

Introduction

Our (the authors') purpose in writing this book was to showcase the role of paraeducators who work in inclusive education settings, in particular those who work with co-teachers. As we delved into what experts and researchers had discovered, we learned about the multitude of titles that have typically been applied to paraeducators: aides, paraprofessionals, educational assistants, teaching assistants, TAs, individual aides, personal aides, individual assistants, paras, and paraeducators. All of these titles refer to a person who is not a certificated professional but who has responsibilities to a child or group of children in a school setting.

Each of the authors has had unique experiences with paraeducators as part of his or her own development. For example, for two years Ann Nevin served as a tutor for emergent readers in a third-grade inclusive classroom in Florida and as a teacher's aide to master teachers in speed reading and the writer's process during 10 consecutive summers at a 10-day camp for teenagers in California. Rich Villa can vividly remember being a new science teacher for grades 7–12 and not knowing how best to work with the paraeducator assigned to him. Subsequently as a special educator, Rich worked with several paraeducators and found that they were critical and valuable colleagues assisting in the delivery of instruction to support students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs). In addition, when he later served as a district administrator, he actively recruited, trained, and arranged for a paraeducator to serve as an elected member of a staff development committee and arranged for paraeducators to receive training and attend IEP meetings. Jacqueline Thousand's experiences include working with paraeducators in community early education programs for young children with disabilities and teaching paraeducators who were enrolled in teacher certification programs. These experiences form the basis of our deep respect for the role that paraeducators play in the lives of students and teachers.

As the book unfolds, you—the reader—will learn how the presence of paraeducators in the classroom helps to ensure that individual students can receive differentiated instruction to meet their diverse needs. The content of each chapter focuses on effective instructional practices and includes problem–solution scenarios based on real-life experiences of paraeducators in inclusive classrooms and the educators with whom they work.

We wrote this book to be as user-friendly as possible. At the beginning of each chapter is some visual representation of its contents as a preview, to prepare you for what you will learn. We used a variety of visual representations such as concept maps, timelines, and organizational charts. We posed questions to stimulate your curiosity—the questions reflect comprehension, evaluation, and application levels of understanding. In addition, we sprinkled charts, forms, lesson plans, and other reproducible items throughout the book so as to facilitate the day-to-day work of the co-teacher teams and their paraeducators. We liberally used text scaffolding techniques that help readers remember and track content (e.g., flowcharts, charts to show comparisons and contrasts, graphic organizers, and note-taking guides).

We wanted to let the paraeducators' "voice" and experience come through. And we wanted to write in such a way that *all* who care about the work of the paraeducator can find the book useful in guiding their work with paraeducators. That's why we hope that parents, teachers, school board members, and related service personnel such as speech therapists and guidance counselors will use this book. Our goal is to help all our readers add new reasons to respect and advance the work of paraeducators in our schools.