




Student Empowerment Through Effective Para Educator Support



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Less than 5% of high school graduates with Down syndrome are going to college, and less than 20% are going into the workforce



Why do we see these stats across the USA?

- Prompt, praise and reward dependency
- Students segregated from peers too frequently
- Inability to generalize skills learned across settings
- Used to adults managing daily routines for them



How can we improve outcomes?

- Focus on inclusive education with proper supports
- Strong emphasis on fostering independence
- Scheduling the day for success
- Co-teaching and making modifications/adaptations
- Debunk the "readiness myth"



Growth Mindset vs. Fixed Mindset

Fixed Mindset

He is not ready for school

We don't have enough resources

She needs to be pulled out

I need more para support

We have tried this before

I wasn't trained for this

Growth Mindset

How can we get school ready for him?

What can we do with resources we have?

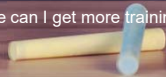
How can I make sure she is included?

What can he do independently?

Did any part of what we tried work?

Where can I get more training?

Northstarpaths.com



Para Support

- Paras are assigned to classrooms or teachers; NOT to specific students
- Paras should supplement and not replace direct teaching from licensed educators
- Students who struggle the most, benefit from more time with qualified teachers
- Paras should help students manage their own learning



Supporting vs. Punishing

- Supporting corrects misbehavior and instills self-discipline
- Punishment stops misbehavior by inflicting pain or penalty.
- Supporting focuses on future correct behavior,
- Punishment focuses on past incorrect behavior.
- Supporting demonstrates attitude of love/concern for the child— they remain calm and relaxed.



Proper Training for Paras

- Access to and participation in IEP meetings for students
- Discipline procedures, medical interventions, confidentiality, communication expectations, student schedules
- Specific training on diagnosis of the student(s) they support
- Classroom rules and routines
- Expectations for behavior and academic support



Proper Training for Paras

Ensure paras have the essential 'need to knows':

- Concepts, facts, information being taught
- Skills to be learned, applied, practiced or extended
- Intended learning outcomes
- Expected/required feedback
- Medical information for proper support



Proper Training for Paras

Specific training provided by Special Education staff should include:

- Learning about specific student cues
- Understanding self stimming behavior and how to redirect
- Student's communication skills, educational goals and support needs
- Effective learning and behavioral strategies



Role of Paras

- Reinforce/redirect student behavior
- Prepare and use data collection materials
- Maintain and organize teaching environment to ensure success
- Implement teacher led accommodations/modifications
- Foster independence and self regulation
- Ensure student can navigate school community safely



How does the student view Para?

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| • My friend | • Helpful |
| • My personal assistant | • Lifeline |
| • My shadow | • Annoying |
| • My boss | • Intrusive |
| • As an authority figure | • Bridge builder to peers and curriculum |



Potential effects of too much support

- Separation from classmates
- Interference with peers
- Feeling of being stigmatized
- Lack of teacher engagement
- Loss of personal control
- Provocation of behaviors

**Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli and MacFarland (1997)



Offering Help vs. Receiving Help

| Personal Dimension | Why Do We Like Offering Help | Why Do We Dislike Receiving Help |
|--------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ABILITY | Affirms capacity | Implies deficiency |
| VALUE | Affirms worth | Implies burden |
| POSITION | Affirms superiority | Implies inferiority |
| OBLIGATION | One is owed | One is obligated |
| VULNERABILITY | Masks our vulnerability | Reminds us of our vulnerability |

*Emma Van der Klift & Norman Kunc Axis Consultation and Training Ltd



You're Overthinking It!

- Common behavior for age
- Typical kids do this
- Too much supervision
- Too many prompts/transitions
- No special world waiting
- Assigning motives
- Over verbalizing
- Focus is on task completion and not learning



Successful Paras

- Confident in their actions
- Feel no guilt over the disability
- Look into the future
- Allow student to try and fail
- Natural consequences
- Avoid power struggles
- Process not goal oriented
- Ask for help when needed
- Good communication with all team members



Successful Paras



Skill VS Will in Classrooms

| | | |
|-----------------------|----|--------------------------|
| Skill | VS | Will |
| Ability Competency | | Motivation Engagement |



Skill VS Will in Classrooms

Skill

- Task analysis
- Backwards chaining
- Video modeling
- Celebrate success
- Teach in context
- See one, do one, teach one

VS

Will

- Video modeling
- First/Then
- Jump start activity
- Timer
- Take emotion out of it
- You know what to do



So What do we Do?

Communication!

- Para – General Education Teacher
- Para – Special Education Teacher
- Para – Student
- Para – Home
- Para – Related Service Personnel



Data Collection

- Prompt policing
- Reduce transitions
- Offer choices
- Provide predictability
- Long range vision



Balancing Act

- Supporting not enabling
- Self regulation
- Mother hens
- Clear expectations
- Trial and error
- Build in natural supports



Prompt Hierarchy

| Type of Support | Definition | Example |
|------------------|---|---|
| Full Physical | Direct and physical assistance | Hand over hand assistance to write name |
| Partial Physical | Physical assistance for some part of activity | Connecting zipper and pulling 1 inch |
| Modeling | Demonstrate what to do | Para does an art project side by side student |
| Direct Oral | Verbal directions only | "Josh, please stand up." |
| Indirect Verbal | Verbal prompt to get student to think about what comes next | "Josh, what should you be doing now that math is over?" |
| Gestural | Physical movement to cue (head nod, thumbs up) | Para points to visual schedule on desk |
| Natural | No cue change from other students directions | Bell rings and teacher ask students to move to rug. |

** adapted from *Paraprofessional's Guide to the Inclusive Classroom*

Fading Para Support

When is support truly necessary?
 --10 minutes at recess lineup
 --All day long
 --Think like an employer

Reduce cues

Look for natural supports; engage peers

Color code materials to help with organization



Avoid a Velcro para at all costs!



Fading Para Support

- Prompt, process, praise (intermittently)
- Use transition objects
- Ask facilitative questions (what comes next? What are other students doing? What does the schedule say?)
- See one, do one, teach one
- Try it first and I will check on you



Scheduling for Success

- Reduce volume of transitions
- Bring work to student
- Give me a reason for the work
- Harder topics at peak times
- Visual schedules
- Include student in planning

There cannot be a crisis next week.
My schedule is already full. Henry Kissinger



Questions?

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