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Book Review: The Paraprofessional's Guide to the Inclusive Classroom: Working as a Team

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Book Review:

The Paraprofessional's Guide to the Inclusive Classroom: Working as a team. 2nd edition by Mary Beth Doyle, Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 2002. 137 pages, \$25.00 paper.

In a special education program, working with paraprofessionals can be either an asset or a nightmare of tension and conflicting role expectations. As a supervisor of student teachers, the complaint that is heard most often is the difficulty establishing a smooth, coherent working relationship with paraprofessionals in the classroom. Often many school districts do not adequately define the roles and expectations for paraprofessionals and do not provide training and preparation for this position. The purpose of this text is to provide a format and structure for creating just such a working relationship.

The beginning chapter points out that the use of paraprofessionals in the public school system is one of the fastest growing positions in public education. Paraprofessionals work in a variety of capacities including both instructional and noninstructional duties. With inclusive classrooms, paraprofessionals are becoming more common place not only within special education classrooms but also within regular education classrooms. Effectively using this extra support is essential for providing an effective instructional program for students with special needs.

One of the strengths of this text is a clear definition of the roles and responsibilities that faculty and paraprofessionals must have in the classroom. By using a format that is a workbook approach this text encourages a discussion of these roles and responsibilities and provides clear guidelines for direction and instruction of paraprofessionals in these responsibilities. The reader is encouraged to reproduce the large format pages as part of the discussions and reflections. Reproducing these pages allows the text to be used yearly in order to facilitate discussion for new paraprofessionals and teachers or to enhance an ongoing working relationship.

Chapter 2 provides information concerning collaboration and teaming skills. Strongly emphasizing reaching consensus concerning the program for children the text places the responsibility for planning instruction squarely with the professional teacher. Defining curriculum and how curriculum may be taught at various levels and with various approaches is also discussed and provides insight and information for paraprofessionals without a background in education.

The new chapter concerning confidentiality is very clear and an important addition to this text. Without a background in education, paraprofessionals often do not understand laws and confidential procedures. Busy professionals may overlook instruction in this area. Ms. Doyle' text describes several scenarios that guide confidential discussions and establish what can be discussed with who and under what circumstances.

Professionals site teaching discipline as serious concern not only within inclusive classrooms but also within self-contained classrooms. Chapter 5 provides insight into discipline methods and the importance of encouraging positive behaviors by not using punishment as a means of control. All members of the team working with students with special needs should read this chapter.

The text is not lengthy. It quickly and concisely defines a number of critical areas for all team members to be aware of. Regular educators would benefit from using this text because it quickly touches not only on the use of paraprofessionals but also issues that arise while teaching and establishing inclusive classrooms.

The Paraprofessional's Guide to the Inclusive Classroom: Working, as a team is an excellent preparation for a new school year. It would be useful for novice teachers who wish to begin the year on the right foot with fellow faculty and paraprofessionals. It would also be helpful with experienced staff who needs training and understanding in order to create inclusive classrooms. Working with paraprofessionals and preparing them to effectively work in classrooms with students with special needs is an area that needs attention in the field of special education. Ms. Doyle's book provides a useful guide for attending to this neglected area. For further information concerning this text please use the link following this review.

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