals employed in Schoolwide Title I programs to be highly qualified. Locally school districts had the freedom to adopt a rigorous assessment to qualify their paraprofessionals for the highly qualified status. Trainees in the paraprofessional training program who did not have an associate's degree could become highly qualified by passing a locally designed or commercially produced assessment adopted by the school district. One district adopted the paraprofessional training program's completion certificate as documentation for highly qualified status.

Study Overview

The research was a critical analysis of a paraprofessional training and employment program funded by a human service agency that assisted youth and adults in becoming job ready, employed, and career-oriented. This paraprofessional training and

employment program was designed for adults, age 18 and over, who were economically and/or academically disadvantaged. The primary goal was for the participants to attain the skills for entry-level employment placement, employment retention and self-sufficiency.

The enactment of PRWORA meant that millions of America's poor who were receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) through the Department of Public Welfare were legislated to secure employment, along with other restrictions. This hit at the very heart of their means for survival, for the TANF State Plan of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (2005) included "stringent work activity participation rates and a lifetime limit of five years for the receipt of benefits" (p. 3). The bill also denied benefits to some of our most vulnerable citizens. There were also individuals who were low income or without income who were in need of employment. They, too, needed temporary assistance benefits to satisfy their basic needs and to have the opportunity to embark on self-sufficiency. For this population, the training and employment may have been an even greater need.

Mandates were issued to move low-income families to self-sufficiency through short-term training and educational program. The training programs not only addressed training needs, but also employability skills and other barriers experienced by economically challenged populations as they enter the workforce. The coined phrase of welfare roll to pay roll may appear simple, but its implementation may not be as readily attainable to them or others economically challenged individuals.

The research was a study of distinguished graduates of the paraprofessional training and employment program. The research was projected to impact the thoughts,

hearts, minds, and actions of decision-makers involved with administering services to our most vulnerable populations. The study employed portraiture to analyze the data and to secure important outcomes for future employment and training programs for similar populations.

Sample Selection

The research participants are “a purposive sample of unique individuals . . . because they are the only ones who can give the researcher the answers or insight” (Shank and Brown, 2007, p. 127) that are being sought by this researcher. The five subjects for this study were purposefully selected from the group of trainees who completed the paraprofessional training program with distinction and are currently working in the field of training. At the time of their entry into the program, they were unemployed or underemployed Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) or Non-TANF clients. They were referred to the training program to enhance their capacity to become gainfully employed and to embark on the quest for self-sufficiency. Each participant successfully completed the training and entered employment as a paraprofessional in an educational setting within the host county or surrounding region. At minimum, they would possess a high school diploma or General Education Diploma (GED), meet or exceed the ninth grade level in reading and math, would have completed the ten-week training, obtained employment and retained their jobs for a minimum of six months as required by the funding source. For the purpose of this study, the participants will have maintained employment for a minimum of two years as of the 2007-2008 school year.

To maximize the potential for optimal research data, the sample was derived from the pool of successful graduates who would traditionally be considered distinguished graduates by the paraprofessional training program staff based on performance and disposition in meeting program requirements. These are graduates who would be considered as the subject of featured stories and/or recommended for awards by human service agencies and other organizations. A list of fifteen distinguished trainees was surveyed to determine if the trainees met the criteria for research participation. The first five consenting respondents of the distinguished trainees who met the study participation criteria requirements comprised the sample.

The sample consisted of five women whose ages ranged from 26 to 46 or older. They have a total of 13 children with eight children below the age of 20. Three were married with one of them marrying since completing the training; one divorced; and one single. All subjects received a paraprofessional certificate of successful completion. They have all taken professional development classes through their employer. Four of the five have some college credits with two having obtained associate's degree prior to their training. One needs seven credits to receive her associate's and plans to complete in the current year. One started her college degree the fall preceding this research. The sample represented four employers at five different schools. Four of the five participants work fulltime as a paraprofessional, and one part time within her community. Four of the five salaries are below the \$20,000 average for paraprofessionals. All participants have held their jobs a minimum of two years with two participants retaining theirs for more than six years. All have experience in working with students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom or special education room. All participants stated they reached their primary

goal of becoming employed with one stating she felt self-sufficient with her earned income.

Participation Criteria

This purposive sample represents distinguished graduates of the program regarding their knowledge, skills, performance and disposition. The study is seeking to explore the program at its best by studying some of its accomplished participants. The participants for the purposive sample were selected in accordance with the following criteria:

1. Participants successfully completed the paraprofessional training program and received a certificate of successful completion;
2. Participants were identified by the paraprofessional training and employment staff as distinguished in their performance and disposition. These students are traditionally targeted for program marketing, publications, and awards as model students;
3. Participants are currently employed in the field of training at a minimum of two years as of the 2007-2008 school year.

Research Questions

There are two basic research questions.

1. How did the paraprofessional training program components impact the trainees' capacity to successfully complete the program and retain employment?
2. How did the paraprofessional training program components affect the trainees' ability to manage their journey to self-sufficiency?

This study focused on the paraprofessional training program's goals and objectives and how it impacted the trainees' capacity to complete the training, retain employment, and increase their self-sufficiency. Through scientific inquiry, this research study attempted to understand the effects that the paraprofessional training program had on TANF and Non-TANF unemployed and underemployed clients' capacity to successfully complete the training, to transition into the workforce, to retain employment, and to cope with the events that resulted from their journey to self-sufficiency. . For the purpose of this study, successful graduate and program completion encompassed completing the training, entering the workforce as a paraprofessional, and current and consistent employment for a minimum of two years in the field of training.

The researcher incorporated guiding questions referencing the subjects' expectations, experiences, evidentiary information, personal evaluation, and reflections of their participation in the paraprofessional training program. Through this questioning, the researcher was able to hear and record the voices of the five research participants for analysis and to understand what elements of the paraprofessional training program assisted them in being successful graduates and employees. The guiding questions are as follow:

1. Expectations: What did trainees anticipate achieving by participating in paraprofessional training program?
2. Experiences: How did trainees' experiences in the program affect their ability to complete the training, enter the workforce, retain their position as a paraprofessional for at least two years, and remain employed in the field of training to date?

3. Evidence: What are the indicators that demonstrate how trainees have met their expectations and the program's expectations? What is different in the trainee's life now as a result of attending and completing the training?
4. Evaluation: How has the program met the trainee's needs and what recommendations can they offer?
5. Reflections: How have the trainees managed their journey to self-sufficiency? What, if anything, have they done since completing the program that they could not/did not do prior to program completion? What, if anything, would they like to do that they have not done since completing the program?

Data Collection

Considerate researchers always ask themselves whether they need to explain why their data are not just reliable but relevant.

(Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 1995, p. 111)

The semi-structured interviews were conducted at an easily accessible location that was private and acoustically appropriate. There were a total of two sites for interviewing the five subjects. The researcher conducted the interviews using the guiding questions to secure data. The interviews were audio taped to ensure accurate, reliable, and valid data. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted for clarification and verification of acquired data. Each of the five audiotapes was coded for data organization and management. (Merriam, 1998) The audiotapes were transcribed by the researcher and a transcriber. A notarized and signed statement of confidentiality was secured from the transcriber prohibiting her from discussing, releasing, or in any way transferring or translating data to anyone other than the researcher. No identities were revealed to the

transcriber. The information was anonymously labeled for the protection of the subjects and to guarantee the integrity of the study. The 19-question demographic survey was completed immediately following the interview. The researcher and subject conversed to ensure accuracy of interpretation and responses to the survey questions. The researcher took notes during the interview and the completion of the survey, which became a part of the data collection.

The transcribed notes, demographic surveys and written notes were analyzed and categorized for themes relevant to the research. All data remained secure and confidential at all times. The findings have been reported using portraiture and aggregate charting.

Informed Consent and Subjects' Rights

The research sample was governed by the participation criteria for the study. Participants submitted a signed consent form; only original and live signatures were accepted as consent for participation.

All precautions were exercised to protect the rights of the subjects. There were no known risks other than those, which could be expected, in everyday life. Subjects were under no obligation to participate and could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences, and the information collected from the participant would not be used in the study.

Subjects were not compensated monetarily but rewarded with the knowledge that they were providing data for future training and research for similar populations. The return on their investment in this research will be invaluable.

Instrumentation

To generate in-depth information about the training and employment program, its participants and their experiences, the researcher formulated carefully crafted questions for an interview and demographic survey. The participants were free to share any documents, information or artifacts regarding their experiences.

The researcher conducted a 45-minute semistructured interview with each participant using the guiding questions. The interviews were recorded by audio. Following each interview, the participant completed a demographic survey that was created by the researcher to obtain information relating to the research questions that would provide a contextual framework of the environment in which the subjects' live and work. The survey has 19 questions and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The participants and researcher conversed while completing the survey to provide clarification and consistent interpretation of questions and responses. Artifacts provided or referenced by the subjects regarding their progress and performance as a result of their participation in the training program and subsequent employment were included in the data collection if available.

The purposive sample was drawn from a pool of trainees who were identified by the paraprofessional staff as model students. These are trainees who would be considered for promotional and marketing materials and for recognition awards by various agencies. The subjects were requested to participate in the study by the researcher. The researcher had an administrative and instructional relationship with the participants during the period she served as program coordinator and technology advisor. She has not been in that role for one and one half years, which eliminated any perceived risk for

nonparticipation in this study. Participants know the researcher and experienced a comfortable working relationship with her. Since the program has ceased operation as of June 30, 2006, the researcher has no impact on the current status of any participant. Consent to participate is at will without any consequences. The study posed no perceived risks nor did it provide compensation to the subjects for their participation.

Data Analysis

“A warrant is a general principle that creates a logical bridge between particular evidence and a particular claim” (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 1995, p. 112). However, there are three criteria to qualify as a warrant. There must be a description of the evidence, description of the claim that follows from the evidence, and a stated or implied connection between them.

The five interviews were audio taped by the researcher using a recorder. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and an employed transcriber. The transcriber submitted a notarized and signed statement of confidentiality. The interviews were analyzed using portraiture. It gave the researcher the opportunity to allow the story to unfold as the participants shared their experiences. Portraiture looks for a story rather than tell a story (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). The data was analyzed for themes, symbols, and metaphors regarding the subjects’ journey to self-sufficiency. The surveys were analyzed for an aggregate data set to understand the overall characteristics of the sample. The researcher’s notes were incorporated into the data collection. The mixed methods for collecting data permitted triangulation, which is “based on the assumption that any bias inherent in particular data sources, investigator, and method would be neutralized when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and

methods” (Jick as cited in Creswell, 1994, p. 174). The study analysis drew on qualitative and quantitative data collection procedures by incorporating interviews and surveys, which Todd Jick (as cited in Creswell, 1994) terms a between methods approach.

Summary

This study was a critical analysis of a workforce paraprofessional education and training program funded, designed, developed, and implemented for adults designated as economically and or/academically disadvantaged. The study described the elements of the program that were instrumental in the participants’ being successful graduates and employees. A qualitative design employing case studies of five trainees identified as distinguished graduates were used to conduct the study. The research design was constructed to demonstrate how TANF and Non-TANF unemployed and underemployed participants can succeed if appropriate conditions exist and traditional barriers are identified and addressed. The subjects in this study demonstrated what is possible when the system works at its best. It is believed that the information would be applicable and pertinent to future training and to program evaluation. Data was collected, analyzed and reported relative to the research questions posed.

To secure a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the paraprofessional training program and its participants, a qualitative examination was initiated. It consisted of an evaluative format that examined key components of the training program and how they impacted the participants’ capacity to be successful graduates and embark on a journey of self-sufficiency.

The case studies were conducted to understand the journey of the five trainees who successfully completed the paraprofessional training program with distinction. A

series of structured interviews and a survey were employed to ascertain the five subjects' experiences as participants in the program and how key elements of the program impacted their outcome. This study was employed to discover how the paraprofessional training program functioned at its best by studying its distinguished graduates. It also attempted to determine the efficacy of adult education and workforce development programs for those designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged in the host county of training in southwestern Pennsylvania.

The interview questions in the study pertained to the subjects' expectations of the program, experiences as participants, evidence of their performance, and evaluation of the training. The program included academic remediation, classroom paraprofessional training, a practicum, employment placement, employment retention and case management services. The researcher categorized response and identified themes to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction: An Overview of the Study

This study is a critical analysis of a paraprofessional program designed to provide education, training, case management, and employment services to those designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged. The primary objective of the program was to secure employment for trainees who were unemployed or underemployed to embark on their journey to self-sufficiency. Realizing self-sufficiency is not a single event or occurrence as a result of becoming employed, the symbolism of journey is appropriate. Through their quest for self-sufficiency, evidence of self-actualization and self-transcendence emerged.

As the newly employed paraprofessionals entered the workforce, they experienced the joy of working and providing for their families and themselves. They also encountered obstacles that challenged their quest for economic independence as they assumed more financial responsibility for their transportation to work, housing, food, medical expenses and other basic necessities. Whether the participants were receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or underemployed, the challenge of financial security or mere financial comfort was evident in their conversations.

The five subjects in this study revealed a strong sense of who they are as a result of being a part of the paraprofessional training program. When I think of the women in this study and how they have managed their journey to date, the words purpose, perseverance and passion immediately come to mind. As their stories unfolded in the data

set, the researcher noted their poise in presentation, sense of ownership of their journey, and conviction to their profession.

Each of the participants in the study met with the researcher at a location and time mutually convenient after identifying her current residence and work schedule. The interview locations were quiet, comfortable and private. The researcher met with each of the participants for approximately one hour to ascertain information relating to the research questions. Each session consisted of a 45-minute interview at minimum and a demographic survey comprised of 19 questions for approximately 15 minutes.

The five paraprofessionals who chose to participate in this study did so without hesitation or reservation. As a matter of fact, they participated with a joyful spirit. At the appointed meeting time, each participant was punctual and eager to share her story. This purposeful sample was drawn from a pool of graduates identified as distinguished by the paraprofessional program staff. The first five consenting respondents constituted the study sample. The controls in this study provided anonymity. The subjects were allowed to choose a pseudonym or the researcher selected one for them. In order to realize the researcher's intent to protect the identity of the subjects, some information has been reported as an aggregate as seen in Demographic Table 1.

The opportunity to participate in the study was extended to persons identified as distinguished graduates of the paraprofessional training program. The list included TANF and non-TANF trainees who were unemployed or underemployed at the time of entrance into the program. In all cases, the individuals were identified as economically disadvantaged and their tuition was absorbed by the line-item budget that supported the program. None of the participants were fee-based payments. They also acknowledged

that they benefited from the training received. Prior to sending the consent form to prospective candidates, the researcher completed an address and telephone acquisition search through an online telephone/address directory and the employers' e-mail system in an effort to obtain current contact information. After sending potential subjects a letter to participate in the study, the researcher accepted the first five consenting respondents as the study sample. Four of the five respondents were TANF; one responded stated that she did not receive TANF benefits; however, she was admitted to the paraprofessional training program as economically and/or academically disadvantaged. All of the subjects' tuition was paid from the same line item budget that supported the program. The data set for the non-TANF respondent is similar to the overall data set. She did not characterize her experiences in the training classroom as different from the others.

Research Questions

There are two basic research questions.

1. How did the paraprofessional training program components impact the trainees' capacity to successfully complete the program and retain employment?
2. How did the paraprofessional training program components affect the trainees' ability to manage their journey to self-sufficiency?

Research Findings

The research findings document the journey of each subject as she developed the knowledge and skills to become self-sufficient. The demographic data set also reveals information that is consistent with the targeted population of the paraprofessional training program. The demographic data pertaining to the five paraprofessionals participating in this study are displayed as Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' Demographics

Demographics of the Research Sample	
Participation Designation	5 – Participants All participants were designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged, and funds for program participation were distributed from the program's line item budget.
Age Range	2 – 26 to 35 years old 2 – 36 to 45 years old 1 – 46 or older
Marital Status while in the Program	3 – Single 1 – Married 1 – Divorced
Ages of Children at Time of Study	2 – ages 5 to 9 2 – ages 10 to 14 4 – ages 15 to 19 5 – ages 20 and over
Source of Income Prior to Training	2 – Employment 4 – Food Stamps 2 – Cash Assistance 2 – Public Housing/Section 8 2 – Medical
Education Attainment at Time of Study	2 – Associate's Degrees 2 - Credits toward an Associates Degree 2 - Vocational Certificates 5 – Paraprofessional training program certificate 5 – Designated as highly qualified by their schools
Positions as Paraeducators	4 – Full Time 1 – Part Time
Employers	4 – Employers 5 – School Sites 5 – Employed by original employment placement
Years on the Job	3 – 2 to 5 years 2 – 6 to 10 years
Yearly Income	3 - \$10, 000 to \$14,999 1 - \$15, 000 to \$19,999 1 - \$20, 000 to \$24,999
Employment Benefits	5 – Medical, Vision, Dental, Disability 3 - Life 2 - Tuition Plan

The subjects in the study constituted an interesting and unique sample. Their stories can be told in multiple ways, but the emerging themes, metaphors, and patterns

from the data collected revealed subjects who are purposeful, persistent, and passionate. These elements are clearly observable in the passages describing the five participants as noted below.

Portraits of Participants

Sara

Sara was eager to meet with the researcher and to share her experiences, but she was also nervous. Once we settled in and the interview began, she was fine. Sara credits her sister as the one who introduced her to the program. Her sister saw a recruitment poster in the program's window. She quickly wrote the number down and gave it to Sara confident that the training program would be perfect for Sara. Sara chose to enroll in the program to receive training and to become employed. She also knew there were some specific issues that had to be addressed to ensure her journey would be marked by successful milestones. Effortlessly, she made friends with her peers in the training classroom. She worked diligently to complete all academic remediation and paraeducation training requirements. Once she completed the coursework, she was excited to put her theoretical knowledge into practice. She was a pioneer in her internship placement as the first person from the training program to intern at this highly respected child development center. As a representative model of an ideal paraprofessional candidate, the program staff was confident in placing her knowing how important first impressions are. After completing the internship successfully, she was immersed into job search. Her diligent efforts, along with the dedicated assistance from the program staff, resulted in Sara securing a paraprofessional position within an educational setting. She reported she still enjoys her job. She likes making a difference in the lives of her students.

She reports her job is high-paced and stressful, but she loves it. Sara reported that she became more comfortable and confident as she progressed through the training program's curriculum. On her job, she experienced success with each student she was assigned. The students' personalities ranged from docile to aggressive. In all cases, she stated that she could see improvement being made as a result of her efforts and rapport with the students. Sara received recognition for her work and her ability to overcome personal obstacles.

Eva

Eva was thrilled to find a program that would lead her to employment with a normal work schedule. She knew that becoming an instructional assistant within a school system would guarantee her daylight hours, holidays and summer off, and evenings free to spend with her family. She entered with a sense of purpose. She knew she needed to complete the training to obtain employment as a paraprofessional. She did not allow anything to distract her from her goal. Once she completed the training, she was hired as an assistant within an educational setting. She has remained with the same educational system, but her position has changed over the years. She commented that paraprofessionals must be flexible because their job responsibilities or position could change at anytime depending on the student population. Eva continues to be an integral part of the school's educational team. She understands the students and enjoys making a difference in their lives. Her experiences in the classroom make her thankful and grateful for the health and stability of her own children. Eva reported that she feels confident on the job and is able to manage the behaviors of students in her classroom. She also reported that she has always promoted the need for her own children to do well in school

and to get a good education. She reported her children are on track, and she is pleased with their progress and the educational decisions they have made and are making.

Louise

Louise needed and wanted to find employment that would complement the skills she had used for almost two decades. Coming from a vocational background, Louise wanted the opportunity to work with children. She saw an advertisement in a weekly free newspaper. She applied and was accepted into the paraprofessional training program. When she entered the training classroom, she knew there would be new ways of learning things and doing things. She relished the challenge and quickly settled in to begin her journey. She completed the program as scheduled and was immediately hired at her internship site. She says, "Teaching is a skill that people take for granted....without it where would our country be? It [teaching] has to be a passion." Since becoming part of an educational system, she has gained confidence in herself. She says the teachers believe that she can contribute to their class. She sometimes adapts materials that the students will be using. She also conducts research to find additional ways she can assist students in the classroom. The teachers value her contribution in the classroom. She stated, "The teachers accept me not as a peer. They [teachers] have the education and I don't. I have the years and they don't." Louise reported that all of her performance evaluations are excellent. There are "no buts and need for improvement," She also reported that her career in the school system have increased her interaction with her grandson as his after school tutor. Making a difference in the lives of others also makes a difference in her life.

Colette

Colette embarked on her journey to self-sufficiency knowing that she had some experience in the field of education, but she needed more training to enter the PreK –12 schools. Upon enrolling into the training program, she reported that she “was not as needy as some teacher aide candidates because I already had a degree and experience working in the field.” Her prescribed paraprofessional training coursework based on a standardized test precluded some of the remediation course topics that others may have been required to take. Upon completion of the paraprofessional training program, she entered the workforce. The greatest asset of the program was the job placement assistance. “You got me employment....steady employment.” At the completion of the first school year, Colette was furloughed. “I kept on going. I did not let that get me down. I worked through the summer for the district as well. And once that was completed, I just did my footwork and my cover letter that you all showed me how to do.” Relying on the employment readiness skills, Colette remained employed. Presently she is a paraprofessional in her original employment placement. She reported that working as a paraprofessional has made a difference in the lives of the students she assists. She has also noticed changes in her own life as she helps others. She also reported that she is able to use the skills developed on the job in assisting her child with his studies.

Paula

Paula had her destination mapped from the beginning. She stated that she enrolled into the program because “I wanted to work in the school that I am now.” She knew to be able to work in the school of her choice she needed documented evidence of training. After being directed to the paraprofessional training program by a friend, she was ready

to embark on her journey. She arrived at the program ready to do whatever was needed to reach her goal. In the paraprofessional training classroom, she built peer relationships and studied math. Her greatest feat was technology because she now realizes that technology is just another tool for instruction. She is currently using technology in her place of employment. She loves to create PowerPoint presentations for small group instruction through the use of a Smartboard. Paulette loves her work and enjoys the supporting spirit of school administrators, teachers, students, and parents. She says, "We're all on the same page." They are all working for the good of the students and the school community. She was recognized after her first year for her contribution to increasing the PSSA scores in her school. Paula continues to prepare small group activities to ensure student achievement. She also reported that her children are very proud of her accomplishments. She also stated she is able to do more things with and for her children as a result of becoming employed

Data Analysis

Question 1: How did the paraprofessional training program components impact the trainees' capacity to successfully complete the program and retain employment?

The paraprofessional training program had 4 major components. The components were a 4-week academic remediation, a 3-week paraprofessional curriculum, and a 3-week internship for a total of 325 hours of programming. The program also included employment placement assistance and employment retention services, along with extensive case management services throughout the training and for 6 months following employment placement.

The subjects cited the staff, program schedule, and location as significant factors in their ability to complete the program. If there was a problem, the students reported they were able to talk with the teacher, case manager, or program coordinator.

“Sometimes I could not be there because my son was ill a lot...I would talk with [the researcher] most of the time and you would tell me what I needed to do...you would tell me to try to get there as much as I can.... I could have been kicked out of the program because of attendance, but you helped me to find a way to stay and complete it.... I’m glad I did....Thank God, my son is not ill like he was then....” In another setting, the trainee might have been dismissed from the program because of her barriers. This paraprofessional training program had a commitment to maximize the success of all students by addressing hardships and barriers.

The trainees reported the following as it pertained to five categories of the paraprofessional training program components:

- (1) Academic Remediation: Some felt they did not need it while others said it was helpful because they had been out of school for a long period of time. Math and technology were the areas cited as most useful to them during the training and on their jobs. These were also the areas they needed to improve most.
- (2) Paraprofessional Curriculum: All students participated in this component because it was the core of the program. Trainees were given a comprehensive study of the roles and responsibilities of the paraeducator along with the knowledge and skills required to instruct and serve diverse populations in an educational setting. Subjects cited having the knowledge of specific terminology, disabilities, and behavior management skills as being important

to them in the workplace. One subject reported that the classroom teacher respected her from the first day because she had a certificate and the knowledge of a paraprofessional. Five of the five participants stated that they made a difference in the workplace because of their training.

- (3) **Internship/Practicum:** Students participated in an internship prior to entering job search. This component was designed as a non-paid experience to put the theory into practice. A small percentage of students were able to complete their internship as an employee of a specific school. If a school were seeking an employee from our program, the staff would make the best match based on the school's needs and the trainee's experience and education. This was the case with one of the subjects in the study. She had earned an associates degree, had previously worked in a daycare setting, and had successfully completed the paraprofessional curriculum; therefore, she was interviewed by the district and subsequently hired. Her first three weeks of employment were treated as a paid internship. The funding agency, the program and the district approved this arrangement. One of the five participants stated that her internship placement did not prepare her effectively for her workplace. She suggested that the practicum be similar to a person's workplace.
- (4) **Job Placement Assistance and Retention:** All five participants in this study credited received their jobs as a result of participating in the training and being referred by the program staff. One subject credited the program with equipping her with the skills to remain employed despite being furloughed.

She was able to update her resume, cover letter, and acquire employment. The study records 100% employment placement and retention for this sample.

(5) Case Management: Five out of five students cited the management of their case as an integral part of their training and successful completion. The onsite staff of the program was cross-trained to address not only academic issues but also personal challenges that compromised their training. The program's network of partnerships and collaborations provided a host of resources to address specific needs.

Question 2: How did the paraprofessional training program components affect the trainees' ability to manage their journey to self-sufficiency?

The training program design is 10 weeks of full day training. The 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. schedule reflected a traditional workday for schools. This gave trainees the opportunity to adjust their schedule and commitments prior to entering the workplace. The program staff worked closely with the referral personnel at the funding agencies to ensure that specific entitlements such as transportation were available so that trainees could get to their school sites. Employment placement also included job readiness that developed the attitudes, ethics and habits of a paraeducator to be an effective team member. The program's case management team intervened at the workplace to ensure trainees were able to retain employment through employee counseling and human resource intervention.

- All five participants cited the ability to find employment after completing the program as the greatest asset of the program. Even though some are working

two jobs to move closer to meeting their financial needs, the subjects stated that the program met their expectations.

The data set resulted in specific themes and category identification that influenced the subjects' lives personally, financially, academically, professionally and socially. Through categorizing and synthesizing their words, tone, and experiences, the researcher captured their journey at various times. As they responded to the questions and elaborated on their experiences, the researcher waited for their story to unfold rather than merely being told, which is common in portraiture analysis. Each of the following categories include significant comments made by the participants.

Personal Discovery (Sense of Self): Subjects reported a deeper awareness of self.

Sara:

I have more patience...I always knew I was a good mom, but I am even a better mom since working in this position [paraprofessional]...I appreciate my children more when I see the struggles and challenges of the children I am working with. I had been told that I am a tough cookie, but I did not think I was. People only see you on the outside, and they don't know what is on the inside.... People don't see the struggles I have to make ends meet.... As I think about it now, I am a tough cookie.

Colette:

I am more patient and tolerant now.

Paula:

I'm on hard myself. I need to ease up.... I was shy....I have become a little more confident and [feel] more capable of doing things.

Financial Challenges: Subjects report economic independence remains a challenge.

Sara:

When I became employed, my cash, food stamps and transportation allowances were stopped. Also, my rent increased It seems as though those who are trying to make it are penalized. It is a lose – lose situation. The little money we earn as paraprofessionals do not pay all the bills. . . not to mention the increase in bus fare to get to work.

Eva:

I love my job and the children I work with, but the job does not pay enough. I've always worked to help take care of my family, but it's not enough.

Louise:

I work 3 jobs to make ends meet. I work one just to have benefits and the other two to pay bills....I would like to work one job and feel secure.

Colette:

I don't want to return to a life on welfare.... where they have to know all your business for \$20.00 worth of food stamps. I'll continue to work two jobs until I can make it with one job...I might make \$600, for example, and only bring home about \$400.00 every two weeks. . . . I have a car now, rent and I'm paying taxes twice. . . .We don't make enough for all we do....but I'll keep working as much as I can I don't want to return to welfare.

Paula:

I feel pretty self-sufficient....I was able to buy a new car. The kids and I are able to do more things because of the extra income.

Single Parent Dilemma: Subjects report challenges that result in a single parent household.

Sara:

I have to provide for my family. . . . It is all on me. Sometimes I feel frustrated . . . I don't want my children to worry or see me frustrated. . . . I have to make sure my children are fine. That there is someone available to watch them when I have to leave for work in the morning. . . . My older child has assumed more responsibility with the younger child. I schedule their doctor's appointment at the same time, so [older child can take the younger child].

Education: Subjects report education is important to them and to their children.

Sara:

Since I have started working as a paraprofessional, I understand more and I don't nag as much. . . . My children are doing better in school . . . [My older child] is on track now.

Eva:

I've always encouraged education. . . . My children are attending universities and are performing well in their classes. . . . I don't have any problem with them and school. . . . I have taken Professional Development Courses on autism and other disabilities. . . . I've been thinking about going back to school.

Louise:

I continue to take courses through PaTTAN to become highly qualified in regular education and special education. . . . Transportation to this location is difficult. . . . I might not be able to continue if my co-worker stops taking the classes.

Paula:

I'm back in school now....My children are proud of me.....They're even talking about college. I had to sit out this ...semester because my child was injured [sports injury].... He's getting better. I'll start again in the fall.

My mom is a teacher. She'll tutor you. She knows how. [Children speaking to their friends who are having difficulty in school]

Professional Position: Subjects report a sense of professionalism and career-orientation

Sara:

I feel good about my job. I love working with the kids.... I feel like a professional in this position. I am doing something that makes a difference. I know the parents appreciate it and I think the kids do, too.

Eva:

I always had a job... I was working when I came into this program.... It just wasn't right for me, so I decided to take this course.... I've had other jobs, but I did not like the schedule. This job allows me to be home with my children in the evening...I love working with the kids.

Louise:

I've taught before in a different population and thought it would be interesting to work with kids. . . . I feel good about education as a career, but it's [paraprofessional pay] not enough money to live on.

Colette:

I had worked before in daycare but the Teacher Aide Program gave me what I needed to get a job in the school....I've worked as a PreK assistant and as a one-

on-one aide with a student with special needs....It was hard at first, but I grew to love him as my student.

Paula:

I have a professional relationship with my colleagues....The school recognizes the skills that I have. ... There is a sense of family in the school.... and we're all on the same page. We refer to the school and the kids as "my school" and "my kids."

Social Stamina: Subjects report that they try to provide as many social opportunities as they can for their children.

Sara:

I am able to do more things with my children, but it is a struggle. . . . I have always been a good budgeter. ...I just wish things were not always so tight. I finally had a vacation....I had to save for it for awhile, but I did it.

Paula:

The kids and I can do more things because of the extra income. ...They are getting older now, so sometimes they want to go with their friends and not their mom.... They go bowling, to the movies, and the Science Center.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data revealed the story of five paraprofessionals who were driven by a purpose to embark upon this journey. They persevered and continue to persevere to make a difference in the lives of the students they serve as well as their own lives and their families. They articulated an unequivocal passion for the work that they perform. This commitment to themselves and the students indicates evidence self-actualization and transcendence.

At the time of their enrollment into the paraprofessional training program, the subjects in this study were either unemployed or underemployed. The program's objectives aimed for trainees to successfully complete the training, obtain employment, and retain employment. To build self-sufficiency, the trainees would have to remain employed, establish longevity in the workplace, and continue their education. The data documents that four of the five students met the above criteria. One stated her desire to enter college in the near future. She has an extensive work history.

Barriers to Training and Employment

The five distinguished graduates of the paraprofessional program who were interviewed for this research reported barriers to their training and/or employment placement options. The barriers were transportation, childcare, and health related issues.

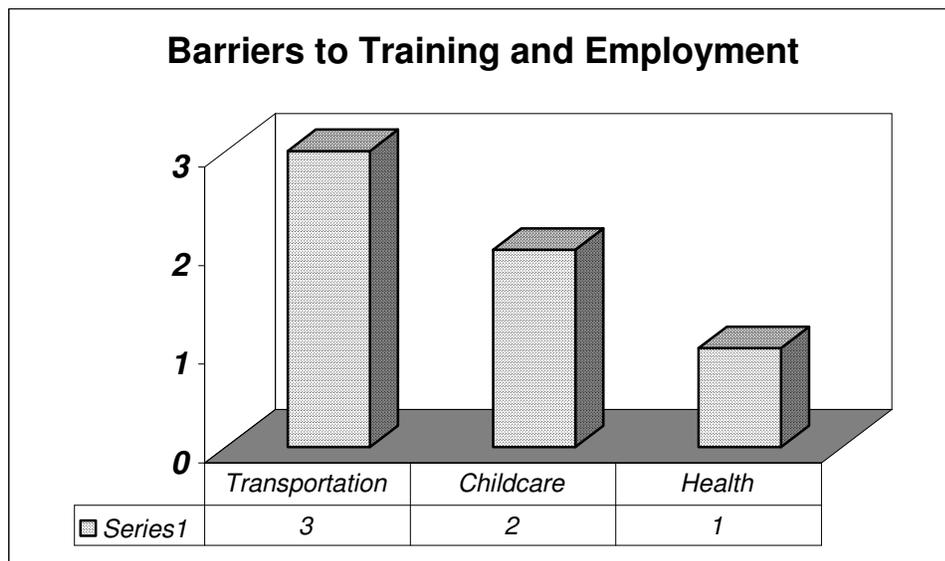


Figure 2: Barriers to Training and Employment

At the time of training, four of the five subjects relied on public transportation. Employment and internship options for teacher aide trainees relied heavily on the ability to get to work by public transit. Some school placements were not on the bus route or

readily accessible; therefore, trainees had to narrow their placement search opportunities for internships and employment. Since completing the program and entering the workplace, one additional subject reported that she has recently purchased a car. Presently, 3 of the 5 subjects have a car, and another reported she is saving for a car.

Childcare was cited as a challenge for two of the subjects. They were the only candidates who had children under the age of 10. Sometimes parents would need to leave for work prior to their children's scheduled school time or the parent returned home after their children. Sometimes children were ill and could not attend school or daycare. Because of these situations, the parents needed childcare before, after and sometimes during the school day. Daycare programs, family, and friends were used for alternate childcare. Participants reported that having a similar schedule as their school-age children made this program attractive to them by reducing the need for childcare.

The third issue was the health of a child. A trainee reported that when a child has a chronic illness, it is difficult to leave the child and go to their school job. Many daycare centers do not accept a child when he/she is ill; therefore, a child who has a chronic health issue constituted a barrier to the participant getting to work in a school setting.

The barriers experienced by the five subjects in the program were attributed to lack of personal transportation, insufficient childcare, and unexpected or chronic illnesses of self or a family member.

The five interviewees reported positive outcomes as a result of completing the paraprofessional training program. The positive outcomes included patience, tolerance, appreciation, initiative, and family interaction.

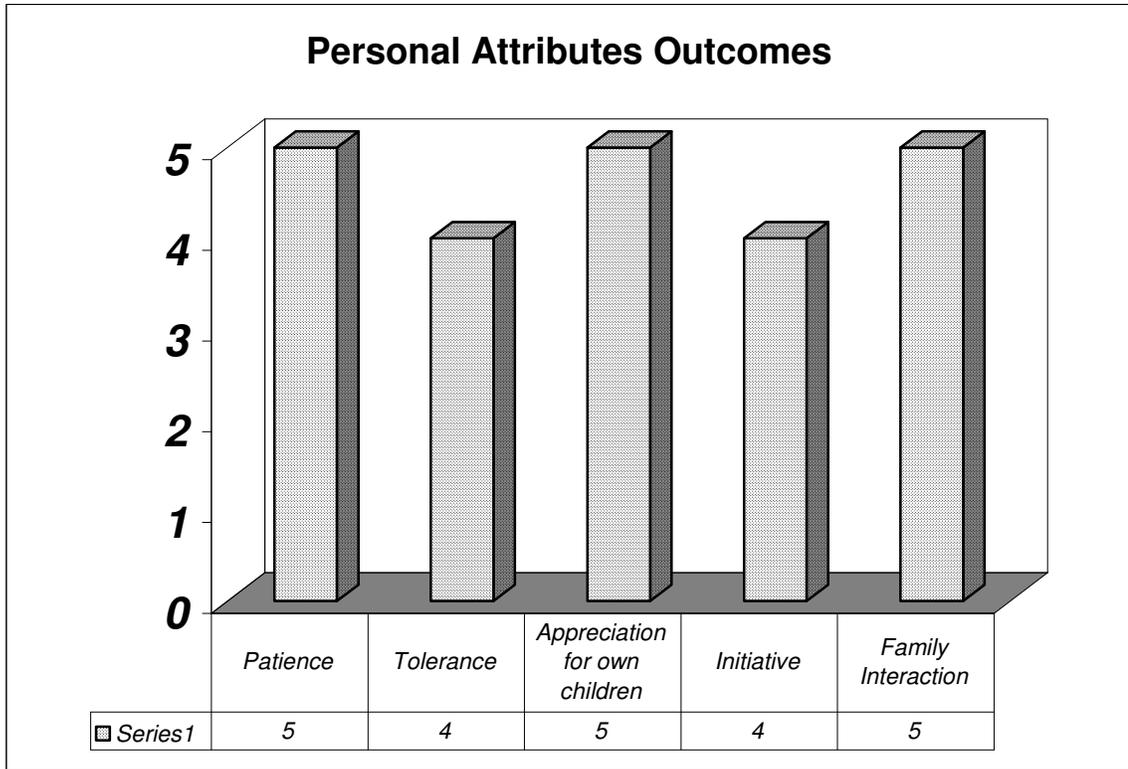


Figure 3. Personal Attributes Outcomes

Each of the subjects said patience and tolerance are necessary attributes for a paraprofessional position. The majority of the respondents said they were patient prior to their experience as an instructional assistant, but that they have become more tolerable and patient as a result of this experience. This tolerance is exhibited both in the workplace and at home.

All subjects cited a greater appreciation for their own children and their children’s health. The subjects are working with children with special needs in diverse settings, including regular education, special education, and inclusion classrooms.

The subjects remarked that their children are proud of their accomplishment of becoming an instructional assistant. They appreciate the idea that mom is a “teacher.” One reported that she regularly tutors her grandchild because he is in the same grade that

she teaches. If she did not hold the position that she does, she stated that she probably would not be as connected to her grandson on a regular basis. Another participant stated that her children offered her as a tutor for their friends.

The subjects also responded to the need to attempt new things. One reported she is no longer afraid to try something new. She reported that she would literally become ill when she first started working and had to do something she had not done previously. She did not want to risk offending a parent or saying “the wrong thing.” Another participant discussed how she made materials and conducted research to assist in planning lessons for the teacher. Another participant spoke about learning to effectively use assistive technology to work with students. Table 2: Personal Attributes Outcomes further describes participants’ comments on patience, tolerance, appreciation for their children, initiative, and family interaction.

Table 2: Personal Attributes Outcomes

Subject	Patience	Tolerance	Appreciation for Their Children	Initiative	Family Interaction
Sara	To do this job, you must have lots of patience...and you must be flexible.	The job is high pace and stressful. To do it you have to have patience and tolerance. You never know what will happen from one minute to the next.	I am thankful for my kids and their health. It makes me appreciate them more.	I do whatever I have to for the students including their extracurricular activities. The teacher and principal have commented about how I do what needs to be done. I enjoy working with the kids.	I'm the main support. We enjoy being together and doing different things. I'm able to help my kids with their homework.
Eva	I have more patience than I thought I had.	I was always tolerant. There are a lot of behaviors in the school.	It makes me appreciate my kids more.... and not to take my kids for granted.	I enjoy ... making a difference in their lives. I understand them and am able to relate to them.	My children are older, so we spend more quality time together.
Louise	I now see things through the eyes of children.	I have to multitask and be flexible	When I see what could be. I am thankful things are not as severe with my kids.	I'm confident. Teachers can ask me to do something and they are assured that I will get it done.	Family members ask me to tutor, which gives me more time with the children in the family.
Colette	I thought I was already patient, but I'm even more patient now.	I'm more tolerant.... able to talk things out able to offer advice.	I really appreciate my kids are as healthy as they are.	I feel like I am a part of the team. We all work together.	I am able to use what I do in school with my child.

Paula	Sense of pride	Students needs come first.	It's great. I love working with the kids. Example to my kids. Kids in school are like my kids.	I am more confident. I feel capable of doing new things....I'm motivated.... and growing a lot.	Kids able to participate in more activities. Children volunteer Mom for tutoring of selves and friends.
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This graph shows the yearly gross paraprofessional salary of the participants in the study. The income range is \$10,000 to \$24,999. The participants also report additional jobs.

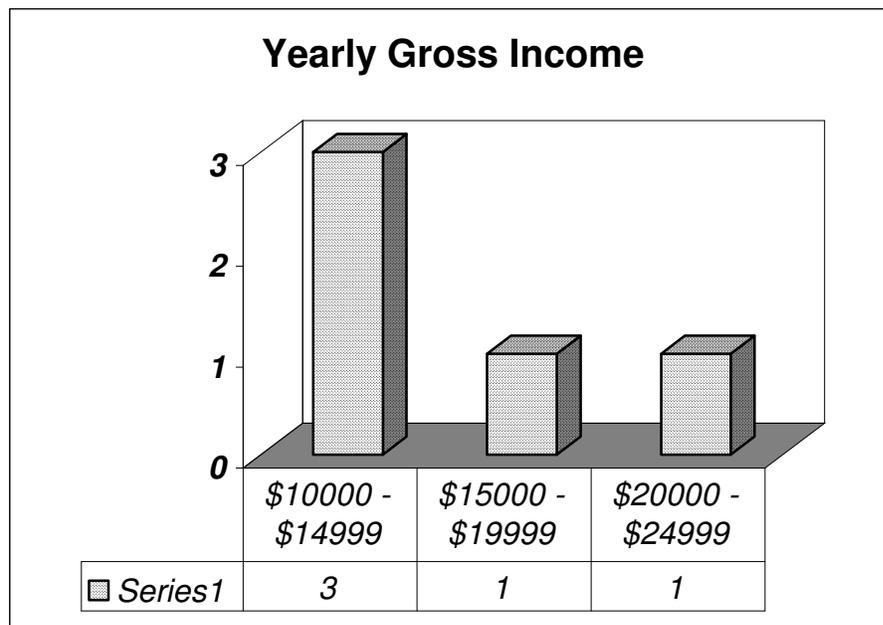


Figure 4: Yearly Gross Income

The study revealed that the training program model was highly effective in meeting the participants' needs to embark on their journey to self-sufficiency. However, only one of the five respondees indicated that she felt "pretty self-sufficient." The remaining four reported that the pay is low and believe that paraprofessionals should be

paid more. Two of the five reported they are working multiple jobs. The hourly income is approximately \$10.00 per hour for time worked, but the yearly gross income is less than the national average of \$20,000. Sara summarized the financial dilemma of transitioning to the workplace as a “lose-lose” situation for recipients of TANF because their benefits are immediately reduced or terminated as their income increases. Their income as noted in the Yearly Gross Income chart is not proportionate to the cost of living as the newly hired paraprofessional assumes responsibility for transportation, childcare, food and increased housing costs. One respondent earned an income significantly higher than the other four; her salary was \$24,000. This was a job opportunity that all of the participants in this study were qualified to assume if a similar position were available at the time of their program completion. The highest wage earner stated, “I probably would not have had the chance that I have now without the guidance to know what to put in the [cover] letter.”

Evidences of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

While seeking to understand the journey to self-sufficiency of the participants in this study, it was also noted that each participant was meeting specific basic needs. The physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, self-actualization and transcendence tendencies were evident within the data set.

Physiological Needs: After completing training and obtaining employment, five of the five participants stated that they had to assume more responsibility for financing their basic physiological needs. As their income increased, benefits from public assistance decreased. One subject termed this a lose-lose situation. However, all participants say they would rather work than be dependent on welfare. One student

reported the lack of personal privacy as recipients of welfare as a deterrent. The overall tone was that receiving assistance was fine when needed, but they all prefer to work and not have a need for it.

Safety Needs: Five of the five feel that they are reasonably safe. They have chosen to live in neighborhoods and work in schools that provide a sense of safety. They have also opted to place their children in schools that would provide the same sense of safety for them. Four of the five subjects live in the same residence that they resided during training. Their ability to provide safety was primarily established prior to their entrance into the program.

Belonging Needs: The five participants reported that they felt an integral part of their workplace. They felt that they contributed to the classroom and are valued for their contributions. As in any workplace, events occur that threaten to disrupt harmony and civility. Three of the five spoke about controversy and how they communicated effectively and professionally when it involved them and distancing themselves when it did not. The participants also cited a renewed appreciation of their family. One subject reported that her job has brought her closer to her children and their friends. Another cited increased time with her grandchild as a result of being employed as a paraprofessional. Overall, four of the five reported a close family relationship.

Esteem Needs: Five of the five participants experienced esteem of self and from others. They each reported that they felt respected at home and in the workplace. Their children were proud of their parents' position in the school. The children enjoyed the idea of their moms "being a teacher" or in this case teacher aide. The subjects had no illusion of their role and responsibility in the workplace, but their children expressed it

differently. All five of the subjects reported that they felt good about their life. They also recognized that they needed to do more to be self-sufficient. Their current employment position was a start. The careers that they are seeking are part of their planning a brighter future. The income levels were not recognized as sufficient by four of the five participants.

The first four basic needs or deficits described by Maslow were somewhat evident prior to their training and employment. It seems from the data collected that they are more cognizant of them now and the effects they have on their lives and others.

Evidence of Self-actualization and Transcendence Characteristics

The five subjects in this study demonstrated characteristics of self-sufficiency and transcendence as they moved toward self-sufficiency. They have all been employed for at least three years and a maximum of nine years. Those who were receiving cash assistance at time of enrollment are no longer receiving cash. However, some are working multiple jobs to make ends meet.

Four of the five subjects have increased their level of education by attending a local college. All subjects have participated in professional development to enhance their skills for direct service to the students they assist.

As a result of working as a paraprofessional, the five participants have increased their sense of reality. They are more aware of the environment around them and how things could be different such as noting the challenges experienced by some of their students. They also report they are able to manage behaviors and proceed with solution-oriented thoughts rather than excuses and blaming.

Five of the five indicated they can be independent thinkers and not rely on the judgments of others or social pressures. They try to instill the same in their students and children. They are also spontaneous and natural in their approach to work and home life. They choose to make their own informed decisions.

Five of the five indicated transcendence tendencies as they help others to fulfill their potential. To this extent, all five of the participants in this study stated that they have made a difference in the lives of students and the school. They are interested in helping people be their best, not changing them for the sake of change. They do accept others as they are.

As the subjects in this study journeyed to self-sufficiency by enrolling into the training program, successfully completing all components, acquiring and retaining employment, and helping others while helping themselves, they manifested self-actualization and transcendence characteristics. The sign is seen in their drive to continue forward to fulfill their potential. Self-actualizers do not stop as they achieve; it incites them to continue to seek fulfillments of life.

Summary

The research results conclude that the paraprofessionals in this study have been successful in securing and retaining employment. It also documents that they all express a passion for the work they perform. Four of the five respondents noted low wages, and three subjects stated that they have experienced financial hardships just as they had prior to entering the workforce.

1. The subjects report that the program met their expectations of attaining employment as a paraprofessional. The staff of the program was highly engaged in helping the subjects in this study to acquire the positions they currently hold.
2. The consensus of five out of the five participants is that the program's staff and the design of the program made a difference in their ability to complete the program.
3. In answer to the question of what else the program could have offered? All students said the program did what it was designed to do and that it met their expectations. As an example of an issue that was beyond the control of the program, Louise stated, "The only other thing you could have done was teach me to drive and buy me a car....That was not part of the program, so I don't think there was anything else you could have done... Everything else is up to the students."

Areas of concern included the facility, internships, and student population.

1. Over time the program has been housed in three locations. Participants cited the following problems: inadequate lighting; restrooms in too close proximity to the classroom; and the noise level present in facilities shared with other entities..
2. One participant stated her internship was an inadequate placement considering the job she secured.
3. The program's population was diverse and required strong classroom management skills for some students who were not prepared for the rigor of an adult education training program. These students were not prepared for the academic, social, physical and emotional commitment required to complete the

coursework. This was a reference to the younger population, but sometimes chronological age was not the hindrance but maturity. The program accepted eligible individuals who were at least 18 years of age.

The subjects offered these recommendations for the program.

1. The program should be designed to generate male participation.
2. The program would benefit the participants by incorporating a component that assisted student in enrolling into college.
3. The program should be credit-based, so that students would be granted college credits at the completion of the program.

This study sample does not appear to be one of living beyond their means, but one trying to find the financial means to live. Some are working two jobs and still are unable to meet the cost of living comfortably, which includes having enough money to pay for their utilities, rent, food, clothing and other necessities of life. The positive note is that the participants are persevering and when times get hard, they do not give up and do not think of seeking TANF. Their intention is to remain employed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Researcher's Reflection on the Program Studied

As I reflect on the paraprofessional training program, I remember those who were instrumental in making it a reality. The cooperation of the numerous organizations, schools, and the interdepartmental participation within the local education agency at the program's inception was truly remarkable. I think about the impact that the program had on so many participants over a period of eight years. The success of the program has been revealed in the testimonies of the trainees, the impact made on the schools in which they worked, the contributions to the communities in which they reside, and the ways in which they have touched the lives of others. The opportunities presented by programs of this type have been demonstrated despite the budget constraints that have cut or eliminated such initiatives.

Putting the Research in Perspective: The State of the Nation

This year, 2008, is a presidential election year in the United States of America. When the candidates address groups and the nation, they frequently speak to the crisis plaguing America's workforce. As companies downsize, outsource, and close, workers are displaced and are in need of training and education to become employable again. Arbitration requesting workers to relinquish a portion of their income, take a wage freeze or assume greater financial responsibility of healthcare have become commonplace. At the same time, low-income families are struggling to make ends meet to live comfortably, and to have basic life necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing. These issues raise great concern for the American economy. These necessities align with Abraham

Maslow's theory of hierarchical needs. Individuals cannot address their full potential unless their basic needs are addressed sufficiently. For America to have a society of well-adjusted citizens, basic life needs will have to be secured. It is the researcher's contention that self-actualization and transcendence characteristics displayed by the five subjects in this study have and will make long-term differences in our economy.

This research on workforce transitioning is timely indeed. On January 28, 2008, in his State of the Union Address, President George Bush outlined the conditions pertaining to the state of the nation. His speech contained resolves that are currently in place and those that are pending. The issue that is pertinent to this study is the state of the economy, especially as it relates to the working class and lower income households. President Bush (2008) stated, "America is leading the fight against global poverty, with strong education initiatives and humanitarian assistance." He went on to address the issue of trade and how it affects America's workforce. He stated,

Trade brings better jobs and better choices and better prices. Yet for some Americans, trade can mean losing a job, and the federal government has a responsibility to help. I ask Congress to reauthorize and reform trade adjustment assistance, so we can help these displaced workers learn new skills and find new jobs (Bush, State of the Union 2008).

This is good news for many Americans, but it pertains to only a small portion of the population. There are other groups that are unemployed and underemployed who have a need for training and employment programs. The quality of life for Americans remains in the forefront of the debates. At the time this research data was under review, Senator John Edwards conceded his bid for the democratic presidential nomination. However, he

did not concede without first addressing the issue of poverty and ensuring the nation that the two democratic contenders would carry the torch to end poverty in America. Not only should poverty be addressed effectively, but also the real impact that impoverishment has on individuals and subsequently the cost it has in societal ills. If individuals can address the basic deficits and move closer to the apex of Maslow's hierarchy, the nation as a whole will be better. When people possess characteristics of self-actualization and transcendence, the community has to be better. As positive differences are becoming evident as people realize their potential, the net effect to society will improve. Equally important, as individuals help others to realize their potentials, the effect is magnified. The researcher contends that this is evident in this study. As the subjects were able to address their basic deficit needs, they were also addressing the need to fulfill their potential. The difference made in their lives as a result of their journey to self-sufficiency is intrinsically and extrinsically displayed. Some of these characteristics were dormant and others nonexistent in their lives.

An Overview of the Study

This study was a critical analysis of a paraprofessional training program designed, developed, and implemented for those who have been identified as economically disadvantaged. The data was gathered through interviews and demographic surveys completed by each participant. During the course of the interview, the researcher collected notes as the participant told her story of training, transitioning to the workplace, and journeying to self-sufficiency. The mood during the interview was professional, personable, and collegial. The researcher was the coordinator of the paraprofessional training program at the time the program was operating. As the researcher listened to the

paraprofessionals speak the language of an educator, she realized they had truly transitioned into the school culture. As the researcher listened for the story, she began to better understand the plight of those transitioning to the workplace as economically and/or academically disadvantaged.

Findings and Conclusions

Overall, the program was a highly successful venture for the five subjects in the study as indicated by their responses. They achieved their primary goal of attaining employment and developing a consistent work history as paraprofessionals.

This section will closely examine the two research questions. To answer the first question, the researcher used the interview transcripts and notes generated during the completion of the survey.

1. How did the paraprofessional training program components impact the trainees' capacity to successfully complete the program and retain employment?

Paraprofessional Training Program

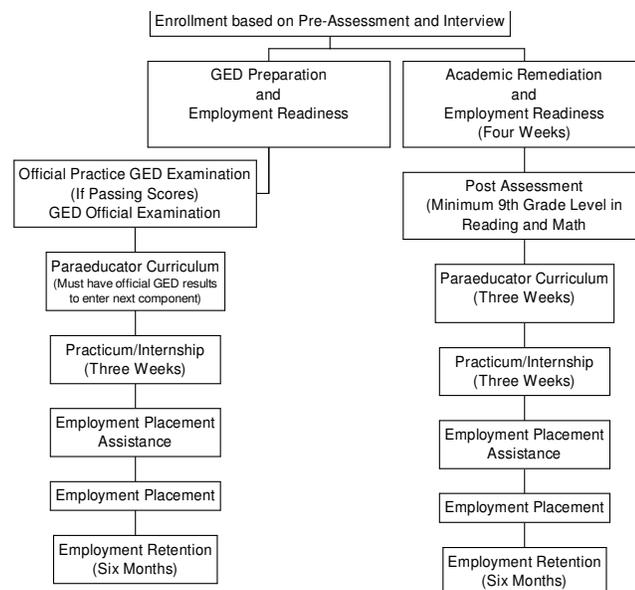


Figure 5. Paraprofessional Training Program

Following a linear program model, the paraprofessional training program was comprehensive, sequential and short-term. The major components of the program included academic remediation, teacher aide curriculum, internship/practicum, employment placement assistance and retention, and case management throughout the training and the first six months of employment.

Test Results and Academic Remediation: An item analysis of the trainee's standardized test was used to determine initial placement in the program's remediation course. A plan of study was given to the trainee and carefully monitored by the instructor to ensure satisfactory completion. In addition to teaching the content, trainees were also taught applicable pedagogy to prepare for instructing in the PreK–12 classrooms. Whether a person had a high school diploma, General Education Diploma, associate's degree or bachelor degree, they all needed to know and understand effective instructional strategies across grade levels. The trainees were also taught how to create technology-based lesson plans using presentation and word processing software packages. The subjects in this study had minimal computer skills at the time of program entry. After completing the technology assignments, the students were proficient in creating lessons, writing resumes and cover letter, and using electronic devices for the classroom and job search. Technology skills have proven to be an asset to the paraprofessionals as they prepare small group activities using PowerPoint and a Smartboard, the Internet as a research tool, or word processing for employment search. The trainee who had to take the ParaPro Assessment to become highly qualified stated she benefited from the elements in this component of the program.

Paraprofessional Curriculum: The paraprofessional curriculum was a requirement for all candidates in the program. The course included communication skills, behavior and classroom management, roles and responsibilities, special needs and instructional strategies. This component assisted the students in developing the skills, habits and attitude to be successful in the classroom. Working with their certified classroom teacher, the five subjects in this study reported that they felt more confident in the classroom because of the paraprofessional curriculum. They also reported the teacher respected their abilities and valued their contributions in the classroom. One subject reported that she was recognized for her students' high performance on the PSSA. This occurred during her first year as an employee of the school. This attests to the knowledge and skills the subject has developed in working with small groups.

Internship/Practicum. The internship was a place students could put theory into practice under the careful guide of a teacher. It was to be a non-threatening environment that was specifically chosen for the candidate. The host teacher monitored the trainees' progress and submitted evaluations after the first week and at the end of the third week. This data was used to determine if the trainee satisfactorily met the requirements of an intern and if a Certificate of Successful Completion would be issued to the candidate. The subjects commented that the internship placement should be more like the job they will eventually obtain. The intent of the internship was to place students in the real world of work. The ideal transition was to have trainees placed in internships where they would be most interested in working upon completion of their training. This gives both the trainee and the administrators the opportunity to observe for compatibility. Three of the five subjects in this study were hired by the school districts that hosted their internship. Four

of the five subjects in this study have maintained consistent employment with their initial employment placement. One was furloughed but was rehired when an opening came available. She continues to work in this initial school placement at the time of this study. The program had access to school districts and other educational entities countywide for internship and employment options.

2. How did the paraprofessional training program components affect the trainees' ability to manage their journey to self-sufficiency?

All of the subjects in this study stated that the program met their expectations. The program provided the five subjects the opportunity to attain a paraprofessional training certificate, employment and a start to their journey of self-sufficiency. The case management offered throughout their training assisted the trainees in meeting their initial career goal of becoming a paraprofessional by assisting in the resolution of barriers that may have challenged program completion, employment acquisition, and employment retention.

For the subjects in this study, continuing education is one of the options to move closer to self-sufficiency. Four of the five participants presently have some college credits. Two of the five participants had associate degrees prior to entering the program. They reported that they have continued their education by attending workshops specific to their employment responsibilities. Two other subjects are currently enrolled in a community college. One currently holds a teacher education diploma from the college and needs 7 more credits to earn an associate's degree; the other subject completed her first semester in December 2007. The fifth subject reported she would like to attend college in the near future. To continue this journey of self-sufficiency, the subjects in this

study will benefit by becoming aspiring educators. They will need at minimum two more years of college to attain a bachelor's degree. This would give them an income closer to economic independence. I recommend that programs similar to the paraprofessional training program take an active role in mapping the trainees' next step after program completion. This was also suggested by one of the subjects in this study.

Next Steps: Implications of the Study for Students, Local Education Agencies,
Funders, Schools and Organizations

Implications for Students: A Highly Effective Training Program

The paraprofessional training and employment program ceased operations June 30, 2006. According to the subjects in this study, the program made a difference in their lives. They are all employed and enjoying their positions as paraprofessionals in educational settings. They are also certain that they make a difference in the lives of the students they are hired to serve. The subjects unanimously agreed that the program was beneficial to them and that it would have been beneficial to others. If a similar program opens in the future, it would be advantageous to incorporate similar guidelines and core curricula of this paraprofessional training and employment program. This study finds that the program worked as it was intended for these five subjects. The model in Table 2 outlines the traits that made a difference. From the data collected and analyzed in this study, the following elements were noted as essential qualities of highly effective training and employment programs.

Table 3: Essential Elements of Highly Effective Training Programs

Goals and objectives are clearly stated	Program goals and objectives must be clearly defined, articulated, known, and understood by the participants. When students know the outcome, they can proceed with a definite purpose.
Experiences are clearly outlined and valid	The experiences provided in the program must be appropriate and necessary for participants to achieve the stated goals efficiently and effectively. All components of the program must be relevant and consistent, yet flexible enough to accommodate the diversities of learners.
Transferring of skills	Knowledge and skills taught in the classroom must be readily and immediately transferable to the workforce. Participants must be taught how to transfer their acquired skills.
Evidence of progress are clearly labeled	An on-going assessment process must be in place to mark milestones. This gives students the opportunity to reflect on their progress; it also serves as a motivator to continue. Success breeds success.
Evaluation of the program	The learner must have the opportunity to provide feedback about the program based on its goals and actual outcomes for the participant. The learner must also note areas for improvement and areas of strengths.
Purposeful incentives	The program must have tangible benefits that are meaningful, specific, and worthwhile to sustain student's participation and to affect motivation.

Implications for Local Education Agency: Program Model for the Nation:

The results of this study concluded that the paraprofessional training and employment program provided an extraordinary means for initiating self-sufficiency, personal growth, and professional development for those designated as academically and/or educationally disadvantaged. The five subjects in this study are greatly appreciative and highly satisfied with the outcomes realized from their participation in the paraprofessional program. They are happy with their employment even under stressful periods. They have found a cause to champion --education for the students in

their classroom, their own children, and themselves as they seek opportunities for academic achievement and personal fulfillment. The mission of education is to provide the best options and opportunities for learners to succeed. This paraprofessional training program described in this study provided the perfect opportunity to obtain employment as a paraprofessional and to jumpstart a career in the field of education, as noted by the subjects. Working in a school setting has a symbol of prestige and pride; it is not a symbol of boasting, but one of privilege to be able to help others to someday help themselves through academic, social, and physical achievements. The paraprofessional training program addressed the educational needs of those designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged by expediting their entrance in the workforce through short-term vocational training. Within the local education agency, there existed the capacity and resources to administer this program and similar programs as one-stop-facilities. The agency is noted as an educational service agency with the personnel, networking capabilities, and educational resources and expertise to be a model for the nation in workforce development. As this study attests, this training program could possibly have been a model for the nation.

Implications for the Funding Agencies: Building Longevity for Employees

Employment acquisition and employment retention for those designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged were primary goals set by the human service agency for the paraprofessional program, in which the five individuals participated. This study revealed that not only was employment obtained by participants but at an average hourly wage of 42% above the minimum stipulation. Additionally, the six-month retention rate for employment was exceeded. This study revealed that

participants find a joy in working with students and have remained on the job beyond the retention stipulation. This paraprofessional training program provided an excellent return on investment. Successful graduates from the program's first cohort in 1998 are still employed. This means that 9 ½ years later trainees are still employed in their initial placement. Longevity is the optimal term. My recommendation is that the eligibility guidelines for program participation be extended to encompass more of the unemployed or underemployed persons in the county; that measures be incorporated to include rather than exclude individuals who are economically disadvantaged. This would make the cost per student ratio miniscule while realizing high percentage gains in employment and retention.

Implications for Educational Settings: Highly Qualified Workforce

The five subjects in this study indicated that they were prepared to accept their position as paraeducators in an educational setting. All reported that they have made important contributions to the classrooms and the students they assist. One student noted that the technology that once frightened her prior to training is now one of the greatest assets she uses in instructing students. This paraprofessional training program had developed a reputation of providing well-qualified paraprofessionals for diverse populations, resulting in the program becoming an employment bank for educational entities. Sometimes districts made a request for paraprofessionals and at other times the program staff initiated contact. It was a reciprocal relationship as schools were able to fill vacancies, and the program was able to provide employment placements for their successful graduates.

Implications for the Department of Public Welfare: Self-sufficiency Journey

All of the participants in the study successfully completed the program and have been employed consistently for a minimum of two years and a maximum of 9 ½ years, At its minimum, it more than triples the retention requirement of six months. The study constituted individuals of various backgrounds in terms of age, academic levels, work experience, and previous employment. The data collected also revealed commonalities in terms of program expectations and the short-term goal of entering the workplace as a paraeducators. This paraprofessional training program affected change in the lives of trainees by building their capacity to enter the workforce and develop a career path. The trainees completed the program and entered the workforce at levels exceeding the minimum requirements established by the funders in terms of income, benefits options, and employment retention. This was definitely a win-win situation for all stakeholders.

Preparation for Future Training of Similar Participants

The findings from this study support the paraprofessional training program's current design as an ideal model to transition unemployed and underemployed adults into the workforce. The road to self-sufficiency became more attainable as the five participants increased their capacity to earn higher wages and envision a brighter future for themselves.

As this study has demonstrated, future programs should include (1) training that segue into careers, (2) offer on-the-job training and/or practicum, (3) incomes commensurate with the cost of living and do not create an environment of the working poor, (4) extension of programs to include college level academic programs, (5) financial aid policies for college tuition relative to the population's needs, and (6) significant case

management to ensure their road to self-sufficiency is not blocked because of lack of information or resources.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following research is recommended on the basis of this study in order to understand, promote and develop career opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed in our nation.

1. A longitudinal study of the distinguished graduates of the paraprofessional training program to document their self-sufficiency journey over time. Self-sufficiency has a potential to stretch over decades as the trainees work fulltime and pursue education part-time.
2. An examination of the paraprofessional training program from the perspective of those who did not successfully complete the training. Understanding their plight could give greater insight into how that segment of the program population could have been successful.
3. An analysis of the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional before and after enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act 2001. This could have significant implications in understanding student achievement and performance.
4. If there are new programs established similar to the paraprofessional training program in this study, they should be well publicized so that those who need it could take advantage. Programs such as these are a benefit to the participants, their families, the students they serve and society in general, as the five participants indicated.

5. The perception of the paraprofessional role and responsibilities in the classroom as noted by the teacher, the paraprofessional and the student. This data could be used to determine if the paraprofessionals' skills and knowledge are effectively used in the classroom.
6. If a program similar to the studied paraprofessional training program is instituted, more males should be recruited for training to allow them to garner skills, obtain employment that provide income, and reduce the social ills associated with no work. The data gleaned from their experiences in a similar program could prove invaluable to research on training, self-actualization and societal conditions.
7. A comparative analysis of the roles and responsibilities of the special education and the Title I paraprofessional. This could identify key components for specific training.
8. A comprehensive study of paraprofessionals who have become certified teachers. This information could produce a wealth of knowledge involving the transition of paraprofessionals to professional educators.
9. A statewide wage analysis of income and benefits of highly qualified paraprofessionals. Significant data could be collected to generate serious conversation about the income gaps in paraprofessional positions.
10. To study programs similar to the paraprofessional training program to increase public awareness of the plight of America's working poor to affect change that extends to individuals, society, and the nation. The benefit to affecting social policies and combating social ills are invaluable and inevitable.

The plight of the working poor is being seriously neglected. It is incumbent upon our nation's leaders to include the economically disadvantaged population in their plan for changing the way America conducts business. The change must not only focus on the middle and upper classes, but it must address the issues of the impoverished within our society, including the working poor.

As the presidential candidates in this 2008 election continue to reiterate a campaign for change in response to the failing economy, they must not continue to ignore America's poor. One of the answers for those of severe economic strife is to implement education and training that is purposeful, meaningful, and leads to productive work. The combination of a sense of purpose and productivity will reduce the social ills that plague our nation today by affecting change that extends to individuals, classrooms, schools, society, and the nation.

The phrase, "the fierce urgency of now," continues to ring out as the economy falters, war escalates, and tragedy multiplies within our communities and throughout our nation. The urgency to address the stability of our nation must not exclude nor neglect our population at the lowest economic echelon. The time is now; the need is great; and our nation must respond to all economic levels in a positive and responsive manner.

The research generated by this study has demonstrated the connections between purposed training, productive work, attainment of self-sufficient and self-actualization, and the pleasurable transcendence in contributing to the development of others. Hopefully, research will aid the unemployed and underemployed, so that through their positive gains, they may better participate in the nation's vitality.

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Appendix A

Paraprofessional Training and Employment Program

REVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Introduction to the Paraprofessional Training and Employment Program

This study was designed to examine the efficacy of an adult training and employment program for those designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged in southwestern Pennsylvania. National, state and local governments have allocated dollars to create self-sufficiency opportunities for those who are unemployed or underemployed. At the time of this program operation, funds were provided through the local human service agency and delivered to local agencies for education and workforce readiness programs.

Throughout a quarter century of teaching and/or coordinating adult literacy and workforce education programs, I have seen the impact it has had on individuals. I have been able to teach skills and to increase the knowledge base of people from various backgrounds. However, I truly believe that there is more to educating people than increasing reading, writing, and math levels. Behind the traditional education, I believe there are other lessons being taught vicariously. I also recognize and know that adults bring vast experiences that enhance the learning environment. What are these lessons and are they applicable to enhancing employability, life skills, and self-actualization of adult learners?

When one is without employment, it can be devastating. There are many obstacles to overcome and hurdles to clear. Deciding on a career is difficult when young but even more so for adults. To have limited options is even more difficult. This is the existence of programming in the county today. Educational programs are being eliminated and/or

scaled down. This has done a great disservice to the population that is in great need, specifically those who attend adult education and workforce development training.

The Need for the Paraprofessional Program

The paraprofessional training program was funded to enhance the self-sufficiency for individuals of low-income status. The training was to be short-term in an attempt to expedite their transition from public assistance, underemployment or unemployment to wages leading to self-sufficiency. Equally important, the program was designed and implemented to provide highly skilled paraprofessional employees for schools and educational centers throughout the host county and surrounding region.

The program consistently met the performance standards established by the human service agency for participants' program completion, employment placement, entry-level wages, benefits and employment retention rate. The program has not been formally examined for its value and impact on its trainees, specifically the successful graduates of the program as they transitioned to the workforce as paraprofessionals.

In proposing the paraprofessional training program, there were many factors to consider and barriers to address to ensure the appropriateness of the training for the population to be served. An authentic learning environment that simulated the workforce was crucial for preparation. Aligning the curricula with national, local and state standards for paraprofessionals were significantly important.

Adult Basic Education and Workforce Development Program

In April of 1984, the local education agency with funding from the Job Training Partnership Act developed, designed and implemented community-based literacy and adult education classes throughout the county. The classes were designed to prepare

adults who were experiencing economic and academic hardships to enter adult basic education, GED preparation and remediation to enhance their skills and to provide them with the opportunity to enter post secondary programs and/or gainful employment. The 2005-2006 program year marked the twenty-first year that the adult education programs either met or exceeded performance standards set by the funding source.

A certified teacher and case manager staffed each classroom. The supervisor of the program served as the liaison for the classroom and central office. Eventually funding became available for a coordinator to perform the duties of program maintenance and operation.

Historical Development of the Training Program

The paraprofessional training and employment program was an outgrowth of the highly successful adult basic education and workforce development program described above. The paraprofessional training program also received funds from the county's human service agency and fee-based payments for city-sponsored residents. In 2002, the program was permitted to seek alternative funding to offset the cost to the county. At that time, the staff began to work with a neighboring county to secure interested candidates to train as paraprofessionals for their home county. In a partnership with the neighboring local education agency, the paraprofessional training program was able to secure ten additional practicum placement sites. In 2003, the paraprofessional program graduated its first trainee from this neighboring partnership. This not only proved beneficial for the trainee, but also for the training program because it developed another base for student recruitment, practicum training and employment placement.

This program modeled the work environment. The class schedule simulated a typical school workday. The necessity to be punctual, regular in attendance, and prepared for the day was important for program compliance. Sanctions could and were imposed whenever necessary by the county assistance office and the human service agency to ensure and monitor progress for successful program completion. On the other hand, there were also incentives available if the participant remained in compliance with established guidelines. The incentives included but were not limited to vouchers to be used at local retail stores.

The former directors of the local education agency's human resources division and adult education programs partnered and collaborated with the five divisions to make this training program a reality. This consortium met regularly to determine the employment needs of the agency and the program's projection of available employee candidates. Conversation also included understanding current trends to ensure the program's viability as a source for employee candidates for preschool, K-12, and special education programs. Initially, approximately fifty percent of the successful graduates accepted employment with the local education agency, and the remaining graduates were hired by other private and public educational entities. Over the lifetime of the program, options for employment placements increased and varied giving students the opportunity to select the best match for them.

The Inception – Addressing the Need

This initiation of this program was need driven. It satisfied three primary needs.

1. The local education agency had a need for highly skilled and trained paraprofessionals to staff its schools and classrooms.

2. The human service agency needed service providers who could deliver short-term training and employment opportunities to expedite the workforce transitioning of those designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged.
3. The adult basic education program needed to remain a viable and select provider for the education and training of those designated as economically and/or academically disadvantaged.

The program was a unique county-funded program. At its inception, it had direct and complete support from the local education agency. It provided a model for agency-wide cooperation and collaboration. The agency not only had the capacity to operate the program, but also the infrastructure as an educational service agency to develop a seamless transition for participants from the paraprofessional training classroom as students to the agency's classrooms as instructional assistants. Not many programs would have the resources to train, educate and employ an extensive portion of its trainees. This training was designed to foster careers and to have a positive impact on the trainees and their families. Striving to be the best that one can be was an integral part of the program. As students learned to better manage their basic life needs, they also began to articulate the need for fulfilling their career goals, dreams and hopes.

Participation Eligibility

The paraprofessional training and employment program was a high interest program for both participants and potential employers. However, the eligibility constraints as determined by the funding source limited the number of people served each year. Since the program was mandated to serve specific sectors of the economically

disadvantaged populations, many who were interested and would benefit from the services were deemed ineligible. For example, clients who were not receiving cash assistance (possibly medical and food stamps only clients) through the public welfare offices were often ineligible. Some of the most needy were being excluded. Classrooms were sparsely populated because of specific guidelines that limited rather than included. Therefore, the need to rethink and to reauthorize becomes paramount at the legislative levels. This would make programs such as the paraprofessional training program more cost effective and yield a greater return on investment.

Recruitment and Publicity

The program had an active and continuous recruitment process including but not limited to printed materials, media advertising, and community canvassing. Mass mailing and delivery to public, social and governmental agencies generated much interest and request for information. The area's free local newspaper was a strong source for securing inquiries. Each week hundreds of calls were documented after its publication.

Success

The overall program was successful for the participants and the schools they served. Trainees persevered and accomplished their short-term goal of training and employment. Trainees were diverse, so their accomplishments were measured against their own accomplishments. We believe that success breeds success and that personal achievements make the difference.

Although some were not successful in meeting the specified goals of the paraprofessional training program, they were successful in some aspect. Some participants accepted other employment opportunities because conditions existed that

precluded them from hire in the field of education. Others made a decision to not work in a school environment. These persons were at a minimum because of the eligibility and entrance screening processes employed by the various agencies. As a literacy and job readiness model, the paraprofessional training staff had the capacity and responsibility to develop the necessary skills for other employment options. This alternative promoted a model for individual success and fostered the best match for the client and the employer. The majority of those who did not complete the training cited medical issues as a cause. Upon resolution of these issues, the trainees could possibly return and complete their training if deemed eligible by the human service agency and consent of the local education agency.

This program was effective in many ways including number of program completers, hourly wages, employment placements, and employment retention. It was now time to look closely at outcomes that were not generally considered or had not been articulated. There was a wealth of information to be discovered that could bring us closer to meeting the needs of the workforce and training initiatives. One of the goals was to meet the training needs of the participants and the educational settings they might be employed. Another was to apply case management strategies that would assist the trainees in their journey to self-sufficiency.

The Paraprofessional Program Curricula Description

The program was a ten-week training that included a four-week job readiness and academic remediation component, a three-week paraeducation curriculum, and a three-week practicum. The program consisted of employment placement assistance, employment counseling, and a minimum of six months employment retention services.

The training was approximately 325 hours with classes meeting Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. including a half hour lunch. Classes were centrally located within the county and city limits. Practicum and employment placements were determined individually to meet the specific interests, abilities, and accessibility for the trainees. Upon completion, the graduate received a certificate of successful completion. Most importantly, the graduate increased his or her marketability and the opportunity to be considered for positions previously not opened to them.

The program's curriculum was aligned with national and state standards and laws. It not only addressed the participants' barriers, but it also incorporated the knowledge, skills, attributes, disposition, and decision for entering the field of education.

Entrance Requirements

The human services agency determined initial eligibility; the training provider conducted the final selection and acceptance. Trainees had to be at least 18 years old, proficient in the English language, able to acquire Act 33 and 34 clearances, minimum reading and math levels at seventh grade to be remediated to at least the ninth to enter the paraeducation component, and a genuine interest in the training as determined by the enrollment counselor through informal questioning. The majority of participants' reading and math scores were typically higher than the required entrance and remediation levels of seventh and ninth respectively.

There were many personalities in the paraprofessional training program. The diversities in abilities, work readiness, social adeptness, and physical capacity created a classroom environment that respected diversity. However, there are also common themes, but each case is unique. I believe there are also underlying connections to their

experiences, training, and personal attributes that impacted their ability to complete the program and to retain employment over time.

The program objectives were revised in 2005 as it prepared its proposal for the 2005-2006 program year.

Academic and Job readiness Objectives:

1. The overall goals for the academic program include raising test scores for all students to at least the ninth grade level in reading and math.
2. To review basic English skills (grammar, capitalization and sentence structure).
3. To practice everyday and employability writing skills (notes, documentations, letters of application, resumes, cover letters, business letters and thank you letters).
4. To establish personal development plan, work habits and ethics that includes goal setting, attendance, punctuality, team building, job interview techniques, communication skills and conflict resolution.

Teacher Aide Curriculum Objectives:

1. Identify the characteristics of special needs students: Learning Disabilities, Mental Retardation, Autism, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and Attention Deficit Disorders.
2. Develop skills to function as a member of a collaborative team.
3. Demonstrate active listening and clear communication skills.
4. Explain and demonstrate confidentiality policies and procedures.
5. Know and distinguish the roles and responsibilities of the employment position.
6. Develop proactive strategies to prevent disruptive student behavior.
7. Apply skills to de-escalate verbal confrontation.
8. Demonstrate basic emergency procedures.
9. Demonstrate basic competency in meeting the physical needs of special needs students.
10. Develop an awareness of a variety of instructional strategies and adaptations.

Internship/Practicum Objectives:

Internships are designed to prepare the paraeducator trainee for employment with both *typical* and special needs students.

1. To give the trainee a hands on experience in a school before starting a job.
2. To expose the trainee to a daily school routine as compared to a class schedule.
3. To give the students an opportunity to observe various teaching styles.
4. To observe and interact with a diverse population of school aged students.

The paraprofessional training program was a model for workforce training. Its agency's history of collaborating, training and serving as a leader in educational services created an environment conducive to meeting the needs of schools, learners and the labor force.

Paraprofessional Program Ceased Operations

The paraprofessional training and employment program ceased operations June 30, 2006.

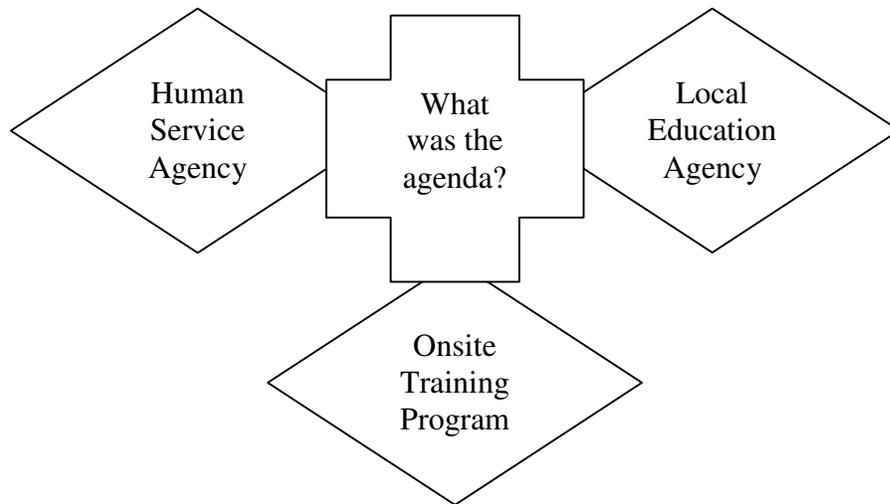


Figure 6. Key Entities of the Program

What is the mindset of individuals and agencies who make the decision to discontinue human services to those who have been categorized as “most vulnerable” in our society? To answer this question, the researcher identified the key entities responsible for the paraprofessional program’s implementation, continuation and finally dissolution. On the surface and in the hearts and minds of service agencies and their personnel, the fulfillment of the needs of humans should be foremost. However, economics, politics, and agendas sometimes become a nemesis in the decision-making process. After approximately eight years of exemplary service to communities, schools, and children,

the paraprofessional training program ceased operations on June 30, 2006. Who is to blame, if anyone? How was the decision derived? Whom did it benefit? Whom did it hurt? What were the alternatives? Finally, what is the human cost? These questions can readily be addressed by focusing on the 3 entities – the human service agency, the local education agency, and the onsite paraprofessional training program - in the diagram above.

We must assume by virtue of the vision and mission statements posted by the human service and host educational agency that responding to the welfare of individuals is primary. If this is the case, where was the breakdown in continuing services to our “vulnerable” population who attended and would attend the paraprofessional training program to initiate their self-sufficiency? Even though the official record lists lack of funds for discontinuation of services, other factors must have been considered. From its inception, the paraprofessional training program was a win-win situation for all three entities. The human service agency needed to provide employment opportunities for the clients they served. The host educational agency needed well-trained paraprofessionals to staff their classrooms. The onsite training program remained functional and was able to provide students with the skills and knowledge to enter meaningful and career-potential employment as qualified paraprofessionals.

What were the primary roles of the identified entities? The human service agency distributed the funds to operate the paraprofessional program with specific outcomes to be achieved by the participants enrolled in the program. The outcomes included employment with wages slightly above minimum wage, benefits being offered, and participants’ retaining employment for a minimum of six months. The human service

agency also determined the participants' enrollment eligibility. The local educational agency was the host and official administrator of the paraprofessional training program, including program development, fiscal accountability and compliance responsiveness. At the inception of the program, the host agency collaborated across divisions to ensure that the program met the training and hiring needs of the agency and other educational settings. The onsite program maintained the daily operation of the program including, training, student recruitment and retention, employment placement and retention, documentation of program performance, and program marketing.

Over the years, the three entities worked together to ensure that the paraprofessional program remained a viable and attractive option for trainees. The paraprofessional training program was included on the Workforce Investment Board's 2003 Gold Star provider list recognizing its success with clients. So, who is to blame, if anyone and how was the decision derived? As the dollars available to the human service agency for training began to shrink, eligibility requirements for student participation in the program remained limited, which excluded many. This limitation affected the cost per student in terms of dollars, but not in terms of human development and overall services to the community-at-large. Despite this challenge, the onsite program staff was able to secure enrollments through alternative funding to offset the cost. The local educational agency needed self-supporting and self-sustaining programs. When the funding crisis of the human service agency was evident, the educational agency's response was clear - without funding, the program would close. The alternate sources of funds were fee-based per client and would not support the program's structure. However, at the inception of the paraprofessional program, the agency worked across divisions to ensure that the program

would be a success. The divisions had a vested interest because they benefited from the services provided by the program. The agency-wide vision of the program slowly lost its vigor as the original team was replaced with new and current employees as a result of attrition. The true impact of the program's closing is probably realized now as the employment columns are filled with the need for well-trained paraprofessionals, which many were previously filled by the paraprofessional program's successful graduates.

The closing of the paraprofessional training program did not benefit anyone or any agency. On the contrary, it is a great loss to everyone involved – the agencies, future trainees, schools, students, and society-at-large. Imagine discontinuing an educational service that benefited adults, children, families, and society. This program was a new beginning for some. It gave them the skills and knowledge not only to serve as a paraprofessional in a school, but also the skills and disposition to be an asset to the students, the teachers, the school, and their homes. As our country continues to strive for academic excellence among our school children, we must be more responsive in providing the opportunities at the local level to make a difference. This paraprofessional program provided a means to a journey of self-sufficiency, self-actualization and self-transcendence for its participants. As trainees matriculated through the program and then into the workforce, they made a difference in the lives of others while addressing the fulfillment of their own potential. This certainly is a win-win solution for all.

Dollars alone cannot be the bottom line for determining potential life-changing and life-sustaining events. If education is one of the equalizers of men, then we must be prepared to educate our population. We must be resourceful and understand the magnitude of our responsibilities and capabilities as educators and service providers. This

program could have become a model for our nation - a model where families and schools are positively impacted by bringing them together to educate children within the communities.

What were the alternatives to closing the paraprofessional program? Perhaps we could have been more vigilant and intuitive in responding to the funding issue. We could have been creative in designing and developing partnerships and collaborations that would be mutually beneficial in sharing resources and monitoring cost effectiveness. Most importantly, we could have evaluated the opportunity being eliminated and its real cost to individuals and society both now and in the future.

The human cost in closing the program will be manifested in years to come. How many of our school age children will miss the opportunity to be schooled by well prepared paraprofessionals? How many good teachers will suffer “burnout” as a result of lack of assistance in their classrooms? How many homes will continue to be disrupted because of the lack of emphasis on education? How many paraprofessionals to teacher careers will be eliminated? Above all, how many from our designated “vulnerable” population will not be hired by schools and will miss career opportunities that may lead to self-sufficiency, self-actualization and transcendence?

The paraprofessional program concluded its training operations approximately two years ago. In those two years, how many loss opportunities have occurred for people who are unemployed and underemployed? For most, teaching is not only a profession but also a passion. It is a calling that generates self-fulfillment in the midst of its stresses as identified by the subjects in this study. As a result of closing this program, some individuals’ dreams and goals may not only be deferred but denied forever. Some may

settle for another career; others may be fortunate to secure a paraprofessional position on their own. Either case, I ask what really happens when opportunities are not deferred but denied.

I asked you to imagine discontinuing an educational service that benefited adults, children, families, and society. We don't have to imagine; it occurred and the ramifications may be extensive over time. As a result of this study, the researcher suggests that opportunities for careers in education be formulated as career paths for the population studied and for which the program existed. Moving forward from the closing of the paraprofessional program, it would be advantageous that a semblance of this program be instituted statewide under the direction of multiple stakeholders where we seek to include rather than exclude participation, collaboration, partnerships and funding options.

Appendix B
Local Education Agency Description

Local Education Agency

The local education agency is a product of the state legislature. It was instituted to support local school districts' capacity to provide educational opportunities and options for their schools, families, and communities. Through a series of collaborative opportunities, the agency and school districts realized cost-savings and cost-effective initiatives.

The agency provides services to the 42 school districts in the county, along with programs for infants to adults in traditional and nontraditional settings. The services are administered countywide through federal, state, county and private funding. Additionally, professional development services and cost-saving partnerships are offered to districts to maximize personnel productivity and to enhance financial responsiveness. To expedite these services professionally, comprehensively, and expeditiously, the agency has approximately 2,000 employees and hundreds of programs in strategic locations. To this end, the agency has been a leading resource in its region.

Under the direction of a Board of Directors selected from the school districts in the county, the agency continues to seek opportunities for growth and development within the learning communities in the region. A leadership team led by the executive director has been instrumental in identifying initiatives and assembling personnel to manifest its vision and mission while attending to the daily operations.

In 2004, the agency received Middle States Accreditation. Through the accreditation process, the organization developed and documented its belief, vision, and mission statements, which culminated into its existing strategic plan. This plan is reviewed periodically to remain current with its objectives.

Belief Statements

1. The [agency] is dedicated to enhancing learning and increasing student performance.
2. The [agency] is responsible for supporting life-long learning.
3. The [agency] is a source of leadership and services that anticipates needs resulting in educational opportunities for all learners.
4. The [agency] programs are service oriented, data driven, and cost effective.
5. The [agency] promotes and models collaboration to enrich learning opportunities.

Vision Statement

The [agency] is committed to providing educational options and opportunities that maximize achievement for all learners. The [agency] will anticipate the needs of school districts and other learning communities. We will be an innovator of educational options and operational efficiencies and a valued collaborative partner.

Mission Statement

The [agency] is an educational service agency supporting schools, families, and communities. We model and promote effective research-based practices in teaching and learning. Through partnerships and collaborative leadership, we provide instruction and services, which meet the needs of our diverse community of learners.

Strategic Plan

The Board of Directors unanimously approved the [agency's] Strategic Plan in 2003. The plan was developed during the planning sessions for Middle States Accreditation and continues to chart the course of the organization. Action plans were

developed for six areas, which are continuously reviewed for objective attainment. The areas include student achievement, program evaluation, internal communications, public relations and marketing, and systems change.

Location

The [agency] relocated in 2003 to a newly built facility in the heart of a newly development region. The facility is a state-of-the-art construction, which is recognized for its functionality and accessibility. This administrative service location has satellite offices and programs throughout the county servicing schools, learners, and communities with efficacy. The organization's website enumerates and describes the educational services available to the public. As a leader and innovator of research-based and cost effective services, the community is welcome to contact the agency for specific needs and to participate in its host of programming services.

Appendix C

Mission Statements of Collaborating Agencies and Departments

Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Department of Public Welfare,
Workforce Education, and the Allegheny Intermediate Unit

Mission Statements of Collaborating Agencies and Departments

Linkages of Support

<p style="text-align: center;">Department of Human Services</p>
<p>The [local] Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for providing and administering publicly funded human services to Allegheny County residents. DHS is dedicated to meeting these human services needs, most particularly for the county's most vulnerable populations, through an extensive range of prevention, early intervention, crisis management and after-care services.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Department of Public Welfare Mission Statement</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Promote, improve and sustain the quality of family life; Break the cycle of dependency; Promote respect for employees Protect and serve Pennsylvania's most vulnerable citizens; And Manage our resources effectively.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Workforce Education</p>
<p>Workforce Education is defined as work-related learning experiences which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• can include foundation skills, technical knowledge and computer skills;• serve either employed or unemployed workers;• are provided either inside or outside the workplace;• focus on the skills and knowledge workers need to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ get and keep good jobs and○ meet demands for productivity, safety, and advancement.
<p style="text-align: center;">Local Education Agency</p>
<p>The [local education agency] is an educational service agency supporting schools, families, and communities. We model and promote effective research-based practices in teaching and learning. Through partnerships and collaborative leadership, we provide instruction and services, which meet the needs of our diverse community of learners.</p>

Appendix D

CEC Knowledge and Skill Base for All Beginning Special Education Paraeducators

CEC Knowledge and Skill Base for All Beginning Special Education Paraeducators

Special Education Standard #1:

Foundations

Knowledge:	
PE1K1	Purposes of programs for individuals with exceptional learning needs.
PE1K2	Basic educational terminology regarding students, programs, roles, and instructional activities.
Skills:	

Special Education Standard #2:

Development and Characteristics of Learners

Knowledge:	
PE2K1	Effects an exceptional condition(s) can have on an individual's life.
Skills:	

Special Education Standard #3:

Individual Learning Differences

Knowledge:	
PE3K1	Rights and responsibilities of families and children as they relate to individual learning needs.
PE3K2	Indicators of abuse and neglect.
Skills:	
PE3S1	Demonstrate sensitivity to the diversity of individuals and families.

Special Education Standard #4:

Instructional Strategies

Knowledge:	
PE4K1	Basic instructional and remedial strategies and materials.
PE4K2	Basic technologies appropriate to individuals with exceptional learning needs.
Skills:	
PE4S1	Use strategies, equipment, materials, and technologies, as directed, to accomplish instructional objectives.
PE4S2	Assist in adapting instructional strategies and materials as directed.

PE4S3	Use strategies as directed to facilitate effective integration into various settings.
PE4S4	(a) Use strategies that promote the learner's independence as directed.
PE4S5	Use strategies as directed to increase the individual's independence and confidence.

Special Education Standard #5:

Learning Environments and Social Interactions

Knowledge:	
PE5K1	Demands of various learning environments.
PE5K2	Rules and procedural safeguards regarding the management of behaviors of individuals with exceptional learning needs.
Skills:	
PE5S1	Establish and maintain rapport with learners.
PE5S2	Use universal precautions and assist in maintaining a safe, healthy learning environment.
PE5S3	Use strategies for managing behavior as directed.
PE5S4	Use strategies as directed, in a variety of settings, to assist in the development of social skills.

Special Education Standard #6:

Language

Knowledge:	
PE6K1	Characteristics of appropriate communication with stakeholders.
Skills:	

Special Education Standard #7:

Instructional Planning

Knowledge:	
Skills:	
PE7S1	Follow written plans, seeking clarification as needed.
PE7S2	Prepare and organize materials to support teaching and learning as directed.

Special Education Standard #8:

Assessment

Knowledge:	
PE8K1	Rationale for assessment.
Skills:	
PE8S1	Demonstrate basic collection techniques as directed.
PE8S2	Make and document objective observations as directed.

Special Education Standard #9:**Professional and Ethical Practice**

Knowledge:	
PE9K1	Ethical practices for confidential communication about individuals with exceptional learning needs.
PE9K2	Personal cultural biases and differences that affect one's ability to work with others.
Skills:	
PE9S1	Perform responsibilities as directed in a manner consistent with laws and policies.
PE9S2	Follow instructions of the professional.
PE9S3	Demonstrate problem-solving, flexible thinking, conflict management techniques, and analysis of personal strengths and preferences.
PE9S4	Act as a role model for individuals with exceptional learning needs.
PE9S5	Demonstrate commitment to assisting learners in achieving their highest potential.
PE9S6	Demonstrate the ability to separate personal issues from one's responsibilities as a paraeducator.
PE9S7	Maintain a high level of competence and integrity
PE9S8	Exercise objective and prudent judgment.
PE9S9	Demonstrate proficiency in academic skills, including oral and written communication.
PE9S10	Engage in activities to increase one's own knowledge and skills.
PE9S11	Engage in self-assessment.
PE9S12	Accept and use constructive feedback.
PE9S13	Demonstrate ethical practices as guided by the CEC Code of Ethics and other standards and policies.

Special Education Standard #10:**Collaboration**

Knowledge:	
PE10K1	Common concerns of families of individuals with exceptional learning needs.
PE10K2	Roles of stakeholders in planning an individualized program.
Skills:	
PE10S1	Assist in collecting and providing objective, accurate information to professionals.
PE10S2	Collaborate with stakeholders as directed.
PE10S3	Foster respectful and beneficial relationships.
PE10S4	Participate as directed in conferences as members of the educational team.
PE10S5	Function in a manner that demonstrates a positive regard for the distinctions between roles and responsibilities of paraeducators and those of professionals.

<http://www.cec.sped.org/ps/paraeducator.doc>

Appendix E

Participant Letter and Consent Form



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

Letter to Participant

Dear Participant:

As a successful graduate of the Paraprofessional training program, I am inviting you to participate in a research study. This study is a requirement for me to receive my doctoral degree in Instructional Leadership from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA. Your agreeing to participate in this study will enable me to collect necessary data to complete the final phase of my dissertation research.

The purpose of the study is to critically examine how the Paraprofessional training program impacted your success in the training classroom and the workplace. I believe this study will be an important milestone in understanding training and employment programs and their participants. It is also a time to reflect and celebrate your accomplishments.

Your participation will be needed in December of 2007 or January 2008. At that time, you will participate in an audio taped interview conducted by me and the completion of a demographic survey. This will take approximately one hour of your time at a convenient and suitable location that will offer privacy. All information will be confidential. There will not be any identifying markers to associate you and your information as stated on the consent form. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. The de-identified data will be held for 5 years after completion of the research. The study does not have any known risks, and participation is strictly voluntary.

If you choose to participate, please sign the enclosed consent form after carefully reading it; then return it in the envelope provided. Your signed response is requested within five business days. If you have any questions, you may contact me by telephone (412-671-4299) or e-mail (lockett0@peoplepc.com). You may also contact Dr. Ruth Biro, my Dissertation Committee Chair, at 412-396-5585.

I look forward to your participation.

Sincerely,

Linda Darnell Lockett



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

- TITLE:** A Critical Analysis of a Paraprofessional Training Program: Teacher Aides Managing Their Journey to Self-Sufficiency
- INVESTIGATOR:** Linda Darnell Thornton Lockett
[REDACTED]
E-mail: lockett0@peoplepc.com
- ADVISOR: (if applicable):** Dr. Ruth Biro
School of Education, Canevin Hall
Instruction and Leadership in Education
Phone: 412-396-5585 E-mail: biro@duq.edu
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Education at Duquesne University.
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research study that will investigate how the Paraprofessional training program assisted its trainees in successfully completing the paraprofessional training program, securing employment, and retaining long-term employment in the field of education.
- You are being selected to participate in this study because you
1. successfully completed the Paraprofessional training program and received a certificate of successful completion;
 2. were identified by the Teacher Aide Training and Employment staff as distinguished in performance and disposition; and
 3. are currently employed and have been employed in the field of education for at least two years as of the 2007-2008 school year.
- As a participant, you will be asked to

1. Participate in an interview that will take approximately 45 minutes. The interviews will be held at a convenient and secure location. During the interview, a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. I will transcribe or a professional transcriber will transcribe the audiotapes. I will ensure that all identifiers, if any, are removed. If necessary, I will contact you to clarify your responses for accuracy in transcribing and reporting.
2. Complete a demographic survey consisting of 19 questions. The survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete.

These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

There are no risks greater than those encountered in everyday life. Your participation may result in an intrinsic benefit as the findings may affect policies, practices, and procedures for future workforce training programs and their participants. This continues the tradition of paraprofessionals who make a difference in the lives of learners.

COMPENSATION:

Participants in this research study will not be compensated in any way. However, participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. An envelope is provided for return of your response to the investigator. Please respond within five business days.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your name will never appear or be recorded on any research instrument, survey or audiotape. No identity will be made in the data analysis. In transcriptions, identifiers of subjects and anyone the subjects talk about will be deleted. If a professional transcriber is used, the transcriber will only have access to the taped interviews, will submit to a notarized confidentiality clause, and will only release information to the researcher. All written materials and consent forms will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home. The de-identified data will be held for 5 years after completion of the research. The audiotapes will remain secure at all times.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time without any consequences. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, none of the information gathered will be used.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call the researcher, Linda Lockett (412-671-4299), the advisor, Dr. Ruth Biro (412-396-5585) and Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (412-396-6326).

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix F

Instruments

Part I: Paraprofessional Research Survey

This survey is conducted as part of a research study for a doctoral dissertation analyzing the impact of a workforce education paraprofessional training program for TANF participants. This study is being conducted under the supervision and approval of the Duquesne University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), my dissertation chair and committee members, and by consent of the Allegheny Intermediate Unit's Executive Director.

There are no known risks and all information will remain confidential and all findings will be reported as an aggregate.

Directions: This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Please check and/or write-in the responses that best reflect your present status. Questions with a red asterisk refer to your status at the time of training.

I. Demographics:

- A) Gender: Male Female
- B) Race/Origin: African American
 Caucasian
 Hispanic
 Mexican
 Other _____
 (Please specify)
- C) Language: English
 Spanish
 Other _____
 (Please specify)
- D) Age: 18 – 25
 26 – 35
 36 – 45
 46 – 55
 56 – 65
 66 or older

E) Marital Status: Single
 Married
 Separated
 Divorced
 Widowed

F) Family Household: Mother
 Father
 Children How many? _____

Children's Information		
Gender	Age	Grade
Male Female	_____	_____

G) Additional Family Members: *(In the household)*

Mother	Sister	Uncle
Father	Niece	Cousin
Grandmother	Nephew	Godchild
Grandfather	Grandchild	Friend
Mother-in-law	Brother-in-law	Other _____
Father-in-law	Sister-in-law	_____
Brother	Aunt	<i>(Please list relationship)</i>

H) Describe your relationship with the noncustodial parent. (if applicable)

Excellent Good Need to Improve Not Applicable

I) Describe your children's relationship with the noncustodial parent. (if applicable)

Excellent Good Need to Improve Not Applicable

J) *Source of income prior to training: (Please check all that apply)

TANF Assistance

Cash Assistance

Food Stamps

Medical

Public Housing

Section 8

Child Support

Unemployment Compensation

Paid Work Experience

Unsubsidized Employment

Other _____
(Please specify)

II. *Barriers during training: (Please check all that apply)

Child Care

Housing

Transportation

Family Problems

Domestic Abuse

Problems with Children

Health Issues with Self

Health Issues with Children or Family

Other _____
(Please specify)

III. Education/Training: *(Please check all that apply)*

GED

High School Diploma

AIU Teacher Aide Training Program

Other Training Programs *(Please specify program and dates attended)*

Certificate(s) of Achievement or Successful Completion
(Please specify)

College Credits

1 to 24 College Credits

25 to 45 College Credits

46 to 60 College Credits

61+ College Credits

Degree: *(Give year)*

Associate's in _____

Bachelor in _____

Master in _____

Other (Please specify) _____

Certifications:

Crisis Prevention and Intervention

Infant and Adult CPR

Automated External Defibrillator

International Computer Driving License

PA Credential for Special Education Paraeducators

Have you received the status of highly qualified as outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001? Yes No

IV. Employment:

A) Describe your position as an instructional assistant. (Check all that apply).

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Elementary School Aide | Contract Aide Position |
| Middle School Aide | Emotional Support Aide |
| High School Aide | Learning Support Aide |
| Center-based Aide | Life Skills Support Aide |
| Full Time Aide | Aide for Autistic Student |
| Part Time Aide | Aide for Mentally Challenged Student |
| One to One Aide | Other _____ |
| Classroom Aide | |
| Long Term Substitute Aide | |

B) Rate of pay: \$_____ per hour \$_____ per day

C) Benefits:

- Health
- Vision
- Dental
- Life
- Disability
- Tuition Plan
- Other _____

Part 2: Interview Questions

The researcher will conduct semistructured interviews using the following guiding questions. Each interview will take approximately 45 minutes. During the interviews, pseudonyms will be used to protect the identities of the subjects. These guiding questions are an adaptation of Kathy Short and Carolyn Burke's *Reflective Questions that Span the Inquiry Process* (as cited in Sustain, 1996; Short and Burke, 1991).

Expectation: (Consider why you have participated in this training)

1. What factors contributed to your decision to enroll in the Paraprofessional training program?
2. What aspects of the programs were most important to your being able to successfully complete the Paraprofessional training program?
3. What were your expectations upon enrolling into the Paraprofessional training program?
4. Describe your success and accomplishments as result of attending this program.

Experience: (Describe your experiences.)

5. Describe your experience in the training classroom
6. Describe your experience in the workplace.
7. Describe what it was like to transition into the workplace.
8. What adjustments – if any – did you have to make?
9. What adjustments – if any - do you need to make now?
10. As a result of the training, did you learn or discover new strategies for coping with life's situations?
11. Describe the challenges you had to overcome as a result of entering the paraprofessional training and subsequently into the workplace.

Evidence: (Producing a result at the end of the process)

12. What growth and change have you noticed in yourself and your family?
13. What have you learned about yourself from this experience?
14. How are you different now than you were prior to entering training and employment?
15. What do you know now that you did not know before?

Evaluation: (Detecting changes in your life as a result of training).

16. How has your life changed since entering training and the workforce (ex. housing, income, education)?
17. What was most challenging about the training program?
18. What was most rewarding about the training program?
19. How could the program have served you better?
20. What services would you need to increase your economic independence?
21. Is there any other information you would like to share with me before we conclude this interview?