

The *Paraeducator* Press

Helping Students Shine

TEACHER – PARAPROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

By Gina Massengill, M.Ed.
VDOE Region 5 T/TAC @ JMU

Communication is essential in all human organizations. The statement, “I think we have a communication problem here,” is frequently heard when problems emerge among people working together. This is particularly true in the classroom setting, especially when paraprofessionals work closely with teachers and other school personnel as a member of a team. Teamwork requires excellent communication because all members of the team must be willing to share their information, their ideas, and their points of view to do their jobs thoroughly and effectively.

The role of the paraprofessional is to assist and enable the teacher to fulfill the functions of a classroom manager. To accomplish this, it is important to fully understand your administrative and instructional duties so that you complement and support the activities of the teacher. The teacher can provide you with information in order to orient you with the classroom, the students, and the other staff members that assist in this specific learning environment.

Becoming Familiar with Your New Classroom:

1. Spend at least one day observing in the classroom.
2. Ask the teacher to help you understand the following about the classroom:
 - Daily routines
 - Daily and weekly schedules
 - Instructional procedures

- Classroom rules
 - Lesson plan format
 - Procedures for handling student assignments
3. Learn about the activities that take place at the beginning of each class, such as:
 - Attendance
 - Warm-up routines
 - Lunch counts
 - Special services
 4. Learn about the class policies regarding:
 - Classroom procedures (e.g., posting and handing in assignments)
 - Room organization and clean-up
 - Dismissing the class and small groups
 - Student rules
 - Bathroom rules
 5. Understand the class policies regarding:
 - Incomplete work, late or missing work, and make-up work
 - Parent and family communication
 - Other
 6. Discuss the plans of the students with whom you will work (Gerlach, 2003).

Ask for a description of your role and responsibilities in the classroom, as well as the roles and responsibilities of other staff, parents, and volunteers. Sometimes parents, related services staff, and even administrators can be unclear about the role of a paraprofessional, which may lead to inappropriate expectations. Roles and responsibilities will differ according to student and staffing needs. Below are some responsibilities that MAY be part of your role in your classroom:

- Assist teacher in maintaining records, folders, and filings
- Manage classroom books, supplies, and equipment
- Assist in large group instruction

- Tutor individual and small groups of children
- Prepare materials
- Report attendance
- Collect data for student assessment, observe and record behavior
- Help pupils understand teacher directions
- Supervise children during recess on the playground
- Attend student conferences and IEP staffings
- Prepare instructional resources and collect specific materials for lessons
- Help students with missed work and make-up tests
- Arrange learning centers and prepare materials for special activities such as art
- Listen to oral reading
- Provide role model for the children
- Play instructional games with children
- Record materials for children with disabilities
- Contribute ideas when staff is planning instructional program
- Re-teach with special practice after initial instruction by teacher
- Supervise test periods and enter grades into grade books
(adapted from Dover, 2002)

Having a regular pattern of communication will ensure that team members have a time to discuss student needs and goals, challenges they might be facing, and ideas they have. This is a time to receive information and updates regarding students, such as assessment results, behavioral changes, medications, and other factors that influence the work of the paraprofessional.

If you do not know the answers to these questions, discuss them with your supervising teacher:

- What tasks need to be done and why, how, and where this happen?
- When and how will I be observed and evaluated?
- When and how will feedback be provided to me?
- Do I have a written plan to refer to throughout the day?
- Do I know the deadlines for all tasks that are my responsibility?
- Do I have important content in writing?
(Gerlach, 2003)

Creating the time for communication and planning will pay off in shared understanding and expectations down the road. Due to hectic schedules and the fast pace of the instructional day, it is important to develop a variety of communication methods to keep up with instructional tasks and responsibilities that change as the needs of the classroom and children change.

Some sample communication channels include:

- Communication logs, in which the paraprofessional and the teacher write notes about the day's activities and progress, can be kept in a three-ring binder in a convenient place.
- Progress and data sheets that are routinely used will provide information for the teacher and the paraprofessional on the effectiveness of the instruction or management plan.
- Communication notes that are jotted down and dated on post-it paper can be organized in a spiral notebook and review for a more thorough analysis (adapted from VDOE, 2006).

Communication among the adults working together to provide instruction and support to students in schools is critical. It is a key component in creating a successful and coordinated learning environment in the classroom.

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