

# **Supporting Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities: What Paraeducators Need to Know and Do**



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**AbleNet University Webinar: February 1, 2017**

# Session Focus

- Gain skills in understanding the needs and responding effectively to students with severe and multiple disabilities.
- In this webinar session, you will learn how to tailor paraeducator support to:
  - Maximize academic and social learning opportunities for students with significant cognitive, communication and motor needs.
  - Facilitate their growth of independence and reduce dependence on the adult.

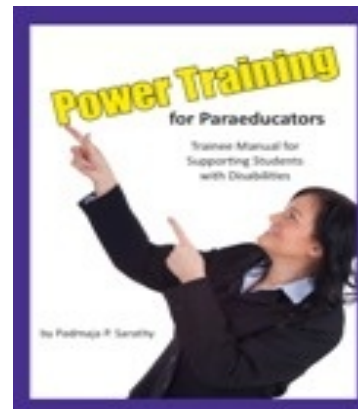
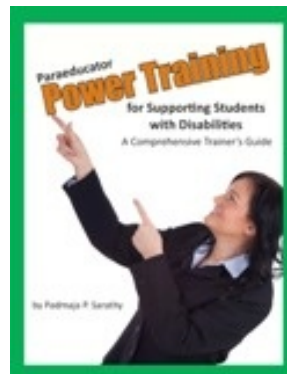
# Participant Poll

- **Paraeducator?**
- **Special Education Teacher?**
- **Administrator?**
- **Support Staff?**
- **Other?**



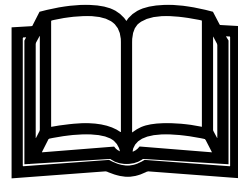
# Author & Educational Consultant [www.inifintepossibilities-sped.com](http://www.inifintepossibilities-sped.com)

- **Paraeducator Training DVD and Trainee Manual**
  - ‘Trainer of Trainer ‘ DVD with multiple training units
  - Paraeducator trainee manual with pre and post assessment for each unit, quizzes, checklists and role-play activities
  - **Publisher: Legal Digest ([www.ed311.com](http://www.ed311.com))**



# The Forthcoming Book

## ***Students with Significant Disabilities: At the Crossroads of IDEA and ESSA***



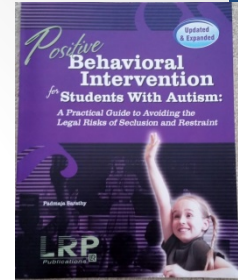
- **Author: Padmaja Sarathy**
- **Publisher: LRP Publications**
- **To be released in February, 2017**

# Books and Products

- **Positive Behavior Strategies for Students with ASD:**

A Practical Guide to Avoiding the Legal Risks of Aversives

Publisher: LRP Publications, ([www.shoplrp.com](http://www.shoplrp.com))



- **Autism Spectrum Disorders: Seven Steps of Support**

A quick reference guide

Publisher: National Professional Resources, Inc. ([www.nprinc.com](http://www.nprinc.com))

- **Magical Musical Transitions** – A Music CD for assisting children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Marketed by [www.nprinc.com](http://www.nprinc.com))



- **Serving Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities:**

A Guide to Strategies for Successful Learning (Publisher: LRP, [www.shoplrp.com](http://www.shoplrp.com))

- ***From Early Intervention... to Preschool Program... and School-Age Services: A Parent's Guide*** (Publisher: LRP Publications, [www.shoplrp.com](http://www.shoplrp.com))

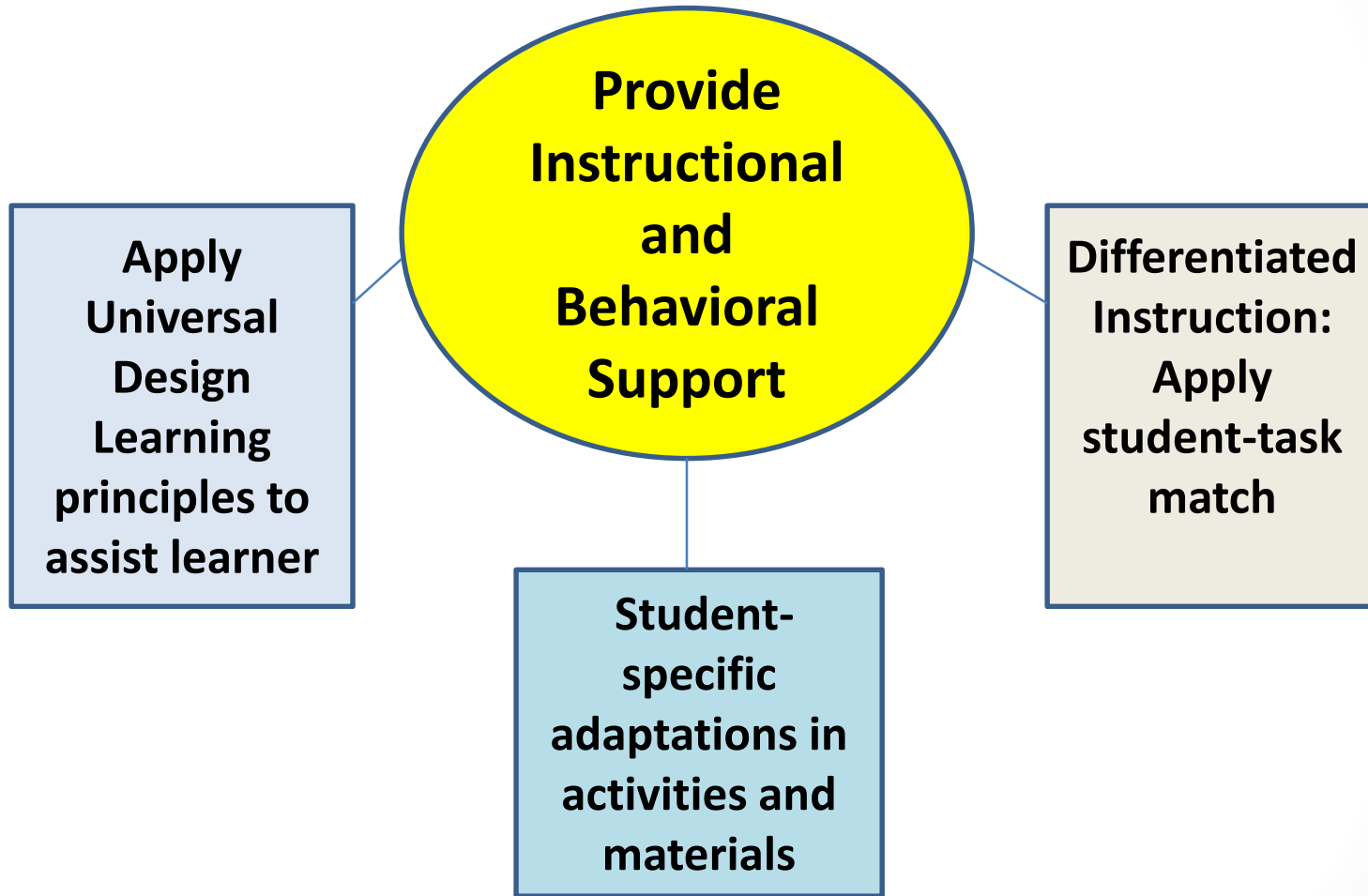
- **Together We Succeed: Building a Better System for Transitioning Preschoolers with Disabilities** (Publisher: LRP Publications,)

- A couple of books are be released in 2017.

# The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015

- **ESSA is the new law that replaced No Child Left Behind law.**
- **There is a new name and an important definition for paraeducators in ESSA.**
  - ESSA has adopted the NEA-endorsed term “paraeducator”.
  - Title VIII defines professional development to mean activities that provide educators, paraprofessionals specifically included, with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to meet academic standards” says NEA (<http://www.nea.org/>).
- **Paraeducators will continue to work under the direct supervision of a classroom teacher. (Same as before).**
- **Paraeducators have a seat and a voice at the table. They will need comprehensive training to play a meaningful role in the IEP meetings.**

# Paraeducators assist with instruction and help to Implement the Adaptations.



Adapted from Sarathy, 2012



# Paraeducator Roles and Responsibilities: Changes

- Paraeducators deliver direct services to children with severe disabilities:
  - They are providing instructional support in a broad range of academic areas (Keller, Bucholz & Brady; 2007).
  - They are working with students with the most complex educational and behavioral needs with the least amount of training (Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron & Fialka; 2005; Keller, Bucholz & Brady, 2007; and information retrieved on 1/31/2012 from [www.paracenter.org/paraeducators/why-train-paraprofessionals](http://www.paracenter.org/paraeducators/why-train-paraprofessionals)).

# Concerns

- **Paraeducator Proximity is a major concern.**
  - Researchers have documented that greater contact between the student and the paraeducator has an adverse effect on student learning and performance, especially if the paraeducator is not trained:
    - Negatively impacted students' social interaction with peers; Also affected teachers' academic expectations of the student. (Gerber et al., 2001, as cited in Causton-Theoharis, et al., 2007)
- **Intrusive support with continuous prompting and hovering inhibits learner's self-dependence.**  
Students become prompt-dependent.

# Need for Comprehensive Paraeducator Training

- The need for paraeducators to be well trained and qualified for the roles they play is clearly evident:
  - Legislative mandate (IDEA and ESSA) require it.
  - The inadequacy of paraeducator training due to role changes has been identified (Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron & Fialka, 2005).
  - Legal liability issues arising out of insufficient training (Katsyannis, Hodge & Lanford, 2000).
  - Improved child outcomes due to paraeducator training ([www.paracenter.org/paraeducators/why-train-paraprofessionals](http://www.paracenter.org/paraeducators/why-train-paraprofessionals)).
  - Anecdotal evidence and data gathered (Sarathy, 2012).

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

**Need for  
Professional Training**

**Paraeducator Support  
*For Students with Severe  
& Multiple Disabilities***

**1. Understanding and  
Responding to Learner  
Characteristics**

**2. Providing  
Personalized Supports  
under Teacher Direction**

**Monitoring  
Behavior &  
Encouraging  
Feedback**

**Facilitating  
Choice-making  
&  
AT Use**

**Aiding Systematic  
Instruction with  
Prompting  
Strategies**

**Enabling  
Partial  
Participation**

# 1. Understanding and Responding to Learner Characteristics

- Learner characteristics: Cognitive, communication, motor and behavior issues
- It may influence how we respond to students with severe and multiple disabilities and engage them in meaningful activities.
- What are some barriers that maybe impacting:
  - Inadequate adaptations and support tools?
  - Attitudinal barriers leading to lower expectations?
  - Limited learning opportunities?
  - Inadequate professional training opportunities?

# Learner Characteristics

- We need a competence-oriented approach to engage and involve students instead of deficit-driven methodology.
- **Consider student's strengths and Needs:**
  - Responds to 'Yes/No' questions given photo or object referents
  - Makes a choice between 2 pictures or representational objects related to the activity
  - Turns pages in a book with without an attached adaptation
  - Activates an AT device or a switch to obtain something or to respond to questions

# Learner Characteristics (Continued)

## **Consider your student's strengths and Needs**

(Paraeducator can help observe and monitor student response and progress):

- Recognizes some sight words/match words.
- Matches numerals with corresponding sets of objects; identifies numerals.
- Uses a talking calculator with gesture prompts.
- Reaches for an object with hand or eye gaze or body movement or body orientation.

# Learner Characteristics (Continued)

## **Consider your student's strengths and Needs**

(Paraeducator can help monitor student response and progress):

- Shows increased vocalization in response to person or activity or object
- Smiles in response to social, visual, auditory, and/or tactile input
- Orients towards sound through head turn
- Shows change in affect in response to stimulation
- Can partially feed self
- Hold and manipulate object inserted into closed hand or when attached to adapted cuff/glove.



## 2. Personalized Support “Aha” Moment

- **The Paraeducator plays a supportive role...**
- Jacob is visually impaired with significant cognitive and communication deficits.
- Para-educator helped to ensure **Communication opportunities** for Jacob throughout the day. Examples:
  - Arrival: Met him on arrival with an AT device to help Jacob initiate greetings.
  - Breakfast: Helped to indicate his choice of drink
  - Literacy/Reading Time: Aided in holding book/story prop with support.
  - Ensured use of AT to respond during lessons by activating device.

## 2. Personalized Supports

### Gain Learner's Attention in Creative Ways

- Overcome the challenges of gaining and sustaining a learner's attention:
  - Draw on student's attention with interactive hands-on activities incorporating multi-sensory features.
  - Engage student's attention by tapping on the picture and/or object (on the mini white board associated with the lesson/concept/story).
  - Maintain attention by illuminating the pictures and key words in the (adapted text) book with shining a light from behind (Downing, 2005).
  - Noting all initiations by the student– how the student initiates through sounds, movements and changes in state and affect

# Personalized Supports: Systematic Instruction

- Teachers coach and guide paraeducators to:
  - Use systematic instruction techniques with errorless prompting to teach academic concepts.
  - Praise only the correct response.
  - Provide sufficient wait time for student to respond.
  - Break down complex tasks into smaller parts to increase student's success in learning the concepts.
  - Limit the amount of information (concepts) presented at any given time.

# Personalized Supports: Level of Prompts

- When information is presented, make effective use of prompts.

## Prompting Strategies:

- Modeling
- Verbal or gestural cues
- Verbal Prompts
- Physical assistance
- Total guidance
- **Fade assistance gradually.**

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

Target: Independent Performance

Move from least to most intrusive.

Modeling



Verbal/Gestural Cues



Verbal Prompt



Physical Prompt



Total Assistance

# Personalized Supports: Prompts

## Paraeducator Action Steps...

- Learn prompt hierarchy from the least to the most intrusive level of prompting.
- Get help on how to use prompts, how to vary the level of prompts according to the individual needs of students.
- Get your teacher to model it for you.
- Learn how to gradually fade the prompts.
- Be mindful that with constant adult help, the student could develop “learned helplessness.”

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

# Personalized Supports: Choice-Making

- Offer Choice-making opportunities throughout the day on a consistent basis:
  - To increase motivation to participate in self-selected activities
  - To become more self-determining by exerting control over daily activities.
  - To positively impact how others perceive them.
- Choice-making teaches children that they can exercise control over their environment by using communicative behavior to indicate choice or behavior.
- Help to make concepts personal, relating them to the student's own life.

# Think of Choices Your Students Can Make...

Paraeducators can observe and provide the data.

Activities

Locations

Time of Day and  
the Type of Choice

Supports

- When?
- What?
- Where?
- How?
- With whom?

## Personalized Supports: Partial Participation

- Promote active learning through partial participation if student cannot perform the task independently.
- Learner may learn to perform several steps or only one step in the task and may be assisted during all the other steps. The adult no longer has to perform them for the student.
- Promote exposure and access to activities even if the participation is extremely limited.
  - (e.g., the student is just beginning to tolerate the activity or is able to perform only one step in a sequence of steps involved in the activity).

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012



# Personalized Supports: Assistive Technology

## Gain Skills in using AT for Communication Support

AT devices provide opportunities for communication, independent functioning and to gain a voice.

- Student can activate an AT communication device (by pressing the device) with pre-recorded word, phrase or sentence to participate in choral reading or respond to a question.
- A peer who is verbal can record the required word, phrase, sentence or the story.
- AT devices need to be used consistently to attain desired outcomes.

# Personalized Supports: A T Devices



A BIG Step-by-Step with Levels  
a sequential communicator



iTalk2 Communicator helps in making choices

TalkingBrix Communicator



A **Quick Talker** that has a  
number of message locations



Environmental Control Unit



A **Book Worm** is a literacy tool.

# Personalized Support

## Case Scenario: “Aha” Moment

### **The Paraeducator plays a supportive role...**

- Alexia had significant cognitive and communication difficulties. Although able to walk, preferred to squat on the floor and drag herself instead of walking to different locations.
- The paraeducator came up with a creative solution of posting her photo (preferred item) at several strategic locations with a matching photo in her hand to hold in her hand. It motivated and enticed Alexia to get up and walk in search of her photo.
- Paraeducator observation of Alexia and her preferences helped her to come up with a solution.

# Personalized Support - An Aha Moment!

- Alex bangs on his wheelchair tray making annoying sounds in the inclusive setting. The behavior continued despite warnings from teacher to stop it. This behavior was distracting other students.



**No Noise**

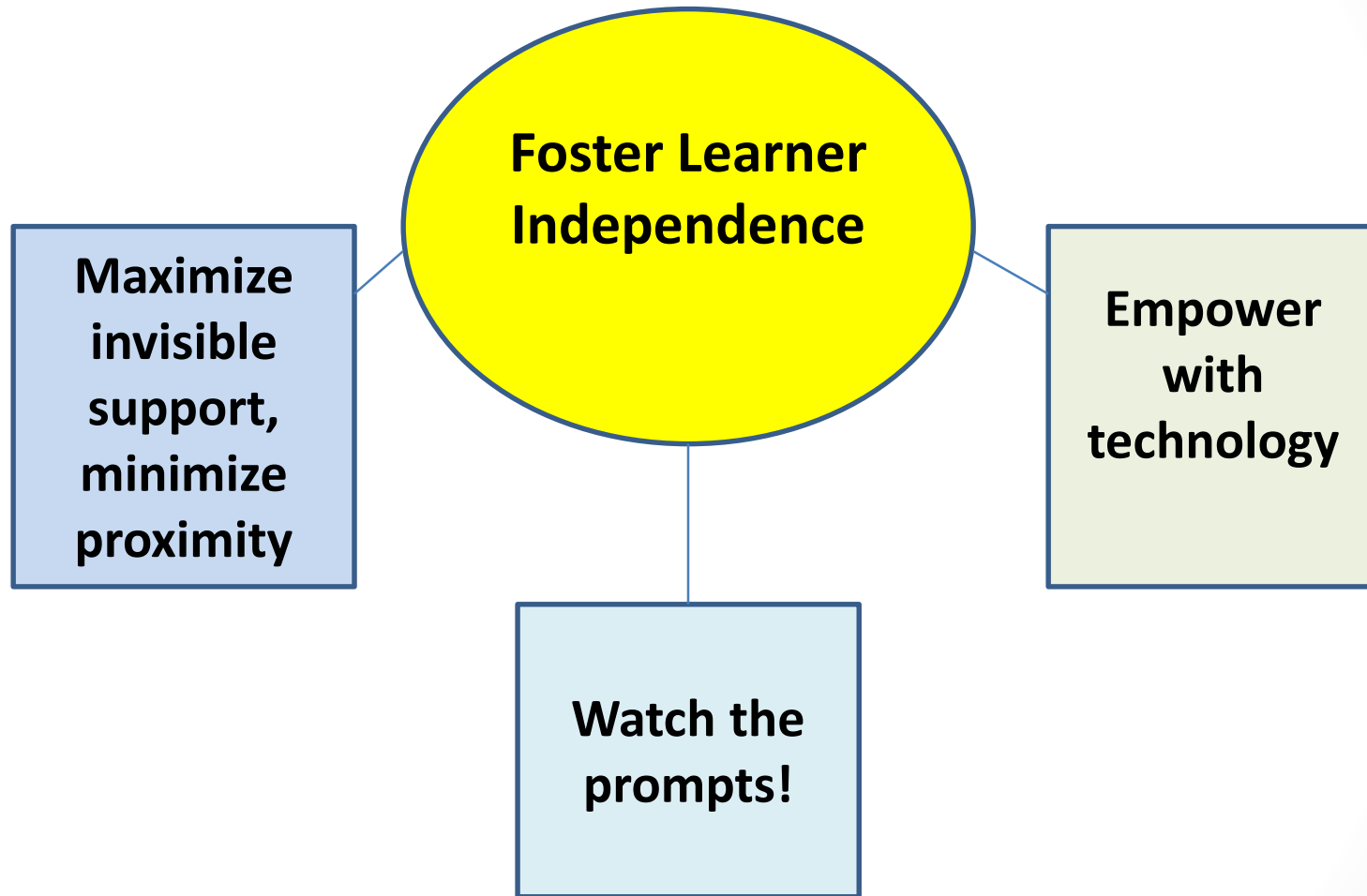


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The paraeducator used a *“Pictured Rule Cue Card”* depicting *“No Noise”* and *whispers (or gestures) quietly* to remind Alex. He is also *taught replacement behaviors: Clapping his hands and if feeling restless, to squeeze the Koosh ball.*

# Foster Learner Independence.



Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

## Minimize Proximity, Maximize Discreet Support

- Minimize proximity while maximizing your discreet and targeted instructional support.
- Circulate among all students. Do not sit next to the student to continuously monitor and provide support.
- Shape behavior to increase independence.
- Be alert to the prompts provided through:
  - body language
  - facial expressions
  - the way the questions are phrased
  - the tone of voice.
- Physically guiding a student through the task does not provide information on student's learning.

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012

## *Guiding Rules for Para Support*

- Ask yourself (constantly) how you can help the student to become more self-dependent.
- Understand and follows prompt hierarchy to avoid over-prompting the student.
- Prevent 'Learned Helplessness' from setting in. Step back and fade your cues.
- Get teacher help to adapt the work to allow the student to complete it independently. Provide encouraging feedback for effort.
- Encourage peer support. Move out of the way when student is engaged with peers.
- Honor age-appropriateness.

Adapted from Sarathy, 2012)

# Resources

- Causton-Theoharis, J. 2009. *The Paraprofessional's Handbook for effective Support in Inclusive Classrooms*. Paul Brookes Publishing Co.
- Giangreco, et.al (2005). "Be Careful What You Wish for...": Five Reasons to Be Concerned About the Assignment of Individual Paraprofessionals. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37(5), 28-34.
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- Sarathy, P. 2014. *Serving Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities: A Guide to Strategies for Successful Learning.*, (Second Edition, 2014). LRP Publications, PA ([www.lrp.com](http://www.lrp.com))
- Sarathy, P. 2013. Positive Behavior Strategies for Students with ASD: A Practical Guide to Avoiding the Legal Risks of Aversives. LRP Publications. ([www.shoplrp.com](http://www.shoplrp.com))





**THANKS.**

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