

# The Teacher Para Learning Connection

State Support Team 9

Issue 1

October 2013

This newsletter is a means of connecting teachers and paraprofessionals as they learn new ideas together that support the students they serve. This newsletter will be published four times a year.

We start our first issue with a metaphor offering a good model for the relationship between teachers and paraprofessionals. After reading the ideas, think about your teacher-para team, think of your own metaphors and consider sharing your ideas with others.



## “Conductor and Concertmaster” (Stivers, 2011) A Metaphor for the Teacher & Paraprofessional Team

We all rely on models to develop our skills; teachers learn by observing mentor teachers during student teaching and paraprofessionals by observing the teachers with whom they work. But where are the models for how teachers and paraprofessionals should work together? Few of us have had the advantage of actually observing effective teacher / para teams. Describing the characteristics of good teaming is a helpful step – but seeing it in action would be better. We can look to other fields for useful models, such as the executive chef and sous chef, or the head coach and assistant coaches. One very promising model is the conductor and concertmaster.

### What does this metaphor “Conductor and Concertmaster” mean?

It suggests:

- a professional image of two people with distinctly separate roles and responsibilities who must collaborate to achieve results ( the education of our students);
- the leadership of a teacher as decision-maker who coordinates the players, sets the pace, evaluates the learning and adjusts the practices in the classroom; and always acknowledging the valuable role of the assistant on the team;
- in concert with the teacher, the distinct tasks and responsibilities of the paraprofessional who may be trusted to make some decisions independently;
- interdependence and mutual respect; and
- a dynamic pairing of energy and excitement.

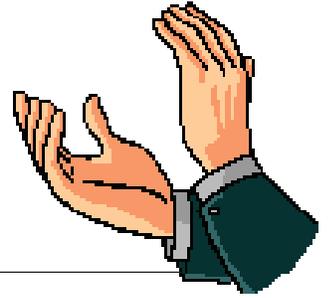
Teacher and para teams are more than “peanut butter and jelly”, a generic mixing of people that go together well. Teacher and para teams have energy, represent two distinct roles defined by the law and *individual members who work together to support student needs on a daily, consistent basis.*

### As we look at the components of the metaphor, we understand energy and excitement but do we understand the distinction between roles and responsibilities between the members of this team?

- Just like the conductor who gives direction to the orchestra, the teacher provides the orientation to the team members, creates the schedule and writes the lesson plans to define the tasks to support student learning needs.
- The para, like the concertmaster follows the musical score like the para follows the schedule, lesson plans, and goals set for the selected students being served.
- As the conductor selects the music that matches the strengths of the orchestra members so does the teacher select the instructional strategies that best match the needs of the students.
- Just like the conductor and concertmaster have mutual respect to lead the musicians to produce a coordinated arrangement of sounds; the teacher and paraprofessional show mutual respect for each other’s roles and coordinate their efforts for effective programming for individual students.

**Remember to come to the Para Series offered by the State Support Team 9 at R.G. Drage Career Center on October 9 & 31, November 14 & December 12 from 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.**

*We give a standing ovation for the teacher-para teams serving students with energy and enthusiasm!*



## Teacher – Paraeducator Collaboration

As we look at the teacher-paraprofessional collaborative teams, we look at the research defining team practices. Ashbaker and Morgan (2012) stated that a general consensus on selected themes for effective practice regarding teacher and paraprofessional collaboration. One critical theme was the clarification of roles and responsibilities for each team member. Let's look at these.

### Responsibilities of the Teacher and Paraprofessional

Many paras ask “What is my role?” “What can I do?” IDEA 1997, re-authorized in IDEIA 2004 Personnel Standards state that a paraprofessional is an employee who, following **appropriate training**, performs tasks as prescribed and **supervised by the licensed/ certified professional/ practitioner**. Paraprofessionals perform specific duties as directed by the licensed professional. Ohio Administrative Code notes that paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with state law, regulation or written policy, can be used to assist in the provision of special education.

The Council for Exceptional Children paraeducator standards state “as determined by the instructional team” to note that paras provide support for student learning as directed by the teacher or instructional team. Note on the IEP, the support services of the paraprofessional are included in Section 7 under Support for School Personnel. A set of standards for intervention specialists and a set for paraprofessionals are located on the CEC website ([www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)).

#### Paraprofessional Responsibilities

Responsibilities that paraprofessionals provide in support of the licensed professional (teacher) include: monitor behavior; update websites; copy papers; supervise students during recess, lunch; collect student data; follow lesson plans designed by the teacher; uphold class discipline plan; assist with transitions; assist with the implementation of social skills; reteach concepts; assist students with completing their academic work; assist with self-care skills; prepare instructional materials; and work with individuals or small groups of students to reinforce/reteach concepts. Communication with parents has boundaries defined by the teacher/team: correspondence needs to be authorized by the teacher.

#### Teacher Responsibilities

The certified/licensed professional maintains responsibilities for assessing the learner and family needs; planning, evaluating, and modifying services for students; coordinating information provided by other professionals; communicating with families such as grades, assessment results, discipline, medical, equipment needs, and lesson planning. The response to this question then is based upon the training of the paraprofessional (which may be provided through on-the-job mentoring and demonstrations). Seven functions of the licensed professional (teacher) include the orientation & scheduling of paraprofessionals; planning lessons; delegating tasks; providing professional learning; and giving feedback on performance (French, 2003).

One Question relevant to roles:

#### Is it okay for the para to teach new concepts?

**No** - Teachers are responsible for “teaching” new concepts. Paras will reinforce or review new concepts. The idea of pre-teaching means introducing vocabulary or providing background information on a topic that will be taught. To assist a student in acquiring background knowledge prior to a lesson, under the direction of the teacher, paras may read a book to a student, preview a video with a student, or introduce words that the student may be taught in a lesson to develop background knowledge.

Please send feedback, comments or questions for possible inclusion in The Teacher-Para Learning Connections newsletter to Denise Uitto at [duitto@uakron.edu](mailto:duitto@uakron.edu).