Paraeducators Supporting Reading Instruction

BY

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THESIS
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Abstract

Paraeducators provide support to students with disabilities during instruction within the course of a typical school day. The use of structured and scripted interventions has been effective in improving the reading skills of students with reading difficulties. The purpose of this research study was to provide an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators working alongside special education classroom teachers to provide reading instruction in classrooms for students with complex learning disabilities. The context for their instructional support was one large urban Midwestern school district where the Wilson Reading System® (WRS) was used to teach reading. Through phone interviews, the study identified nine paraeducators’ use of time in elementary and high school classrooms, their knowledge about the intervention, and factors that contributed to their personal success. Results of the study included a description of the academic and nonacademic duties performed by the paraeducator on a daily basis, presented three paraeducator profiles that highlighted their roles and responsibilities using the WRS, and presented factors that impacted the paraeducators’ sense of self-efficacy, such as their personal commitment to support students.

Keywords: paraeducators, reading interventions, learning disabilities, Wilson Reading System
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With my mother’s encouragement and, let’s be honest, insistence, I made a decision many years ago to pursue what I believed would be a great educational opportunity. I could not have completed this journey without the help and support of many individuals and groups, those who prayed for me and encouraged me. My favorite educational movie is To Sir with Love. It reminds me of why I entered the field of education and why the need is greater today than it was more than 25 years ago. Well, I’m not Sir; in this situation, you all are and I am honored to acknowledge you in this section.

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Like the paraeducators who participated in this study, I know what it’s like to let someone else shine and remain in the shadows because I, too, was once a paraeducator. You were patient with my questions and offered encouraging words to me. You all are my heroes.

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In 1991, I stood before a small audience and gave a message to thousands. It was the same message that I would give my students during my first teaching assignment on an almost daily basis. I said, “Look Room 210. I did it.” Now I can say that same sentence and mean it as much today as I did then. So…look, family, friends, colleagues, students and passersby. I did it.

And, finally, to Him who sits on the throne and unto the lamb. I know that it was you who guided me through this process in preparation for something new. I’m ready.

CDW
Dedication

My mother and father encouraged my sisters and me from an early age to get as much education as we possibly could. It is because of their vision of a better life for us, the belief in the connection between a good education and the preservation of our family and their infinite wisdom that the completion of this dissertation was possible. Therefore, this dissertation is dedicated to my family.

To my mother, Jean, who earned her Bachelor’s Degree at age 45; the memory of my father, Henry, whose only regret in life was not getting more education; to my oldest sister, Barbara, who is completing her Bachelor’s degree at 56; to my middle sister, Donna, who is a published author in allergy research; to my youngest sister Antoinette, who, with her giving heart, advanced degrees in business and brilliant mind, is the complete package; and to my nieces, Kiyomi, completing her Master’s degree in psychology, and Tyler, who loves Asian languages and is completing her undergraduate degree, and nephews, Darnell, Sr., Reginald and Darnell, Jr.: the world it at your feet. Be bold. Open the door; take the step and live.
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Chapter I: Introduction

In the field of education there is a group of individuals, often without teaching credentials, who provide instructional support to children with disabilities on a daily basis (Manz, Power, Ginsburg-Block & Dowrick, 2010). This group, called paraeducators, is often considered to be essential in supporting the learning needs of students with disabilities (Capizzi & DaFonte, 2012; Carter, O’Rourke, Sisco & Pelsue, 2009; Devlin, 2008 and Giangreco & Broer, 2007). The term paraeducator was chosen to compare the work of classroom assistants/aides to that of the serious work done by paralegals and paramedics (Pickett, 1989). It has been applied to individuals who serve in a capacity that is distinctive from that of a teacher aide. As the number of students with disabilities receiving services in general education settings increases, so does the number of paraeducators providing supports (Bryan, McCubbin & van der Mars, 2013, Carnahan, Williamson, Clarke & Sorensen, 2009; Mueller & Murphy, 2001; Piletic, Davis & Aschemeier, 2005). The National Education Association reports that there are 758,000 paraeducators in their organization. Of that number, 75%, or 568,000, identify themselves as paraeducators working in special education (www.nea.org.com).

According to the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services (NRCP), a paraeducator is:

One whose positions are either instructional in nature or who deliver other direct or indirect services to children, youth or their parents; and those who work under the supervision of teachers or other professional personnel who have the ultimate responsibility for a) the design and implementation of education and related services programs and b) the assessment of the impact on student progress and other education outcomes. (1993)
With the adoption of the term paraeducator, several distinctions were made. While the term ‘teacher aide’ represented a largely silent partner who assisted teachers in completing general tasks, the paraeducator is viewed as someone whose responsibilities can be largely instructional (Giangreco, 2003; Pickett, 1999). They provide direct instructional support to students with disabilities alongside certified teachers in varied settings (Downing, Ryndak & Clark, 2000; French, 1998).

Research suggests that parents, administrators and teachers view the role of paraeducators in the education of students with disabilities as important and believe that the preparation of paraeducators is critical (Chopra & French, 2004; Mueller & Murphy, 2001; and Werts, Harris, Tillery & Roark, 2004). However, prior to the passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), few states mandated training for paraeducators and even fewer had developed core competencies for them (Carroll, 2001). When training opportunities were available, many paraeducators were not able to take advantage of them. They cited limited personal funds to meet financial cost of training and the lack of support from family members (Bernal & Aragon, 2004; French & Cabell, 1993).

As the population of students requiring the support of a paraeducator expands, the task of adequately preparing paraeducators becomes more critical. Research states that those who are least prepared, such as paraeducators, are assigned to teach those with the most complex needs (Gaylord, Wallace, Pickett & Likins, 2002; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, 2013; Giangreco, Doyle & Suter, 2012; Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron & Fialka, 2005; Maggin, Wehby, Moore-Parten, Robertson & Oliver, 2009; Suter & Giangreco, 2009). This can be said in relation to the ever-increasing demand to place paraeducators in classrooms that include student with disabilities, as well as general education and self-contained/instructional
special education settings. Similar to special education, most general education teachers are not prepared for the skill of supervising and co-teaching with paraeducators (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Carnahan, Williamson, Clarke & Sorensen, 2009; Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero & French, 2011; Gaylord et al., 2002; Maggin et al., 2009).

**Statement of the Problem**

Paraeducators support students in various settings within the course of the school day, yet research about their role supporting reading instruction is lacking. The majority of paraeducator research focuses on a few key areas: roles and responsibilities, training and preparation and utilization of paraeducators. Their role in supporting reading instruction has not been researched beyond offering ways to effectively involve them in reading instruction (Causton-Theoharis, Giangreco, Doyle & Vadasy, 2007). The need to identify the paraeducators’ role in instructional environments is necessary due to the tradition of paraeducators being placed in roles where they received little to no preparation (Giangreco, 2010; Giangreco, Doyle & Suter, 2012; Riggs & Muller, 2001).

According to Morgan (2007) the paraeducator role in supporting reading instruction should not be to introduce new skills, but should be relegated to the following activities: (a) listening to students read; (b) answering questions; (c) practicing letter names and sounds; (d) using story sequencing; (e) performing alphabetizing and rhyming exercises; (f) playing dictionary games; and (g) practicing letter names and sounds. In an article by Causton-Theoharis et al. (2007) outlining the role of the paraeducators in supporting reading instruction, they warn that instruction to students with the most need should be provided by a qualified teacher and not replaced by instruction provided by a paraeducator. They continued to provide the foundation as to how paraeducators could participate in reading instruction. They suggest that the paraeducator
be allowed to provide supplemental support within the reading program. The literacy program should be a research-based intervention program, the paraeducator be trained to provide the support and a time for feedback about their support should be incorporated into the program. Currently, there is little to no research providing details that support these recommendations. This gap in the research creates a need to study the role of the paraeducator using a research-based reading intervention program to support reading instruction.

**Research Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this research study was to amplify the voice of the paraeducator who, alongside special education classroom teachers, provide reading instruction in classrooms for students with complex learning disabilities. The context for their instructional support was Monarch Programs where the Wilson Reading System (WRS), a structured intervention, was used to teach reading. This context was selected because the WRS is a structured program that lends itself to the daily repetition of some of its lessons. It allows the paraeducator to be independent while they support instruction within the classroom setting under the guidance and supervision of a WRS Level 1 certified classroom teacher. Further, the WRS setting lends itself to collaboration by the definition of the program. Paraeducators are not allowed to introduce new information therefore they have to interact with the teacher in order to know how to support students during daily instruction.

Paraeducators’ use of time in these elementary and high school classrooms, their knowledge about the intervention and factors that they reported as having contributed to their personal success were examined.

The research questions for this study were:
• How do Wilson-trained paraeducators in the Monarch Program describe their use of time during the reading instruction period and beyond?

• How do paraeducators describe their knowledge and skills for supporting students with complex learning disabilities using the Wilson Reading System in the Monarch Program?

• What factors affect paraeducators’ ability to be successful in supporting Wilson Reading System instruction?
Chapter II: Review of the Relevant Literature

The purpose of this research study was to provide the paraeducators’ view of their roles and responsibilities while working alongside special education classroom teachers to provide reading instruction in classrooms for students with complex learning disabilities. Monarch Programs where the WRS, a complex reading intervention, was the context for this instructional support. The paraeducators’ use of time in these elementary and high school classrooms, their knowledge about the intervention and factors that contributed to their self-efficacy were examined.

This literature review identifies studies relevant to the current study and is divided into two sections. The first section will address paraeducators in special education, including the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators and paraeducator training and preparation. The second section addresses the small body of work focused on the paraeducator and their role in the use of reading interventions.

Paraeducators in Special Education

Although the employment of paraeducators is increasing, school personnel are primarily guided by a minimal body of research regarding their roles, instructional responsibilities, effective training practices and supervision, especially as it pertains to supporting student achievement. Using the terms ‘teacher assistant, teacher aide, paraprofessional, special education assistant, classroom helper, instructional aide/assistant and paraeducator’ (Chopra, 2009) in search engines such as ERIC, a small number of articles was identified. The National Clearinghouse for Paraeducator Resources website provided articles published on paraeducator pathways into teaching, as well as the website Recruiting New Teachers. To assist this effort, leaders in paraeducator research were contacted. The PAR2A Center, a clearinghouse for
professionals, organized paraeducator research into nine categories. Their bibliography contains more than 300 articles, books and reports, written between 1965 and 2013.

There are two general reviews of the literature focused on paraeducators; the first dated more than 20 years ago (Suter & Giangreco, 2009). The Jones and Bender (1993) literature review identified three themes in the research regarding paraeducators: a) history of utilization; b) efficacy research and; c) certification and training. The theme of utilization addressed the changing role of paraeducators, the theme of efficacy looked at student outcomes and educators’ perceptions and the last theme, certification and training, looked at any literature which researched programs to support paraeducator duties in the classroom. Jones and Bender (1993) concluded that there were little data available to adequately assess the expanding role of paraeducators and, despite the increased use of paraeducators, there was little evidence that connected the assignment of a paraeducator to positive student outcomes. Their work identified areas that should be explored in the future, which included the effect paraeducators have on student outcomes, trends in education, such as the Regular Education Initiative and inclusion, and training efforts for paraeducators. Although this review yielded information that was critical to moving the field forward toward understanding what was known and still needed to be investigated about paraeducators, it is important to note that the review was not databased. One particularly notable finding in the Jones and Bender review was one researcher’s largely unnoticed findings at that time: that the number of paraeducators was growing. They identified this as a major change from the current practice.

In a second review of the literature, Giangreco, Edelman and Broer (2001a) analyzed 43 articles that spanned the decade of 1991 - 2001. The majority of the articles were not databased. They argued that the field of special education should focus more research on paraeducators.
Their review indicated the need for more data focused on student outcomes where paraeducator support is in place; an alignment of training and supervision as they relate to the specific roles and responsibilities of paraeducators; and seeking alternatives to paraeducator support (Giancreco et al., 2001a).

A third review of literature conducted by Giancreco, Suter and Doyle (2010) reviewed research completed from 2000 to 2007. The focus was on paraeducators supporting students in inclusive education settings in the United States. They searched for articles with the Web of Science and ERIC search engines using two terms, paraeducator and paraprofessional. To seek additional articles, they visited the PAR2A Center site, the NRCP site and the Project EVOLVE site. Finally, to complete their search, they perused reference sections of published studies.

Thirty-two studies were found and were categorized by nine major topics; (1) alternatives to use of paraprofessionals; (2) hiring and retaining paraprofessionals; (3) interactions of paraprofessionals with students or staff; (4) paraprofessionals’ training; (5) respect and acknowledgement; (6) roles and responsibilities; (7) school change pertaining to paraprofessionals; (8) students’ perspectives; and (9) supervising and directing the work or paraprofessionals. They found that almost 50% of the studies were published in these three journals: Exceptional Children and Research, Remedial and Special Education, and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities. The authors of the study state that although the research was extensive, it did little to respond to the question of paraeducator effectiveness. They call for more research to inform policy decisions.

The nature of research and articles reviewed in these efforts varied, but there were similarities in the findings that should be noted. All of the reviews suggest that the relationship between paraeducator support and student academic progress, also termed paraeducator
This study focused on the use of paraeducators to support reading instruction using a structured reading intervention, the Wilson Reading System. It responds to one of the areas of suggested future research, paraeducator utilization. In the following, I reviewed recent research, focusing on the past six years, about paraeducators.

**Paraeducator roles and responsibilities.** A great deal of research, although limited in scope, has focused on the roles and responsibilities of the paraeducator. Of twenty-one articles, books and reports that address the role and responsibilities of a paraeducator, the majority was not databased; however, all suggest that the role of the paraeducator includes both instructional and non-instructional duties. Research acknowledges that the job of a paraeducator is complex, low paying (Genzuk & French, 2002; Giangreco & Broer, 2003; Suter & Giangreco, 2009) and involves a great deal of multitasking. French (1998) asserts that whereas some paraeducators are still responsible for walking students to and from the school bus, monitoring mealtime, bridging the gap from home to school, and performing clerical duties, more instructional responsibilities have been added (Quilty, 2007). For example, it has been noted that some paraeducators assist students in transition from high school to post-secondary environments or work opportunities while others support students in inclusive settings (Drecktrah, 2000).

While some duties include routine clerical and housekeeping responsibilities, paraeducators also perform functional assessment activities and observe and document student progress (Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay & Stahl, 2001). When asked, some paraeducators indicate that they are responsible for instructing students in ways similar to the role of the classroom teacher (Shyman, 2010). Paraeducators perform duties similar to those of certified teachers,
without prior preparation (Giangreco, Edelman & Broer, 2001b). They also indicate that they create and implement lesson plans; design, administer and grade tests; and are expected to assume the role of disciplinarian within the classroom. Specifically, while working with a small group of students, they were expected to attend to misconducts displayed by other students. This was a role in which paraeducators indicated that they were uncomfortable.

In a study conducted by Carter et al. (2009), 313 paraeducators from 77 schools, including elementary, middle and high school, were asked to complete a four-page questionnaire about their job and the specific tasks they are asked to perform. Overall, a majority of the paraeducators, 85.3%, reported that they worked with students in small groups and 4.2% of the paraeducators provided input on IEPs. Self-report data revealed that paraeducators supported behavior management and provided clerical support, such as typing and filing. If paraeducators were asked to complete a task more frequently, they reported that they were better prepared to do the job. If they were not asked to do the job often, they indicated that they were less prepared. Paraeducators in this study indicated they were most prepared to monitor hallways, provide clerical support, work with small groups or with students on a one-on-one basis, and meet with teachers and service providers. Further, they reported that they were least prepared to complete disability specific paperwork, assist with speech and physical or occupational services, write lesson plans, and participate in IEP meetings.

Findings from this study indicate a need for better role clarity. When paraeducators are provided detailed information about their work, have access to training and receive supervision from teachers, they are likely to be better prepared to perform their duties.

Fisher and Pleasants (2012) asked paraeducators who worked in general and special education settings to complete a survey about their roles and responsibilities. Over 1800
Paraeducators returned their survey and provided demographic information that asked about their experience as a paraeducator and their education background. The full survey was broken up into four parts. Part one asked paraeducators to respond about their work experience, including the length of their work day, their duties and the students they supported. Part two of the survey asked participants about their roles and responsibilities. They were asked to qualify statements about tasks they were asked to complete on a daily basis. Part three asked paraeducators to address their concerns about a perceived lack of appreciation, lack of preparation, their interaction with general education students, turnover and whether they perceived themselves in the primary role of instructor. The final portion of the survey asked the paraeducator to provide their perspective on whether the classroom teacher was prepared to work with them and staff development.

Fifty-three percent of the paraeducators identified their primary role as providing behavioral and social support. More than ninety percent indicated that this role was appropriate for a paraeducator to complete. The second highest role that paraeducators indicated as a primary responsibility was implementing teacher-planned instruction. Eighty-one percent of the paraeducators indicated that the role was appropriate for a paraeducator. Whereas paraeducators felt that attending planning meetings was appropriate for them to complete, only nine percent indicated that it was a primary role. Further, three percent indicated that interpreting for families was a role they assumed within the course of their workday. Only twenty-seven percent believed that the role was appropriate for them to complete. No further information was provided as to why they felt this role was appropriate for them to complete.

Paraeducators engage in activities that federal laws indicate should be the responsibility of the teacher. More than 25% of the paraeducators indicated that they completed lesson plans,
which is in direct contrast to what IDEIA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act) and NCLB indicate for their roles. Fifty percent of the paraeducators stated that they adapted lessons and almost 75% of them stated that the role was an appropriate one. Finally, results of this study indicated paraeducators ranked lack of appreciation for the work they do as their highest concern.

In a third study, twenty-two paraeducators working in special education from three school districts in Florida were interviewed about their roles, responsibilities, preparation and challenges. The study by Patterson (2006) asked paraeducators’ perceptions about their typical workday, relationships with school colleagues and parents and their job satisfaction. The interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes and were conducted using a semi-structured format.

These themes emerged from the interviews: range of responsibilities; strategies to support behavior management; need for better-defined job description; training and compensation; and collaboration amongst stakeholders.

Range of Responsibilities: Paraeducators indicated that during the course of a school day they engaged in a variety of duties, including conducting large and small groups, alongside the classroom teacher. Eighty-one percent of the paraeducators stated that they were capable of teaching the students but 77% wanted to be compensated for the tasks they assumed. All 22 of the paraeducators indicated that they were expected to complete clerical work such as filing, taking inventory of furniture and books, and modifying material.

Strategies to Support Behavior Management: Ninety percent of the paraeducators indicated that they were expected by their classroom teachers to assume the behavior management tasks for students in the classroom. Not only were they expected to address classroom incidents of behavior, they were also called upon to address behavior issues on a
PARAEDUCATORS SUPPORTING READING INSTRUCTION

school-wide basis. Paraeducators indicated that the preparation they received in their role addressed academics rather than behavior, although they spent a great deal of their day supporting the behavior needs of students.

Need for better-defined job description: Paraeducators stated that they were expected to respond to the needs identified by the teacher and administration and felt as if there was no definition to their role. Almost 75% of the paraeducators were frustrated by this lack of job clarity.

Training and compensation: More than half of the paraeducators indicated they were not prepared to assume the responsibilities given to them. Some paraeducators stated that they did not need any training to complete their job because they received training while they worked with their students. Further, paraeducators said they were not paid equitably for the work they completed.

Collaboration amongst stakeholders: Again, more than half of the paraeducators stated that better collaboration amongst the teachers, paraeducators and parents was needed. Seventy-seven percent indicated that the team should work together to support students.

**Paraeducator training and preparation.** Teachers working with paraeducators require guidance for effective collaboration and paraeducator supervision. Katsiyannis, Hodge & Lanford (2000) reviewed the issue of professional preparation for paraeducators. Several legal cases were reviewed in which preparation issues for paraeducators were questioned. Parents voiced concerns that the paraeducator providing the most service to their child was not the most prepared to do so. Despite the concerns of No Child Left Behind, only eighteen states have created programs to prepare paraeducators to support students with disabilities. The increase in the numbers of paraeducators, mandates for students with disabilities, as well as concerns of
parents, indicate a need for programs to assist paraeducators in acquiring the skills needed to appropriately and effectively support students.

Drecktrah (2000) states that the increase in paraeducator hiring has changed the role of teachers in special education, a factor that would indicate that preparation needs to take place in preservice education programs for special education teachers. However, there is little evidence that state educational institutions have responded to this need and few programs have been developed (French, 2001; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay & Stahl, 2001). One teacher commented on the topic of supervising paraeducators, stating “working our schedules and supervising paraprofessionals is a stressful and difficult part of my job for which I have had little or no training” (Wallace et al., 2001). In support of that statement, after revising their standards for teacher endorsements, Colorado did not include statements to support the supervision of paraeducators (French, 2001). In Wisconsin’s ten teacher education institutions, it was found that in their teacher preparation programs, only two hours are spent on issues of collaboration, preparation, supervision and evaluation as they relate to paraeducators (Drecktrah, 2000).

Breton (2010) researched the Maine Department of Education and found that they have three certificates for paraeducators: Educational Technician I, II and III. The job titles are differentiated by the years of education an individual possess. With each job title, the responsibilities increased. An Educational Technician III was charged with conducting small groups and community based instruction, in addition to the responsibilities of a Technician I and II, which was to be completed with the supervision of a special education teacher. All Educational Technicians were charged with assisting with the preparation of materials supporting classroom management, and other duties, instructional and non-instructional, that the teacher identified.
Of the 5430 paraeducators in Maine, 750 were arbitrarily sent a four-part survey to complete. One part asked the paraeducator to complete demographic information, including their current role, job responsibilities, years of service and training. The second part asked paraeducators about their perceived usefulness, and the extent of their supervision and evaluation by both general education and special education teachers. Part three asked the paraeducators about their knowledge to complete their current job and part four asked the paraeducators perception about their recent training.

Sixty percent of the paraeducators stated that they met with the teacher once a week. Approximately 16 percent of the 258 surveys returned stated that they were never supervised. Thirty-seven percent of the paraeducators stated that the support they received from their teacher/supervisor was helpful. From the data gathered in this study, it was determined that Educational Technicians I and II received the least amount of feedback regarding the work they completed each day.

Paraeducator’s Role in Supporting Reading Interventions

An article written by an author who identifies herself as having a learning disability states that any attempts to provide reading instruction failed and that by fourth grade, she was still unable to read. She credits the introduction of Monarch programs, such as Orton-Gillingham Phonics and Lindamood-Bell’s Visualize and Verbalize, offered by her school district when she was twelve years old for her reading success (Puccini, Puccini & Chang, 2013). Older students, in grades six through twelve, seldom receive support to address their reading difficulties (Edmonds, Vaughn, Wexler, Reutebuch, Cable, Tackett & Schnakenberg, 2009).

Evidence-based interventions are the key to address early reading deficits of students and allow for differentiation to meet the needs of a diverse group of students. The use of scripted
reading interventions has shown positive results for students with reading difficulties of varying ages (Stebbins, Stormont, Lembke, Wilson & Clippard, 2012; Vellutino, Scanlon, Sipay, Small, Pratt, and Chen). In their overview of the research on interventions for struggling readers from the past twenty years, Wanzek, Wexler, Vaughn and Ciullo (2009) state that students with disabilities who receive explicit instruction in phonological awareness, fluency and word meaning are more successful at improving their ability to read. They further state that those students in grades 4 – 12 are more likely to improve when they receive instruction in key areas: word study, word meaning and comprehension strategy instruction. In the following section, I review the last six years of intervention studies focused on students of varying ages with severe reading and/or learning disabilities.

A study conducted by Vaughn, Wexler, Leroux, Roberts, Denton, Barth and Fletcher (2012) addressed the impact of intense interventions on students with reading difficulties and the effects of reading instruction for students in a secondary setting. Their study addressed two areas that they contend the field has overlooked: the need to support students who did not respond to typically effective intervention and the need to provide reading comprehension intervention for students beyond third grade. There were two intervention teachers hired who received 60 hours of professional development to provide the intervention to students.

Forty-six eight graders, in their third year of receiving reading interventions, received supports to address their individual needs. Students were taught vocabulary, self-monitoring strategies, how to preview reading passages during reading and how to make predictions before, during and after reading. Teachers provided the intervention during small group instruction, with two to four students in the groups. Word study lessons were conducted during a 50-minute instructional period using an unnamed, sequential scope and sequence program from Wilson.
With this resource, teachers were given the flexibility of pacing to meet the individual needs of students. Teachers used textbooks and subject specific passages to support comprehension instruction. Sharing positive comments during weekly phone calls to students’ homes was an integral component of the intervention, as was a mandated period to address student motivation.

Results of the intervention were positive for the eighth graders. Although they had received interventions during their sixth and seventh grade years without much success, during their eighth grade year, they made marked improvement. Results indicated that although they outperformed the comparison group, comprised of typically achieving students and those who were not provided the intervention, they still did not read on the same level as their grade appropriate peers. The findings indicated that with consistent intensive intervention, students would continue to make improvements. With no intervention, however, they would remain deficient. Further, Vaughn and her colleagues suggest that intervention should continue into high school.

A study conducted by Cooke, Galloway, Kretlow and Helf (2011) looked at the use of a scripted intervention to provide additional reading skills practice for twelve first grade students identified as “at risk” for reading difficulties. The scripted intervention was administered by paraeducators using a direct instruction format in a small group setting. Paraeducators were identified as a viable group to conduct the intervention due to the lack of other available personnel and to their ability to work with students in small groups. Four paraeducators were selected to participate in this study. There were provided one-on-one training by the presenters of the intervention in three specific areas of reading instruction to effectively administer the intervention: spelling, reading and fluency accuracy and oral reading. If paraeducators were to use the nonscripted program, they were provided a 3-hour in-service, along with their classroom
teachers, by the authors of the intervention. They were provided information on how to pronounce sounds, support behavior management and how to use the materials that were provided. The paraeducators and the teachers were trained together so that the teacher would know what the paraeducator was providing and how it was being done. This training included where the intervention should be conducted, guidelines for the expected behavior of the students and how to record student responses. Paraeducators and teachers were able to view a demonstration of a lesson that included how to hold the intervention book and how students should be seated. Each skill was demonstrated with the presenters taking on the roles of the teacher and student. After the demonstrations, the paraeducator was allowed to practice teaching the skill while the two authors of the intervention monitored and offered assistance to support the implementation of the lesson. This was followed by a question and answer period with the authors. This 3-hour training was followed up with another hour and a half workshop due to paraeducators experiencing some difficulties with presenting the intervention.

Paraeducator training for the scripted program was vastly different. It took place on a one-on-one basis and was provided by a third author of the intervention. Paraeducators were taught how to read the script, how to provide the lesson and how to observe student responses. One paraeducator had an opportunity to see the intervention modeled, was able to practice the intervention and then ask questions. The presenter provided a lesson with students for the paraeducator to observe. The other paraeducators were not provided the opportunity to see the author present a lesson to students.

The paraeducators worked with students in first and second grades identified as having reading difficulties based on their Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) score. These paraeducators, with various years of experience and education, were taught to use
the Early Reading Tutor (ERT) intervention. The ERT provided two versions of their intervention, both a scripted and non-scripted option. With the scripted version, paraeducators were given the exact words to be spoken to the students. The scripted version was designed to be used in a one-on-one setting; however, it was found to be successful with up to three students. In this version, the paraeducator would say “This is a new sound. The sound is …” There was no option for group responding with this version. In the non-scripted version, students would respond to questions as a group, and then take turns giving their responses. Individually, students would have up to three times to practice the skill.

Paraeducators were asked to support phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency instruction. After receiving ninety minutes of reading instruction from their teacher, the identified students would go to another space and receive direct instruction from the paraeducator. The sessions could range from 10 to 15 minutes.

Results of this study included efficient teaching by paraeducators noted in the few incidents of off-task behavior by students. There was growth noted in the next two administrations of the DIBELS assessment. Students far exceeded the growth from their initial testing session. Eleven of the twelve students tested were at grade level on the assessment. The paraeducators all stated that the scripted version of the assessment was preferred. They stated that it allowed them to work faster with the students and increased their personal level of confidence in delivering the intervention.

In 2012, Shaw and Disney conducted a study with 244 adults with moderate to severe disabilities living in an assisted-living facility who also attended an onsite literacy program. Ninety-eight percent had been identified as having a learning disability and seventy percent were male. These employment-seeking individuals, who were classified as middle to lower income
status, were predominately Caucasian. More of the students declared that they used voice recognition software and seventy-five percent stated that they had received tutoring support in the past for their literacy deficits.

Individuals in the program participated in 80 to 120 hours of intervention and were assessed on their progress with the Woodcock Diagnostic Reading battery. Participants received 10 weeks of intervention during the morning with the Lindamood-Bell LiPS program and afternoon instruction focused on comprehension tasks using fiction texts. Teachers and paraeducators were trained to provide explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, sight words, fluency and spelling quantity and quality of preparation. For an hour, students worked in groups of three to five with the same teacher. After each hour, they rotated to a different teacher.

Students were organized into five groups depending upon the amount of time they spent receiving instruction. There was significant growth in all five categories, including those who received less than 50 hours of instruction. In fact, those students who had the strongest growth were students who spent the second to least amount of time in instruction. Although there was growth in all areas of literacy instruction, none of the literacy participants’ weakness changed. Significantly higher gains were indicated for those students whose prior vocabulary and background knowledge was greater. Those with higher vocabulary abilities made more progress.

The researchers attributed the students’ significant growth to three factors. First, it is believed that the small group environment, along with a mixed method to deliver instruction, contributed to a positive outcome. Second, the intense nature of the intervention allowed students to see successes more frequently. The ten-week program did not allow opportunity for outside distractions to impact their success. And, finally, there was assistive technology available to support instruction.
In 2007, Lane, Fletcher, Carter, DeJud and DeLorenzo conducted a study to determine if improved reading abilities impacted behavior of students. Two teachers and one paraeducator were trained to provide interventions to first grade students at risk for reading disabilities and who had significant behavioral challenges. Twenty-four students, the majority of whom were boys, ranging in age from five years to seven years of age were selected for the study. The students received services for a learning disability.

Each teacher held a teaching degree and the paraeducator had a high school diploma. All of the providers had to participate in training to learn the intervention and they had to practice it to become proficient. Each agreed to implement the intervention during the school day. Paraeducators had to agree to review behavior management strategies, conduct two groups to provide the intervention and had to agree to allow university researchers to observe them during their groups. Training for paraeducators was conducted during a 2-hour session on components of the intervention. The training included a discussion on effective reading programs and behavior management strategies. They were allowed to preview lessons and materials. The lessons were modeled for the paraeducators and feedback regarding each activity was provided. Each week, additional sessions were conducted with paraeducators by the research assistants. Feedback was given to paraeducators about lesson implementation and strategies to support behavior management. Phonological awareness training (PATR) was provided to the teachers and the paraeducator. It covered four specific areas: rhyming, blending, segmenting and reading and spelling.

Students were divided into two groups: those with below to average reading abilities and those with average to high reading skills. There were four students per group and the groups
were conducted three days a week for twenty weeks. Sessions were limited to 30 minutes each day.

Results of the study determined that while there was an improvement in some of the areas of reading, there was no decrease in behavior incidents. Students’ early literacy skills improved, including phonological skills; however, there was no indication that paraeducators were effective in managing student behavior. The study suggests that paraeducators receive additional training to address behavior. Older students, in grades sixth through twelve, seldom receive support to address their reading difficulties (Edmonds et al., 2009).

Stebbins et al. (2012) conducted a study to assess the effectiveness of the Wilson Reading System (WRS), a Monarch approach built on the Orton-Gillingham method. They looked at the use of the program with students with disabilities over a two-year period. Five female teachers from schools across the Midwest volunteered for this study. The teachers were all certified special educators and received a three-day training with the WRS. On day one of the training, teachers learned the essential parts of a Wilson lesson and the steps involved to introduce the lesson to students. On the second day, teachers reviewed the spelling portion of a WRS lesson and practiced implementing the lesson with each other. On the last day, teachers engaged in a discussion about the differences between noncontrolled text (new words and sounds are introduced) and enriched text (noncontrolled, real world text). After the lesson components were reviewed, the entire lesson was modeled for the participants.

Twenty fourth and fifth grade students were selected for the intervention whose Individualized Education Plan (IEP) identified their reading disability. The students were administered the Scholastic Reading Inventory and the Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Achievement in a pre and post-test settings to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.
During a two-year period, in addition to receiving typical literacy instruction during the regular school day, these students received 45 minutes a week of direct instruction in a resource room using the WRS. Instruction was provided in groups as small as one to three students and in groups larger than six students and included the following components: quick drills to practice vowel and consonant sounds; tapping out words previously taught; vocabulary instruction; oral reading assessment; and fluency.

Students showed significant improvement from the initial implementation of WRS to the second year of the intervention when improvement leveled off. Overall, however, there was significant growth noted in reading comprehension for struggling readers. When the students were compared to national expectations, they showed average growth rates. Previously, there was no growth indicated for this population of students.

The review of literature conveyed that although there was some information available about the day-to-day work of the paraeducator in instructional settings, there was very little about the paraeducator in a setting where reading instruction took place.
Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this research study was to provide the paraeducator perspective of their roles and responsibilities in supporting reading instruction. Paraeducators worked alongside special education classroom teachers using the WRS, a reading intervention, to provide reading instruction for students with complex learning disabilities. The context for their reading instructional support was Monarch Programs. Three questions were examined to identify their use of time in elementary and high school classrooms, their knowledge about the intervention, and factors that contributed to their sense of personal success, their self-efficacy. The absence of information about the specific role of the paraeducator in reading instruction, as indicated in the previous chapter, was the foundation for this study. The Monarch Program, where the WRS was used, was selected as a context because paraeducators were identified as integral in the provision of reading intervention support to students within the district. This chapter provides details about the methods of the study, including the design, role of the researcher, recruitment, setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Design

This study focused on the roles of paraeducators based on direct interviews with them, rather than through survey, questionnaire or other means of quantifying data. Qualitative methodology uses the researcher as the instrument typically involves a smaller, more focused sample than quantitative research (Merriam, 1998). Terms used interchangeably with qualitative research are field study, participant observation and ethnography (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative methodology has at least four distinguishing characteristics: (a) an insider’s perspective, rather than an external view; (b) the researcher as the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data, as opposed to using a survey or questionnaire; (c) fieldwork in which the researcher
conduces data collection at the site and is able to observe in a natural setting; and (d) inductive research strategy which builds on a hypothesis that emerges from the data, rather than testing an existing theory.

Using a grounded theoretical framework, I conducted 17 phone interviews with paraeducators in an effort to identify the role of the paraeducator in supporting reading instruction in the Monarch Program using the Wilson Reading System and to amplify the paraeducator’s view of their efficacy in their role.

Grounded theory allowed me, as the researcher, to discover a theory based on the actions of many participants, going beyond basic description (Creswell, 2013). The goal of grounded theory is not to manipulate data to respond to the questions of the research study (Smith, 2008). As the researcher, I was able to develop a theory by collecting and analyzing data from the field (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Smith, 2008). I engaged in a process of analysis where I compared data from one participant to another to ground the theory in the data being collected. Creswell (2013) describes data collection in grounded theory as a repeated zig-zag motion where the researcher collects data in the field and returns to the office for analysis.

For this study, I used the Strauss and Corbin method for conducting grounded theory. There are three parts associated with this method: open coding; axial coding; and selective coding (Creswell, 2013). Open coding entails labeling the data so that categories emerge. After the open coding, I engaged in a repeated activity of revisiting the data until nothing new emerged, also referred to as saturation. The middle phase of the Strauss and Corbin method is axial coding. Engagement in axial coding helped me to identify how the categories connected to larger core themes. During this phase, I worked toward understanding the relationships among the categories or themes with regard to possible causal conditions, intervening conditions and
consequences. During selective coding, one central concept is formed and provides the foundation for the narrative. It was at this point that the phenomenon being studied was revealed, thus completing the grounded theory process.

**Role of the Researcher**

There are many roles involved in conducting qualitative research. During this study, I assumed the role of interviewer, arranging and completing all phone interviews with each participating paraeducator. I analyzed the data, generated findings and identified future implications. For this district, I was the lead for all paraeducator training. For four years, I was responsible for organizing workshops and conferences for paraeducators. At these professional development opportunities, sessions on the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators, characteristics of students with disabilities, the paraeducator role in data collection and more were conducted by local and national presenters. However, it was my role as a former principal with a Monarch Program in my school that afforded me an insider’s view to the work of a paraeducator in a Monarch Program like few others. I was careful to assure that my interviews, initial analysis, subsequent interviewing and final analysis were not based on previous knowledge and experience about what the paraeducators needed to know and should be doing. I listened to each paraeducator as they spoke and when they made statements such as “you know what I mean” I responded with “please describe it for me anyway.”

While serving as a principal, I was able to offer space in my school for a district-facilitated Monarch Program, one of several throughout the district. As a former principal with a Monarch Program in my school, I had some knowledge about the implementation of the Wilson Reading System. Although I did not work directly with students in the program, I conducted semi-weekly pop-in visits to observe teaching and learning. From these visits, I was able to
create a small, non-specific, limited knowledge base about the Wilson Reading System and the role of paraeducators with the students during instruction. I had observed the paraeducator sitting with a student to engage in one-on-one instruction, as well as supporting students in a small group setting. I was aware that paraeducators had the opportunity to attend professional development offered by the District alongside the teacher to learn about the Wilson Reading System. This knowledge gave me a unique insider’s perspective (Patton, 2002). The paraeducators in my former school assisted me in piloting and refining my interview protocol, but were not a part of the research participant pool for this study.

When I interviewed the study participants, I shared my former role with paraeducators as a way to establish a trusting relationship with them. During the interviews, paraeducators would say, “well, you know what I mean ‘cause you had a program in your school.” While my background served as a conduit for paraeducators to open up about their daily practices, nevertheless, I asked paraeducators to be as explicit as possible when sharing their roles and responsibilities in the Monarch classroom and to not assume my knowledge of their experiences or contexts. The first interview yielded great details about what paraeducators did in the Monarch Program. However, paraeducators shared more openly with me during the second interview than the first interview, with one paraeducator even saying, “Can you please help me to help my kids?” I believe my insider perspective allowed paraeducators to feel comfortable in asking for help.

I used the limited knowledge I had about the Wilson Reading System to anchor my thoughts as paraeducators shared their specific roles. However, it was challenging to abandon what I believed was good practice weighed against what some of the paraeducators shared. In my role as principal, I made it a priority to address the professional growth and development
needs of paraeducators, as much as I did for teachers. To hear that a majority of the paraeducators did not have adequate preparation to provide reading support was concerning. Hence, I took additional steps during data analysis and interpretation to assure that findings were grounded in the data.

After having completed data collection and while I was immersed in the second phase, axial coding, as part of my current job responsibilities, I was asked to attend the introductory Wilson Reading System (WRS) workshop. The school district offered this workshop to instructional support leaders as part of an effort to identify additional supports for schools. Participation in the workshop provided me an accurate and full understanding the WRS and served to make the paraeducators’ descriptions of the 10-part daily lesson clear. This level of reflexivity allowed a broader perspective of the context and content of the work of the paraeducators. I was positively impressed by the WRS and its potential for academically supporting a wider range of students with learning disabilities.

**Recruitment**

Paraeducators with the title of Special Education Classroom Assistant (SECA) who worked within the district’s Monarch Programs were invited to participate in this study, therefore making it a purposely small population from which to recruit. To recruit paraeducators for this study, information was sent via email to each principal of a school where a Monarch Program existed. If principals responded, information was then sent to the paraeducator identified by the principal or their designee. If no one responded, phone calls were placed to the school in an effort to speak with the principal, the classroom teacher in the Monarch Program, the case manager or other designee (Appendix B). My previous role as a principal in this district facilitated numerous relationships with other principals across the city. In four of the schools, I
knew either the principal or the assistant principal and that facilitated approval for the paraeducator to contact me. Once contact was made with the paraeducator, information about the study was forwarded, including an introductory letter (Appendix C), a recruitment flyer (Appendix D) and a consent form (Appendix E).

For this study, in an effort to maintain the anonymity of the participants, paraeducators were asked to call me to participate in the phone interviews. These interviews were conducted at times that were most convenient for participants. The first round of interviews was conducted in the late spring and summer of 2014. The second round of interviews extended into the fall and winter of the same year.

**Setting**

This study took place in a large, urban, Midwestern school district. Elementary and high schools with Monarch Programs where the Wilson Reading System was utilized to provide instruction to students with complex learning disabilities were eligible to participate in this study. The program, originally called the Harbor Program, was established more than 14 years ago. At that time, a limited amount to schools were identified as having a program. In the past 9 years, the program expanded across the city to include classrooms for the 97 students who were mostly males “without behavioral concerns.” Transportation to and from the school is provided by the district. Students qualified for the program if they demonstrated significant decoding and encoding weaknesses in their reading. They were initially identified by a special education teacher at the local school, evaluated by a citywide Monarch Program itinerant teacher and placed by the district in one of the programs near their home school. Students could be evaluated early, after 2nd grade, enter the program as early as 3rd grade and remain there for the duration of their elementary school education. On rare occasions, students could be identified to enter the
program during their freshman year of high school. Program types were dependent upon the
grade configuration of the school. They included programs for students in primary (3rd and 4th),
intermediate (4th and 5th), upper (6th through 8th) and high school (9th through 12th). When
students graduated from the elementary school program, they had the option of transitioning to a
high school with a Monarch Program. Class size in the Monarch Program was limited to nine
students and district-level specialized support staff assisted teachers and paraeducators in
providing reading instruction to students throughout the school year.

Wilson language programs, created by Barbara Wilson
(http://www.wilsonlanguage.com), consist of three distinct reading programs grounded in a
Monarch approach to teaching reading. These three programs have been identified to support
students at various grade levels. They are Wilson Fundations®, Wilson JUST WORDS® and the
Wilson Reading System (http://www.wilsonlanguage.com).

Wilson Fundations® is a reading program that incorporates five areas of reading
instruction identified in the Report of the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness,
phonics/word study, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. It is used with students in primary
grades, kindergarten through third grade. This program supports early intervention and can be
used as either a whole group or small group instructional resource. It is taught during a 30-60
minute period. If used as a Tier 1 (in a Response to Intervention context) reading prevention
strategy, According to Wilson, it is suggested that Fundations instruction be provided by a
general education teacher for 30 minutes. When used as a Tier 2 strategy, the Fundations
intervention period should be 60 minutes, 3-5 times a week. It can be provided by a
paraeducator, general education teacher, reading specialist or other intervention support
personnel.
It is suggested that the Wilson JUST WORDS® program be implemented by a general education teacher, reading specialist or intervention support personnel within a 45-minute period. This program is designed to support reading intervention for students in grades 4-12. The class size should not exceed 15 students. The program seeks to aid students in being independent, fluent readers. Just Words emphasizes phonemic awareness, phonics, word study and spelling and should be taught five times within the week.

Introduced in 1998, the Wilson Reading System (WRS) is built on the Orton-Gillingham method using a Monarch approach to teach reading (http://www.wilsonlanguage.com). The program is used for students who are achieving below expected level in reading and students with dyslexia and in 2nd through 12th grades. Students who have received tutoring in a reading program over a number of years but continue to display reading deficits or students receiving special education services are good candidates for the WRS. Teachers use age appropriate reading materials that include workbooks, readers, word cards and videos. Students are expected to master half of the twelve foundational steps, which include acquiring encoding and decoding skills before they move on to the final six steps. It is during these final steps that students are taught use of metacognitive, comprehension strategies and vocabulary development skills. With WRS, intervention can take place in two different settings. According to Wilson, best practice to implement the program includes small group instruction provided with the classroom teacher or reading specialist leading the class, or it can take place in a more intensive manner, with a certified Wilson trained teacher. The use of visualization techniques helps students link words to pictures in their heads. When asked to retell the story, students are encouraged to do so using visualization strategies.
Wilson reading instruction should be provided 3-5 times per week for a period of 60 to 90 minutes. It can be taught one-on-one or can take place in groups with fewer than six students. Each day, students receive instruction to address decoding, oral fluency and comprehension as part of the WRS ten-part lesson plan. Students learn how to tap out words, touching their thumb to each finger to aid in making letter sounds. In Part One of the WRS, there are six student books that include ten instructional parts, as well as assessments. As students progress through the books, they improve their decoding skills and reading fluency. Each lesson, taught within the assigned reading period, is divided into three blocks. Block One is called Word Study and includes parts one through five. Block Two is the Spelling Block and includes parts six through eight. Block Three focuses on Comprehension and includes parts nine and ten. It takes two to three years for a student to progress through all 12 of the WRS books. Table 1 includes all of the WRS Part One blocks and parts.

Wilson professionals indicate that the WRS lessons be taught by a WRS-certified teacher. The course of study to become a Wilson-certified teacher consists of several components. Teachers must complete the WRS Introductory Workshop where steps 1-6 are presented. They have to engage in a 60-lesson practicum with a student approved by a Wilson trainer. During the practicum, teachers are observed a minimum of five times by a certified Wilson trainer who provides feedback on the fidelity of lesson implementation. At this time, they also demonstrate mastery of lesson plan procedures, an understanding of the language concepts while using Monarch procedures. The selected student must show mastery of decoding and encoding skills during the observation by the Wilson trainer. Finally, after the administration of a post-test to a student, teachers must submit a report that indicates that students have received 60 lesson and that they have achieved step 4.2 in the WRS lessons.
Table 1
*Wilson 10-part Lesson*

Participants

Nine paraeducators in elementary and high school programs were the participants of this study. There were five paraeducators with an Associate’s degree, two with a Bachelor’s degree and two with a Master’s degree. Paraeducators reported having less than one year and as many
as 24 years’ experience as a SECA with the district. There was one paraeducator who had been working in the Monarch Program for nine years, and another with one year in the program. Their average number of years of paraeducators working in the Monarch Program was three. One of the paraeducators transitioned from a paraeducator to a classroom teacher during the course of this study.

I was initially informed by the district that there were 11 schools with Monarch Programs where a teacher and paraeducator team provided reading instruction to students with complex learning disabilities. However, an administrator at one school indicated that they no longer have a Wilson program at their school and therefore did not qualify to participate in this study. Two programs were deemed ineligible for the study due to a conflict of interest with the researcher. Finally, one school did not respond to the many requests made for participation in this study. The data for this study were collected from paraeducators in the seven schools with active programs. There were two schools with two Monarch classrooms, which accounts for the nine paraeducators interviewed for the study.

Data Collection

In conducting qualitative research, there are many ways to collect data (Glesne, 1999); however, the method of interviewing is considered to be the most commonly used qualitative method for data collection (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative interviews go beyond describing and seek to address the how and why of a project, a situation or an experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Glesne (1999), Merriam (1998) and Patton (2002) state that interviewing allows a revelation to emerge that cannot be openly observed. It allows the researcher to hear the perspective of the interviewees and to collect their stories. Interviews allow the researcher to know what is in and on the mind of the persons being interviewed. Paraeducators working with
special education teachers in the Monarch Program were interviewed via phone and recorded. Data collected helped to uncover the “how” and “why” of what paraeducators do to support students during reading instruction each day. Previous studies asked paraeducators to provide demographic information and asked paraeducators to identify their specific roles and responsibilities. There was no published research that asked paraeducators to articulate their daily activities in a reading intervention program.

**Interviews.** A semi-structured format was employed to conduct the interviews. Paraeducators responded to 11 open-ended interview questions during the first interview, some with multiple parts. The flexibility in question order allowed for deeper exploration of a topic. Prior to the start of each interview, a script was read to outline the interview process (Appendix F). Appendix G lists questions from the first interview. Each interview during the first round was recorded and transcribed by the researcher. After open coding with the first interview was completed, a second set of questions was generated. These questions were used during the follow-up paraeducator interview and allowed paraeducators to expound upon or to clarify data from the initial interview. For the second interview, paraeducators responded to seven open-ended questions, some with multiple parts. Appendix H contains a list of the questions. These interviews were also recorded.

Two phone interviews were conducted with eight of the nine paraeducators for a total of 17 interviews. One paraeducator could not continue in the study due to the recent diagnosis of a serious illness. The paraeducator indicated that she would not have the stamina to complete the interview and asked if the questions could be sent via email. This request was granted but no response was received. This paraeducator’s first interview was included in the analysis and results. The pool of paraeducators who qualified for the study was small. Therefore, in an effort
to ensure confidentiality, no qualifying information will be provided in the results section of this study.

Interviews ranged in length from 20 to 78 minutes, depending on how much time the paraeducator needed to respond to the questions. The time span between the first and second interviews was typically four months with a summer break in between.

The first question during the first round of interviews asked paraeducators to provide some demographic information, including how many years they served as a paraeducator and more specifically how long they had been a paraeducator in the Monarch Program. Further, paraeducators were asked about their level of education and any professional development they had to support their role as a paraeducator. The first question of the second interview focused on receiving an update about the period between the first interview and the second one. Asking this question served as a catalyst for openness during the second interview. Paraeducators conveyed their interest to respond to questions.

Questions for each of the interviews were designed to allow paraeducators opportunity to share details about the work they completed on a daily basis. There were times when a follow up question such as, “can you tell me more about that,” was necessary. At the close of both interviews a final question was posed to ascertain if there was any additional information that they wanted to share. Most often, interviewees shared additional information about the WRS.

**Field Notes.** Notes to describe the interviews were written immediately after each interview was completed. Typically, these notes detailed the length and the tone of the interview. These notes also served as reminders about comments made by paraeducators that needed further exploration during the second interview. For example, after the first interview I conducted, I wrote “why hasn’t this paraeducator received the introductory workshop? If she would have
gone for training what could the achievement of the students have looked like?” At the end of another interview, I wrote that I was concerned about the paraeducator and their role in the program. This individual could not effectively describe Wilson and did not seem to plan with the teacher. These notes were instrumental, not only for shaping the content of the second interview, but also in my process of reflexivity. By writing down my thoughts and holistic impressions immediately following interviews, I was later able to consider those impressions alongside the transcriptions. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

**Member checking.** The process where the researcher returns to the participant to share transcriptions or analysis of collected data to confirm accuracy is how member checking is called member checking (Angen, 2000). I engaged in the member checking process to confirm the accuracy of the transcribed interviews with the paraeducators. I repeated what participants shared, in order to ensure that I captured their voice. I completed this process with four paraeducators who were able to describe the most steps of the 10-part WRS lesson plan. During the second interview, I framed questions in this way: “the last time we spoke you described scooping like this…” I then proceeded to share their response. If they agreed, I continued with the questions, engaging in the same process to check my transcriptions. In one specific instance, when I recounted what the paraeducator told me about a WRS strategy, she said, “Yes, that’s right. Remember I told you about scooping the first time we spoke.” If I did not have the statement correct, the paraeducator restated how her response should have been recorded. I erred on the side of the paraeducator and made a notation of the corrected response.

**Inter-coder agreement.** During the coding process, three individuals in education served as coders to establish inter-rater agreement regarding the responses from each participant. An oral explanation of the directions was provided to each coder and an opportunity for them to
ask questions was provided. The coders and the researcher coded each paraeducators’ response and then discuss the results of the coding process. There were instances where one coder identified “scooping” as an instructional practice. When discussed, it was determined that the coder issued that particular code because they were unaware of the WRS strategies. It was then agreed upon that those responses that identified WRS strategies or practices would be coded as such. In another instance, one of the coders assigned codes to opening statements as relationship building. After a discussion it was agreed that those comments would not receive a code. Inter-coder agreement above 90% was established with all three coders.

Data Analysis

Using the Strauss and Corbin method for grounded theory, I began with open coding, which took place after the first interview was conducted and transcribed. While reading the initial interview transcripts, I made notes to mark interesting facts/ideas in the margins. As I read through the transcripts a second time, memos to explain the codes were created. I engaged in the zig-zag motion from the data to the categories to reveal additional points of interest and connections with previous codes. This process continued until all of the interviews were analyzed and numerous sub-categories had been identified. At this time, I created a coding protocol consisting of a list of codes and their definitions/descriptions that was used to aid in the coding process. I then went through the full set of transcripts and field notes one more time until saturation was achieved. At this point no further novel codes or themes were being revealed. I then proceeded to identify major or core categories and then to connect the sub-categories to them. A final step in this analysis process was to consider the ideas and themes in response to the three research questions.
This chapter presented the research methods utilized for this study. It also provided a
detailed description of the recruitment, participant selection, data collection and analysis.
Information about member checking and inter-rater agreement was also provided. The next
chapter will describe the findings of the study.
Chapter IV: Results

This research study investigates paraeducators’ roles and responsibilities working together with special education classroom teachers to provide reading instruction in classrooms for students with complex learning disabilities. The context for their instructional support was Monarch Programs where the WRS, a structured intervention, was used to teach reading. Their use of time in these elementary and high school classrooms was examined along with their knowledge about the intervention and factors that contributed to their sense of self-efficacy. Nine paraeducators working in one school district were interviewed. This chapter provides the results of the data analysis in response to the research questions.

This study sought to answer three research questions: (a) How do Wilson-trained paraeducators in the Monarch Program describe their use of time during the reading instruction period and beyond; (b) How do paraeducators describe their knowledge and skills for teaching students with complex learning disabilities in Monarch Programs; and (c) What factors affect paraeducators’ ability to be successful in supporting Wilson instruction?

In the following, the results are presented in three sections corresponding to the three research questions. The sample of paraeducators in this study was small and they supported instruction in an equally small number of classrooms, each with unique features. Hence, in an effort to maintain their anonymity, neither their true names nor pseudonyms will be used when describing their responses as it is possible, for example, that a combination of comments and descriptors for any one pseudonym could be identifiable to someone with intimate knowledge of the programs. Feminine pronouns will be used throughout.

As part of research question #2, I present profiles of three paraeducators to provide a more coherent view of what this study sought to understand. The cases illustrated how a
Paraeducator can play a key role in the academic development of students with severe reading disabilities. Additionally, paraeducators used “Wilson” and “WRS” interchangeably throughout the interview and this is reflected throughout the Results Section.

Research question one: How do Wilson Reading System-trained paraeducators in the Monarch Program describe their use of time during the reading instruction period and beyond?

Paraeducators provided descriptions and explanations of their roles and responsibilities. These duties took place throughout the school day, including before and after school, and were grouped into two distinct categories: academic and nonacademic. Some of the duties that paraeducators described included collecting data, attending general education classes with students and providing supports in various formats. The non-academic duties were not optional and were often identified by the principal or assistant principal of the school. These duties were accepted by paraeducators as part of their responsibilities. One indicated that she enjoyed seeing students who were not in the Monarch Program.

Paraeducators provided insights regarding the varied number of instructional duties they completed during the course of the school day. These duties took place while they supported reading instruction using the WRS and outside of that program in other classrooms. The duties included supporting instruction in whole group, small group and one-on-one formats with the WRS, going to other classrooms with students to support math, science, or social studies instruction, collecting data within the WRS setting and in classroom settings, and attending IEP meetings. Also described as an academic duty was helping students complete homework from other classes assigned the previous night. Paraeducators also revealed that they reviewed instruction provided by non-Wilson teachers to assist students in keeping up with other
classes. shows the list of academic and nonacademic duties conducted by the paraeducators. The numbers represent the number of paraeducators who responded that they complete that particular duty during the course of their workday.

**Table 2**

_Self-reported Academic and Nonacademic Paraeducator Duties_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Duty</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address off-task behavior of students (talking, day dreaming during WRS)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend IEP meetings*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with clinicians</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning with teacher*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide support in general education setting*</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read with students</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect and/or report data to IEP team member</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and reteach homework</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take notes for students in WRS and general education settings</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Wilson Reading System</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translate for parents</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-academic Duty</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with parents*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete tasks assigned by classroom teacher, outside of classroom</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete tasks assigned by school administration</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall monitoring</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal supervision (breakfast and lunch)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Paraeducators were asked a direct question about this. Unless indicated, all other responses were volunteered, non-elicited by the paraeducator.

**Support to students in academic settings**

The WRS is designed to provide a structure to remediate reading for struggling students. Since the program addresses individual student’s deficits, the program, in its entirety, is not designed to be taught in a whole group format. However, paraeducators described whole-group instruction taking place at the start of the day or at the end of the day.

**Whole-group instruction.** As one paraeducator stated, the first step of Wilson, sound review, was typically conducted by the teacher or the paraeducator at the start of the day. As it
was described, sound review was completed as a whole-group activity because the word list used were consistent across all reading levels. More than one paraeducator stated that the teacher would provide an overview each morning of what would take place during the Wilson instruction period. Eight of the nine paraeducators stated that they engaged in some type of whole group instruction at the beginning or end of the day. If whole-group instruction occurred at the end of the day it was conducted to recap the days’ activities, identify homework for the evening or to give a pre-view of the next day’s lessons.

Each day, the teacher or paraeducator would stand at a display of the alphabet with the vowels on orange cards and the consonants on cream colored cards. Digraphs were on slightly larger, light-colored cards. All of the students engaged in this whole-group activity because, regardless of the WRS level of the students, sound review remained the same each day. In an effort for students to catch up to other students, a paraeducator stated that she also worked with students individually on this part of the lesson. Another paraeducator identified sound review as what she liked about the WRS. “That’s the good thing about Wilson…you review what you did and what you’re doing right now; the old that you did yesterday and what you do today. You always go back” (phone interview, 1/23/15). A paraeducator provided an example of sound review.

‘I’m going to introduce you to the first three vowels.’ I would show that for example when you say a, you also show an apple. I’m also gonna say the sound. A, apple, ah. E, elephant, eh. And, each time [the students] see the letter, [they] know how to read it. (phone interview, 10/24/15)
One paraeducator described how their Wilson period flowed. After a brief whole group period, small group instruction and then one-on-one instruction took place. The teacher and the paraeducator would take turns providing different types of instruction.

We do work in a group but then when you need that special one on one, we give it to you. We not only do this in the Monarch room but it extends out. If I have to go with him or her to their social studies class or to their math class or their Spanish class, that’s where I go and that’s where I extend my services. (phone interview, 6/17/2014)

**Small-group instruction.** The paraeducator role in small-group instruction was described as working with three or four students who were on the same WRS instructional level or in the same book. All of the paraeducators made reference to small-group instruction. The examples provided by the paraeducator were of students moving through the Wilson books at their own pace. Within each of the 12 books, there were a varied number of lessons. Paraeducators described that their role was to support the various lessons within the books stating that they did not introduce new material or new lessons. They only “reinforced” or “reviewed” what the teacher previously taught and provided the structured support for practice that assisted students in reading more fluently.

A paraeducator described the teacher working with two students and her working with the other two until they eventually worked with all of the students. Another paraeducator believed that small group instruction was the most effective aspect of the WRS.

What I think about Wilson is the small group setting. I also think that it is probably the only time that children get the one-on-one phonics and phonemic awareness instruction for any length of time. I think that’s the major thing that works. (phone interview, 11/08/2014)
**One-on-one instruction.** Provision of one-on-one services varied from paraeducator to paraeducator. If the students learned a new skill, she would support that student by working with them alone. One stated that she did not engage in any one-on-one activities with students. She explained that one-on-one support was provided by the classroom teacher. One-on-one time also included helping students to catch-up on Wilson lessons missed due to absence. When this occurred, paraeducators reviewed the first step in the WRS, what they termed the sound review. Four paraeducators reported that they would listen to students read and provide feedback to the teacher regarding the students’ fluency. This feedback occurred when they charted words that the students knew. It was in these one-on-one contexts that the paraeducators collected data for the teacher. One expounded on that statement by including:

> I listened to one student read. The student would read to me and we would stop and kinda analyze what they were reading. I would make them tell me what they thought about the passage. (phone interview, 6/20/2014)

These one-on-one services did not occur only in the Monarch classroom. One paraeducator shared that she went with students to other classrooms to support the fulfillment of the IEP by providing needed accommodations. If students needed note-taking support, the paraeducator provided that support. If a student needed assistance catching up in another subject area, that support was also provided. Paraeducators also provided homework help to students in non-Wilson subject areas such as math, science and social studies. None of the paraeducators stated that they received preparation to provide support in these other subject areas.

Paraeducators also sat with students in other curricular areas and encouraged them to stay focused. If students lost focus, the paraeducator redirected them back to instruction. Three paraeducators reported that they received directives from administrators to complete other
assignments that typically included addressing inappropriate behavior for students not in the
Monarch Program.

Finally, another paraeducator described her role in one-on-one instruction as supporting
the final Wilson step, comprehension S.O.S. (stop, orient and support/scaffold). This step was
described as drawing a picture to help the student understand what he/she read, stating that if
students were only able to read every three or four words the use of pictures helped to improve
their comprehension. This was the only paraeducator who mentioned this strategy. It is
important to note that a WRS trainer described this step as “a complex and vital component of
the Wilson strategy that teachers typically skip or avoid” (WRS workshop content, 1/21/2015)

Two paraeducators described their collection of data. For example, while supporting
instruction in a non-Wilson settings with a student, the teacher asked the paraeducator to collect
data on how the student responded to different instructional settings and to record how many
times the student needed to be redirected. These data were subsequently presented by the teacher
during IEP meetings.

**Attending IEP meetings.** Three paraeducators described a portion of their time spent in
IEP meetings. These paraeducators provided feedback to teachers and other team members
about the academic progress that students were making in the Monarch Program. Specifically,
they would share details about how well the student was reading and how many words they were
spelling accurately. One paraeducator stated she only provided positive statements about the
students. Another paraeducator described talking to the teacher about the academic performance
of a student who was taking medication. This feedback was also shared in interviews with the
counselor prior to IEP meetings or was given at the table during the meeting.
During IEP meetings, four paraeducators stated that they provided translation services for parents. They had the sense that because they could speak their language, that parents felt more comfortable speaking with them. One paraeducator was clear in stating, however, that she asked the teacher’s permission before she had any conversation with parents. Her interactions with parents occurred after school and during the school day.

**Supports to students in nonacademic settings**

Within the course of the school day, paraeducators indicated that they were asked to complete non-instructional duties. Typically, these duties were not with students in the Wilson program, rather they were duties that impacted the entire school. In one example, the paraeducator described going with a student to gym. The student had been exhibiting inappropriate behavior and the paraeducator was assigned to help the student to “avoid getting into more trouble” (phone interview, 7/15/2014).

Five of the nine paraeducators stated that they were responsible for a number of non-instructional duties, some standard and other assigned by teachers or school administrators. They described standing in the lunchroom to supervise students while they either ate breakfast and/or lunch and how they greeted and directed parents who dropped off students for school. Most often these students were not students in the Monarch Program because these students were transported from other parts of the district to specifically receive WRS instruction. One paraeducator stated that she knew the parents of students who dropped off their children for school each morning but did not know the parents of students in her classroom. Paraeducators were assigned door duty, which involved them standing at their assigned door of the school to watch as students entered or exited the building. Finally, paraeducators were assigned hall-
monitoring duty where they would either stand in the halls or walk up and down the halls to make sure that no students lingered during transition from one class to the next.

The time that paraeducators spent fulfilling these duties was time that they believed would be better spent to engage in planning with the classroom teacher prior to the start of the school day. Based on the descriptions that they provided, paraeducators in elementary school settings spent a minimum of two hours each day teaching and supporting WRS instruction in the Monarch classroom and other settings. One paraeducator stated that she spent 80% of her time supporting WRS. The rest of the time was spent providing other support for students within and outside the Monarch Program. Since the first interview, the paraeducator shared that she no longer provided any supports outside of the Monarch Program. The “outside” duties that she once performed, including attending classes with students, were now the responsibility of another SECA in the school. High school was organized differently.

A paraeducator described her morning routine in this way:

As a para basically I arrive earlier than most of the staff and supervise the entry of students. Pretty much, I do lunchroom/breakfast supervision. I transition with the kids in grades 3-8 and monitor the halls and clear the halls before instruction starts at 9 a.m.

(phone interview, 6/20/2014)

To summarize, paraeducators reported that their use of time in the Monarch Program included performing both academic and nonacademic duties. Their instructional duties included supporting students during whole group, small group and one-on-one instruction. Their time was divided between working with students in the Monarch Program using the WRS and going to other non-special education classrooms to provide instructional and behavioral support to students. They collected data for the teacher and other professionals for use in IEP meetings and
engaged in translation support for parents in IEP meetings. Some paraeducators reviewed instructions provided by teachers outside of the Wilson program and assisted students with homework completion. Paraeducators also performed non-instructional duties, which included greeting parents and students during entry and dismissal, monitoring breakfast and lunch and monitoring halls during transition to classes.

**Research question two: How do paraeducators describe their knowledge and skills to support instruction using the Wilson Reading System for students in the Monarch Program?**

In this district, the WRS is used to provide reading instruction to students with complex learning disabilities. The program is characterized by small class sizes with no more than nine students. There is a paraeducator in each classroom, working alongside a Wilson Level 1 certified teacher (or a teacher who is in the process of receiving certification), to support instruction. To obtain a position in the Monarch Program, both the teacher and the paraeducator are expected to attend the introductory WRS course. The introductory course is a pre-requisite to obtaining WRS Level 1 Certification. According to a district representative, this certification is not offered to paraeducators. Paraeducators spoke about their qualifications and preparation to become a Special Education Classroom Assistant (SECA), past coursework that prepared them to support reading instruction and their introductory professional development to the WRS. Although there were four paraeducators who did have the introductory workshop, six of the nine paraeducators stated they felt prepared to support reading instruction in the Monarch Program. According to the district manager of the Monarch Program, there were plans for those who did not participate in the training to do so prior to the end of the school year.
To become a SECA in this district, individuals need 60 college credit hours, with no defined course content. Paraeducators engaged in workshops offered by the district that helped them to shape their role and responsibility as a SECA. These workshops were conducted on professional development days identified by the district and covered topics such as defining special education terminology, understanding disabilities, meeting the academic needs of students and addressing student behavior. Five paraeducators stated that they had some coursework in education in the past, including one with courses in child development. One paraeducator recalled taking a course in college about reading, but did not remember the course content and therefore did not believe that the knowledge was applicable to the current work environment.

One paraeducator spoke candidly about the minimum requirements for the position and was concerned about the quality of preparation for paraeducators working in the Monarch Program. She stated, “You need to have a certain set of skills [to do this job well] and that’s more than what you need to get the paraeducator license” (phone interview, 12/02/2014).

According to a certified Wilson trainer, WRS lessons may last from 60 minutes to 90 minutes. In this school district, elementary schools are required to have a two-hour literacy block in kindergarten through fifth grades and it was during this time that WRS was implemented. In middle school grades 6-8, literacy periods lasted for one hour. In high school programs, WRS was provided during 54-minute periods, with students sometimes having a double period.

Due to the contrast among respondents regarding their knowledge and skills to support the WRS, the findings in response to this question will be based on two groups: those who received the introductory workshop to support the WRS and those who did not receive the training. Following this section are the profiles of three paraeducators, two who participated in
the introductory WRS workshop and one who did not. The content of their interviews provided rich descriptions about classroom practice and their commitment to helping students learn to read. Their profiles articulate the possibility of the impact of paraeducators during reading instruction.

**Participated in the WRS introductory course.** There were five paraeducators in this study who described the 3-day WRS introductory workshop as a professional development session where they learned the theory behind the structure of the WRS. The introductory course, they stated, provided them opportunities to practice the ten steps involved in completing a WRS lesson. During this professional development session, they learned about “tapping,” introduced in step two, and “scooping,” introduced in step five. It was also at this time that their role in supporting reading instruction in the Monarch Program was clarified by the district. Paraeducators reported that it was stated and emphasized that they would not teach any new material but that they would review previously taught information. Two paraeducators attended the workshop with their classroom teacher, learning alongside them and two paraeducators shared that they attended a “paraeducator only” workshop where SECAs from across the district were present. The fifth paraeducator did not provide specifics about who was in the room for her session.

To become more proficient in their ability to support Wilson instruction, three paraeducators described the actions they took after they participated in the introductory course. One paraeducator took the Wilson manual home and read it repeatedly while another observed the teacher several times to make sure she understood how to implement the lessons. Another paraeducator was allowed to demonstrate a lesson to the teacher in an effort to strengthen her ability to support students.
Although there were five paraeducators who had the introductory workshop, when asked
to describe what they did during the course of their WRS instructional day, only one
paraeducator described all ten of the steps and the two distinct strategies involved in teaching
Wilson. This paraeducator also stated that she wanted to receive more Wilson training to better
meet the needs of her students. Paraeducators were asked to walk through their day during WRS
instruction. Some of the paraeducators struggled to recount parts of 10-part WRS lesson. Table
3 offers a look at the steps paraeducators were able to describe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paraeducators' Ability to Describe Wilson Instructional Steps and Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paraeducator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tapping</td>
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<td>Scooping</td>
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Four of the five paraeducators who received the WRS introductory workshop were able
to speak about Wilson with a clarity that others were not able to do. When asked to describe
what they did on a daily basis, one of the paraeducators began by listing the steps of a WRS
lesson. She stated that each day began with the sound review and provided the content of the
one-on-one session she engaged in with the student. This paraeducator also described the process for collecting data about the student’s progress.

Um, from there um, we do the sound review, and if he learned a new skill I go over, I sit with him in a one-on-one basis. Ah, we go back and we practice the words that we already know how to decode and read. We practice and we practice and we practice and then he gets a set of ten words. And then after that we go into his [Wilson] book. And if that’s a story that he reads for the first time, I actually mark how many words he had trouble decoding and reading. (phone interview, 6/17/2014)

Another paraeducator described her day in a Monarch classroom in detail. She stated that she and the teacher work with a small number of students within the WRS period. The students are often in different groups even though they are in the same grade. She talked about how they taught the students to tap out words and shared that she and the teacher follow a lesson plan. After they introduce the first WRS step in a whole group setting, they move to support students in small groups.

We can have anywhere from 5 to 9 students and all of them are at different levels. They could be the same age group, in the same classroom, but be on different levels. There are different steps that you follow. We start with book one which is the basic. We teach the kids how to tap the words out…that each word has a sound and we teach them how to combine the sounds together. We have a lesson plan that we follow. The teacher gives the first overview of each lesson and then we break out into little sessions. I’ll take a group and she will take a group. I emphasize whatever she just went over. (phone interview, 6/18/2014)
Another paraeducator provided a description of how she and the teacher supported students during WRS instruction. She stated that there were steps that she and the teacher followed each day. She described instruction that was provided in different formats, including whole group and small group instruction.

There are different steps that you follow. The teacher gives the first overview of each lesson and then we break out into little sessions. I’ll take a group and she will take a group. I emphasize whatever she just went over. We have a lesson plan that we follow. She goes over it and then I reinforce it or repeat it. (phone interview, 6/18/2014)

Finally, one more paraeducator was able to describe how the WRS was implemented in their classroom on a daily basis. Her schedule included working with students in varying grades and those on different levels in Wilson. She described her day working with one student on decoding. She began the day with the sound review and stated that she engaged the student in practice. After she worked with one student, she then proceeded to support another student. In the following quote, the paraeducator demonstrated that she knew some of the WRS steps.

Ah, we do the sound review we do the cards… umm we go back and we practice the words what we already know… how to decode and read and then I go through the new skills. And I teach him the rules of the new skills and we practice and we practice and we practice. And then he gets a set of ten words. And then after that we go into his book. And that’s a story that he reads for the first time. It could be that he is learning a new skill. I actually mark how many wrong words or how many words he had trouble decoding and reading. After that I move to the next person. (phone interview, 6/17/2014)
The vocabulary these paraeducators used included Wilson-specific terms such as “tapping” and “scooping.” When asked to describe these terms, only three of them could do so. One of them offered a simple description of tapping. She stated that she and the teacher demonstrate how to “tap words out” to students. They teach students that each letter has a sound and tell them how to combine the sounds together to make words. A different description of tapping was provided by a paraeducator who stated that by tapping with your fingers the motion triggers a part of the brain, which helps students to remember words.

For example, I would spell the word cat. I’m gonna be tapping, c-a-t [makes letter sounds]. I won’t be saying cat. I will be using not only the letter but I’m gonna use the sounds those letters make and put those sounds those letters make together while I am tapping. I am actually tapping with my own fingers on my hand or I’m tapping on the table with each finger. That will trigger a motion to my brain for me to get the sense of ‘I can remember that’. (phone interview, 6/17/2014)

When asked to describe scooping, only one of the five Wilson-trained paraeducators could do so. She provided an example of what it sounds like when a student reads a sentence using the strategy to break up the sentence into phrases and what it sounded like without scooping.

For instance if I’m reading ‘the teacher went to the store’, but with our kids, it’s hard for them to say ‘the teacher went to the store,’ so they’ll say, ‘the teacher…went to…the store.’ So they’ll scoop them, they will break down the whole sentence into scoops.

(phone interview, 6/18/2014)

**No participation in the introductory WRS preparation.** There were four paraeducators who reported they had no WRS preparation. These paraeducators were not able to provide details
about the WRS in the way that their trained counterparts were. When they provided details, they were incomplete and lacked specificity. For example, when asked to describe their day in the Wilson Program, one paraeducator stated:

You have the curriculum, the reading material. I pretty much, I have the words laid out for the students to say. If they can’t pronounce or enunciate, I write down which words they struggle with. I make sure I put a checkmark on the words that he or she were uncomfortable with. That’s pretty much what I did. Just figure out the words that the student had the trouble with the most. (phone interview, 7/15/2014)

A similar, general response to the same question was provided by another paraeducator who had been working in the program less than two years. She stated that they [she and the teacher] tell the students to slow down and to reread sentences if the students miss words. She stated that they make sure that the student is comfortable with reading by asking them “what does that page mean to you. What did you get out that page?” (phone interview, 6/16/2014).

Only one paraeducator in this group could describe more than four of the parts of the WRS lesson. Three of the paraeducators only described four or fewer lesson parts. When asked about “tapping,” two of the four untrained paraeducators could not provide a clear description of the strategy. One of them stated that she read the WRS manual that she borrowed from the teacher and observed the teacher several times before assuming her role in the program. She received hands-on coaching to support the students and felt like that preparation was sufficient. Despite reading the WRS manual and the coaching she received, when asked about “tapping,” the paraeducator could not describe this core WRS strategy. Another paraeducator stated that “tapping” was “just sounding out the entire word. Each sound that they make they tap it on the desk. That’s pretty much how that goes” (phone interview, 7/15/2014).
The majority of this group of paraeducators, three of the four, could not provide a detailed description of scooping either. One paraeducator stated, “When they [students] learn to read the sentences, they learn how to scoop” (phone interview, 6/17/2014). This description is in contrast to the detailed description of scooping provided by trained paraeducators. It does not mention using your finger to move from one part of the word clusters to another, nor was the paraeducator able to provide an example of the strategy. One of the four untrained paraeducators did provide a description of scooping.

Paraeducator profiles

Profile #1. One paraeducator emerged as an exemplar of the impact that paraeducators can make supporting instruction for students in the Monarch Program. This individual communicated a passion for her role in the WRS in a way that others did not. She expressed a desire to assist students in learning to read by going to measures that stated she would not give up until her students learned to read.

When her son entered first grade, this paraeducator also obtained a job as a SECA. It was at the same time that she noticed that her child was a nonreader. She watched her child lose focus and become frustrated when completing homework so she began looking for ways to support him. She purchased commercial programs advertised on television that claimed to turn nonreaders into readers. These programs proved ineffective. She moved to another neighborhood and enrolled her child into a new school. Her child’s teacher began noticing the learning and behavior struggles that her child exhibited and asked if she would be interested in meeting the school counselor. She attended the meeting and consented for her child to be tested. Shortly thereafter, she was told that her child had a mild learning disability. The people around the table told her that something happened in his nervous system and that it was all her fault.
She described being confused, feeling intimidated being in a room with people who had more education than she did and thinking that she was illiterate. At that moment, she decided to return to school and was told by her professor, after she described her situation that “a person who is not knowledgeable is actually cursed” (phone interview, 6/17/2014). She internalized that statement and changed her major in school from clerical to education. She described that as the turning point in the way she supported her child, other children and the parents of those students who had unique learning needs.

The paraeducator described the relationship she developed with the teachers and clinicians over the year while she worked as a SECA, often bridging the communication gap between the classroom and the meeting table. During interactions with a speech-language pathologist, she learned several techniques and strategies that she currently used to enhance WRS instruction. For example, she purchased a little personal mirror for students to use as they practiced pronouncing words or reading. “Every time he does the sounds he puts the mirror in front of him so that he can see the mouth. ‘I want you to look at how your mouth looks when you make the sound’” (phone interview, 10/24/2014). She also described using the receiver of a phone so that students could listen to themselves as they read or produced sounds.

I put myself in a child’s place. I go to find things to help kids. We use a phone, the receiver of a phone. It’s something that I picked up when I worked with the speech therapist. It helps when they [the students] are reading the sound or the words. I am not only using the Wilson strategies that I have learned but some other stuff that I have picked up in other places. (phone interview, 10/24/2014)

She not only provided supports to students in the WRS setting, but also referenced that she supported students by following their IEP. If students needed supports in science or social
science, she went into those settings to work with students. If students needed support understanding assignments from the general education classroom, such as reviewing the U.S. constitution she provided that support. “I want to do my part to help them succeed. I don’t want them to experience what I experienced” (phone interview, 10/24/2014). The paraeducator stated that prior to the start of the school year, she and the classroom teacher read the IEPs of students and discussed how best to provide support. Regarding the placement of a student that did not fit the typical profile of a student in the WRS program, the paraeducator stated that she and the teacher discussed the IEP to identify how best to support the student. They discussed some of the strategies listed in the IEP that worked with the student previously that they were going to use during the current school year. She stated that they challenged students but not to the point that they would become frustrated. She articulated her role in implementing the IEP in other settings.

I am all over the place. Sometimes I go to the math classroom with them, it’s whenever the help is needed. Not only do I help them in the classroom, but since they have an IEP if this IEP says they need help in the regular setting then that’s where I go with them. When the bell rings I take one to the third floor the other one to the 1st floor. I run back again to the elevator. It’s like I don't have a moment for myself. (phone interview, 6/17/2014)

The paraeducator described working with other paraeducators in the school to provide support to students. Not only were classroom observations embedded into their daily routines, they also engaged in daily discussions to support each other when they were experiencing blocks in their learning to help students. They never used names, she stated, because “everything is confidential” (phone interview, 6/17/2014)
One of us would say, ‘I’m going to the math class, and they’re teaching, algebra or integers and I forget how to do it. I am getting confused.’ Then you say, ‘Don’t worry about it, this is how you do it. Try this and try that.’ We support each other. We have each other’s back. (phone interview, 6/17/2014)

Over the span of many years, this paraeducator supported numerous students using the WRS. She described a student that she worked with who was successful in the WRS. She did anything that she could to help the student learn. She was introduced to the student through his grandmother and committed to working with the student in an after school setting. When she began working with him he was in third grade and she started using Book 1. When the student graduated, he had completed the first part of the WRS, Books 1-6 and was in Book 8, the second part of the WRS.

The paraeducator stated that she loved the program because it worked. She offered her opinion about implementation of the program and who would benefit best from the WRS. She stated that the program should be used daily and that it would be beneficial for students with and without disabilities because “it teaches the alphabet and sounds” (phone interview, 6/17/2014). She believed that educators should take the introductory WRS workshop to understand her loyalty.

Once you do it’s like love at first sight. Like I said, once you learn it and you get to apply it, even the tiniest success in the child you feel like…singing…if you could start jumping up and doing circles you feel happy. (phone interview, 10/24/2014)

In the past, this paraeducator was encouraged to become a teacher. She declined and stated that years ago she had her chance to pursue that opportunity. Right now, she stated, she was happy to be in the position of a SECA and referred to the teachers as being more qualified
and more professional to address the needs of the students. She compared herself to the teacher and described herself as “the little league” (phone interview, 6/17/2014).

**Paraeducator Profile #2.** When this paraeducator began to describe her school day, she started from the time she walked into the school building. According to her, the day started early and ended late, with her and the classroom teacher reviewing what needed to be accomplished during the school day; but she did not mind. Her focus was on helping students to read, supporting independence with her students and providing opportunities to encourage them.

She described her role and the role of the teacher in helping students learn to read. The teacher entered the classroom and printed out materials she needed for the day’s lessons for each student. The classroom teacher assessed what needed to happen with the students and then told the paraeducator what needed to occur during instruction. The teacher was responsible for advancing students in the WRS and the paraeducator was there to support the teacher in providing instruction. She also supported students when they begin to doubt their ability to read as well as other students by telling them, “If you want to read thick books, you go little by little. It’s not going to happen overnight. You have to do your part” (phone interview, 6/18/2014). She shared a conversation with a student who was embarrassed about her poor reading ability and using the strategies she learned in Wilson. “We tell her, ‘You don’t have to tap [on your fingers], you can tap it on your leg or you can tap it on the table. Everybody in the school is not a perfect reader’” (phone interview, 6/18/2014).

This paraeducator described tapping and scooping as important for students to learn. She and the teacher taught that digraphs, *th, ck, ch, wh* and *sh* each get only one tap because they make only one sound. She shared an example of a lesson where she helped students to differentiate between the *f* sound and the *th* sound.
Like, \(b, a, th\) – it’s like one. And a lot of our kids, well some of our kids, when they hear the word, they hear the \(th\) as the \(f\) sound. We have to emphasize that the \(f\) sound is the \(f\) and the \(th\) is the \(th\) sound. I tell them you spit when you go \(th\) on your hand and that means it’s a \(th\). We showed them how to use their mouth how to do it with their mouth to make the sound. You get a different sound with \(th\) and \(f\). And that helps them. (phone interview, 6/18/2014)

Her description of a session when she reviewed scooping with a student included an example. She stated that rather than students reading a sentence as if they were a robot, she helps them to identify words that could be broken into two or three-word clusters to help them read the entire sentence with fluency. “Rather than say ‘the…teacher…went…to..the…store,’ read like a robot, they take two or three of the words and put them together.” (phone interview, 6/18/2014)

Her relationship with her classroom teacher was described as open and honest. If she needed support with one of the lessons, the teacher was there to provide that support. When she was presenting a Wilson lesson on the \(schwa\) sound, she asked the teacher for help. She recognized that she had trouble with that sound and did not want to tell the students something that was wrong. The teacher reviewed that lesson with her and she felt comfortable presenting it to students. She described her teacher and other teachers in the school as being supportive.

Another role for this paraeducator was supporting the implementation of students’ IEPs. She attended general education classes with students where she supported science and social studies, but also worked with them in the Monarch classroom. She stated that she supported them during assessments by reading the test to them, a support outlined in their IEP. Her knowledge of students indicated that she had access to the students’ IEPs. She stated that some of the students had shared paraeducator minutes and she was directed to divide her attention to supporting each
of them. She further stated that the students’ IEPs informed how her day was spent. She described positioning herself in an area where she was close to all of the students.

She believed that every aspect of Wilson worked well to help students learn to read but also believed that the lessons had to be presented daily. If she and the teacher did not make it through each step of the lesson on any day, they made sure to cover it the next day. Her examples of each step of the WRS lesson are included in Table 4. She stated that she was trying to visualize the WRS steps. Her recollection of the steps can be compared to those described in Table 1 on page 39. Because this was a phone interview, I cannot be certain of whether or not she was reading from notes. Nonetheless, the descriptions she provided were those of accurate examples that clearly represented an understanding of the Wilson Reading System 10-part lesson.
Table 4

Paraeducator Profile #2 - Examples of the Wilson Reading System Instructional Steps

**Step One: Sound Review**
Example: “You’re sitting in front of me. We say bat, rat, rug. I use the word cards, or the magnet board. I write it and they say it. If they don’t know it, they tap it.”

**Step Two: Review Words**
Example: “After we do that I introduce sh and ck. So I give them five words and I write them and tell them to say it and tap it or say it.”

**Step Three: Word Cards**
Example: “Each child had a different pile of cards. They mark the words to see if there’s a short sound or today he will mark the words that have the a or u or if it’s a closed syllable. They put them in piles. You make it different every day just to shake it up a little.”

**Step Four: Practice Reading**
Example: “We open a page, any page in the book where are, and we tell them to practice them. We make a chart of the 9-15 words. I will point to the words on the page and she/he will read them to me. I tell them to read the words on their own. Whatever I hear, for instance, the word is cat, and the child says c-at but he says gap. I chart what he says. If the student reads the words perfectly, you continue. If they get five wrong, you know they’re not getting it. They color it in on their chart and then you know how well they’re doing that they’re grasping it. That’s how we chart them to see where they are and what we need to work a little harder on. Then we have them read sentences.”

**Step Five: Scooping Sentences**
Example: “The kids read the sentences. When they get more comfortable, and read a sentence like ‘the cat is on the mat,’ they start scooping them. So they’ll scoop them, they will break down the whole sentence into scoops.”

**Step Six: Sounds and Word Pronunciation (like step 1)**
Example: “I would say to the student, what says this, what says [paraeducator makes a sound] and the student then declares what the sound makes. If they make an error, I review it with them.”

**Step Seven: Review Reading Concepts and Spelling**
Example: “I give them the letters and they write the letters they use the magnet board, or air write it. We say a word and then they write it down; they repeat it and write it down. They can sky write. Visual and memorization are the tips you always sky write the sight words because they don’t make sense if you tap them out. Then we go to dictation, with 5 words, using the consonant, the vowels and the digraphs. I say repeat after me and then they write what letters say the sound. Then we choose 3 sentences, from the ones they have been practicing, for instance I will say, ‘Sid had the mop.’ They repeat it and then I say it again and they write the sentence. We give them the sentences from the work they are reading.”

**Step Eight: Dictation**
Example: “Students take out a piece of paper and number it 1-20. For 19 and 20 she [the teacher] will give them two sentences. We will correct it on the board if the words are not spelled right. Sentences should have capitals and periods.”

**Step Nine: Adding Pictures to Stories**
Example: “We give them a story. We read it together and I draw it. The kids know that my sentences are funny. I draw a log and a person sitting on the log. So I will say ‘sat on the log’ so that they can picture what I’m saying. Whatever they are on we draw it for them so they can visualize it. They can then ask us a question about the story.”

**Step Ten: Reading, Listening and Comprehension**
Example: “We know they don’t understand what they read. We answer the questions in the book; we use something that they are familiar with. Listening and comprehension; in this step there is more spelling skills practice. Students are asked what the book or story was about and they apply their skills there. We do step 9 more than this one. With step 10 she [the teacher] gives them a story, a handout and they read it (outside of any book we are reading in class). It’s an outside story. They have to put down three things that they have learned and underline all of the ing ending, the th. They have to find those in the story right now. Ing or ng or th, wh, ch, but all those have a name.”
Paraeducator Profile #3. This paraeducator did not have the introductory WRS training but was able to describe seven of the ten parts of the WRS lesson. Her knowledge of the WRS came from the classroom teacher. She stated that she had some courses in reading where she learned how to record reading errors and conduct reading assessments. In the Monarch Program setting, she was not allowed to implement anything she learned in other places. She shared that she was to follow the WRS lesson plan.

This paraeducator’s support for students included attending non-Wilson classes with them. She began her day in Wilson, but after lunchroom supervision, she hopped around going from one non-Wilson classroom to another. She said that she spent 30 minutes in one room and 45 minutes in another. She did not provide Wilson support to any student beyond fifth grade. She stated that she spent a great deal of time in non-Wilson settings, supporting students’ instruction in “six regular education classrooms.” When in a Wilson setting, she stated that the day began with sound review to provide phonemic awareness instruction. Following that, she tapped words with students.

We go over the vowel sounds. We follow up with tapping. We do tapping and blending and we review similar words or the same words for quite a while. Students make the sounds of the letters and they blend them together. B, i g, they tap out first finger, middle finger, ring finger [for each sound]. (phone interview, 6/20/15)

Her description of scooping provided clarity regarding how students use this strategy during instruction. “We do some reading, using the scooping method. We moved from scooping words to scooping phrases; going from one side of the word to the other or going from the beginning of a phrase to the other” (phone interview, 6/20/15). During the WRS time, after sound review, she
and the teacher would engage in small group instruction where they gave students three or four-letter words. She provided the following example:

One word would be dip or buzz. We would try to have the kids decode the words, tap them out before we moved to other words [nonsensical words]. They needed to decode the words to have some measure of success. (phone interview, 6/20/15)

This paraeducator stated that she had known the students since pre-school and that it was nice to see them overcome their reading challenges to experience success in the WRS setting. She stated that she was often called in to support students during IEP meetings and was familiar with various individuals around the table, including the Occupational therapist, the speech-language pathologist and the psychologist. She reported that being at the IEP meetings gave her a different vantage point and presented a picture of the whole child. She called this opportunity being valued as a paraeducator.

In summary, paraeducators described their preparation not only to work in the Monarch Program, but also to be a SECA in the district. Of the nine paraeducators, there were only five who received the introductory WRS workshop who were also able to describe their day supporting instruction with details that the untrained paraeducators were not able to do. Three of them outlined five or more of the ten steps involved in teaching daily lessons to students. This group also provided examples of tapping and scooping. There were five paraeducators who did not describe more than four of the parts of the WRS lesson. Of that number, there was one had received the WRS introductory workshop.

**Research question three: What factors affect the paraeducator’s ability to be effective in supporting Wilson instruction?**
For the most part, paraeducator relationships impacted their sense of efficacy. It was evidenced by their professional interactions with teachers and other school personnel and their emotional connections to students. These interactions allowed paraeducators to cultivate a sense of success in helping students. They identified factors that impacted their ability to be successful in supporting Wilson instruction: (a) their preparation and knowledge to support instruction; (b) their working relationship with teachers and other school personnel; (c) the paraeducators’ personal commitment to students; and (d) the students’ commitment to learn to read. The personal opinions of the paraeducators about Wilson and students were shared freely during the interviews. One paraeducator expressed a dislike for the Wilson program and felt that the students would benefit more from another program that was less technical than Wilson. It is important to note that this isolated comment was not echoed by other paraeducators. In fact, the other eight paraeducators stated that they liked the Wilson program. They believed that they played a significant role in the students’ success, and that if the program was implemented the way it was designed that the students would benefit greatly. The foundation of their loyalty to the program came from the belief that if students could read they would be successful in life.

**Knowledge and preparation affected the paraeducator’s sense of self-efficacy.** Paraeducators articulated a desire to know more about Wilson because they believed it would help them be more effective in the classroom. One paraeducator stated that she wanted to continue her education but stated that the time was not right for her to do so. She was raising a family and wanted to allow her child to finish school before continuing her own education. This paraeducator recognized that she could not go further with Wilson because she was not a teacher, but that did not stop her from seeking additional professional development over the summer to meet the needs of her students. The district paid for the initial workshop but would not pay for a
refresher course. This paraeducator stated that her initial WRS certificate that she received after taking the introductory course had expired. She wanted to take more Wilson training.

I want to take more Wilson training. I am trying to find out about taking the Wilson on my own. I am looking around because they are having a training next month…it’s in [a nearby suburb]. They offer it to anybody. It’s the Level 1 certification. Since I am not a teacher I can’t go further, but I am still trying to find out if I can get certification for Level 1. Every year they [school administration] move us and as a SECA you have to be prepared to make and roll with the changes, to support where the students are. I would rather be prepared and it’s good if you have education. (phone interview, 6/18/2014)

**Working relationship with classroom teacher and other school personnel.** The working relationship between the paraeducator and the classroom teacher impacted Wilson lesson implementation. Seven of the nine paraeducators in this study made statements that indicated they received directions from their teacher that guided the work they completed during the school day. These discussions occurred on a daily basis and included teachers modeling how lessons should be provided to students. One paraeducator stated that she followed the lead of the teacher and that instruction was organic. She stated that they provided instruction that the individual students needed. The remaining two paraeducators stated that they did not receive any guidance from the classroom teacher. One paraeducator stated that everything she did was teacher directed. At the start of the school year she sat with the teacher to review IEPs and to discuss Wilson. Together they outlined how support would be provided for individual students.

In another example, a paraeducator described the lesson planning system that she and the teacher devised. While at school, she and the teacher reviewed the lessons for the next day. At the end of the day, she and the teacher discussed lessons for individual students. Together they
read and studied the lessons, and then the teacher modeled what the lesson would resemble. Afterwards, the paraeducator said she took the initiative to identify what she needs to do to support the lesson. This support included making copies, setting up the classroom and updating binders. She stated that it took between 15 minutes and a half an hour to prepare for the next day.

Teacher feedback to paraeducators about the methods they used to implement Wilson had a positive impact on lessons. A paraeducator stated that the teacher provided suggestions as to how her support of the Wilson lessons could be improved. This paraeducator further stated that she and the teacher worked hand in hand to teach the WRS lessons to students. One paraeducator stated that she and the teacher reflected on the day’s instruction prior to students’ arrival to school and at the end of the school day after students had gone home. Often, the paraeducator initiated feedback sessions, asking the teacher if everything she did for the day met with her approval. When her teacher attended a Wilson refresher course, she came back and reviewed the new learning with her. The paraeducator recalled one instance when she thought she confused students by guiding them through the steps incorrectly. The teacher reminded her of her errors by providing specific, on-the-spot feedback, telling her, “Don't forget to mark the words. Remember, you put a mark if it’s a closed syllable” (phone interview, 6/17/2014). The teacher told her that she was doing okay which made her feel good. The paraeducator was encouraged by this feedback. She believed the teacher was available to be called upon for help at any time.

Another paraeducator stated that she felt fortunate to have a great relationship with her teacher and stated that they had the same attitudes and fundamental belief that the work they did to teach children to read was important work. They had an open style of communication and if
there was any awkwardness in the classroom they discussed it during their daily conversations. Everything she learned, she stated, she learned from the classroom teacher.

Although one paraeducator classified interaction with clinicians as rare, six paraeducators stated that they had positive, limited interactions with clinicians at the school. She described instances when the clinicians identified her as being able to provide information about students when the classroom teacher was not available. These interactions were typically between the paraeducator and the counselor, the paraeducator and the speech-language pathologist or the paraeducator and the physical therapist and informed clinicians about progress that students were making in WRS. Not only did paraeducators describe their interaction with clinicians, they also described interactions with the district manager of the Monarch Program. Three paraeducators stated that they had limited, infrequent interaction with the district managers but that they knew how to contact them if needed.

One paraeducator stated she received feedback from the administrative team of the school. The principal and assistant principal observed her while she reviewed a WRS lesson and gave her positive feedback. She recalled that they told her she was doing a great job and that she should consider becoming a teacher. She was relieved that they felt she was doing well.

**Personal commitment to supporting students.** Several paraeducators described their relationship with students in the Monarch Program as one similar to a parent and her child. They could describe times when past students who had graduated from the school returned to give them progress reports about how they were doing in high school and in life. One paraeducator was emphatic as she made the following statement.
I don't feel like just an assistant but I feel like the parent in the school. Sometimes you have to become their friend and do a little like mommy, do a little parenting.

(phone interview, 6/17/2014)

This paraeducator also made statements such as, “the room becomes like a home” and “this is like a big family” (phone interview, 6/17/2014). She described the students entering and exiting the classroom as they would in a home. She continued by stating “…they go into your heart and no matter where they go, they take a little piece of you” (phone interview, 6/17/2014).

One paraeducator firmly stated that she was committed to helping the students learn and called the students her children. Her account of the lengths she would go to in an effort to help students was an exemplar of the paraeducator commitment. She recognized that she had a heavy accent so she practiced how to make the sounds of the alphabet so that she could better help the students. She said she used strategies that she learned in other work environments to take the Wilson instruction to another level.

I am bringing the Wilson books home more often so that I can sit down and prepare myself. The teacher assigns it and I bring it home so that I can practice even more so that I have fluency with them. Wilson is one period. I have to be ready. And if I have to sit on the floor and he is on the bean bag, that’s what I am gonna do. Whatever makes the child comfortable is fine with me. (phone interview, 10/24/2014)

Each paraeducator took their position seriously, even taking on the role of teacher when the regular teacher was absent. One paraeducator stated that the substitute teachers were not knowledgeable about the WRS so it did not make sense for them to assume the teacher’s role during instruction. The paraeducator would give instructions to the substitute and become the teacher for the day. She described her interaction with a substitute.
Paraeducators’ motivation to help students succeed in Wilson came from a variety of sources but most made statements such as, “I love this program” (phone interview, 9/8/2014). Another paraeducator shared that she loved what she is doing. “I see already that two or three kids have graduated from the program. They still come to see us. They are happy that we helped them.” (phone interview, 12/11/2014)

Another paraeducator stated that she motivated students in her Wilson classroom by letting them know that not everyone in the school reads perfectly. “Practice makes a better reader” (phone interview, 10/24/2014), she told the students and encouraged them to practice reading at home. Other paraeducators agreed and stated that if students were going to be successful they had to practice Wilson at home. Parents, they believed, play a significant role in this effort. Finally, when the principal of her school told one of the paraeducators that she was doing an excellent job and that she could be a teacher and make more money, the paraeducator stated that she was at the school doing what she did to help a child and that it was not about money.

Sometimes you find me giving up my breaks or my lunch so that I can give them what they need. I am not complaining, but when I come home, I don’t want to be bothered, I don’t want to cook, I don't’ want to do anything because I am so exhausted. (phone interview, 10/24/14)
Paraeducators were often the consistent figure in the Monarch Program classroom setting. Five of the nine paraeducators made statements to indicate that the teacher/paraeducator team had changed, sometimes within the school year and over the years. One paraeducator stated, “I have learned a lot from the teacher I work with, but this year, she was not here” (phone interview, 6/18/2014). Another paraeducator stated “The teacher I worked with the last four years, she left. My duties in the classroom are even higher” (phone interview, 10/24/2014). She became the expert in the classroom and the teacher would, as she described it, “watch her do what she should have been doing” (phone interview, 10/24/14).

The students’ commitment to learn to read. Paraeducators believed that the use of the WRS in the Monarch Program was effective for a number of students and described characteristics of students for whom they believed the program was most effective. They suggested that students who came to school each day and did not exhibit inappropriate behavior problems, such as being off-task during the one-on-one lesson, would be successful. A majority of the paraeducators stated that the one-on-one support built into daily instruction made Wilson most effective for students. During these one-on-one sessions, paraeducators were able to provide specific instructions to students to address their instructional needs.

There’s a student…Wilson is ideal for him. He doesn’t know what he’s reading. I told him, ‘just like your name, every letter has its sound. Try to use your Wilson skills to tap out the words that you don’t know…if it’s a big word, break it up and tap out the sounds.’ (phone interview, 10/23/2014)

Another paraeducator described a student who made tremendous gains with Wilson. “When he started he did not know how to put three letters together. He grew four years [in
Wilson] since he started. I did not believe that anybody could make those kinds of gains, but he did” (phone interview, 12/16/2014)

Paraeducators articulated four reasons why Wilson would not be effective for students: (1) student absences; (2) lack of buy-in by students; (3) those with challenges in addition to their reading problems; and (4) students getting a late start in Wilson. They stated that students must come to school so that they can learn how to tap to pronounce words and how to scoop to read sentences and phrases. They believed that these skills were necessary to be able to read using Wilson. One paraeducator believed that if students did not accept the structure of Wilson, it wouldn’t be effective for them. She explained that there was a student who could not embrace tapping and therefore the student could not advance in the Wilson program. Lastly, paraeducators shared a belief that if students entered the program late in their education that Wilson would not be beneficial for them.

Consistency matters, the paraeducators agreed. If students are absent, they won’t get enough Wilson for the week. “They have to come to school or this program won’t work” (phone interview, 10/24/2014). One paraeducator stated there were several reasons for student absences including not being successful in the program.

If Wilson does not work, three paraeducators said it was because there was little to no buy-in by the students. “They just don’t care about learning so they won’t try with Wilson,” one paraeducator, not one of the two profiled, declared (phone interview, 6/16/15).

If you don’t put in the effort, you can’t embrace it [Wilson]. We had students with their heels dug in. With the little effort they put in, they embraced it and they started flying. They started going through the steps rapidly (phone interview, 12/03/2014).
Another paraeducator talked about an older student whose first language was not English. The bilingual coordinator at the school asked a paraeducator to work with the student to learn Wilson. This student had a difficult time learning how to tap out sounds because he confused it with the sounds of his first language. According to this paraeducator, progress in the WRS was slow. Another paraeducator described a similar situation. The student’s first language was not English and he confused the $i$, the $u$ and the $e$ sounds. She stated that his progress was not as rapid as the other students but that she and the teacher continued to work with him. Other students had quickly moved out of Book 1, but he had not.

An older student told the paraeducator that Wilson was boring and that it just wasn’t for him. He wasn’t interested in learning to read and eventually dropped out of school. Paraeducators believed that if the program was started too late that it wouldn’t work. The best time to begin this type of program, they believed, was in primary grades and not any later. They felt the more time the students had to become proficient in Wilson, the better.

In summary, there were several factors that impacted paraeducators’ sense of self-efficacy. Paraeducators identified that their personal knowledge about the WRS and their desire to learn more about the WRS impacted their ability to effectively support lessons. They indicated that their relationships with their classroom teacher and that their brief encounters with school personnel provided encouragement to them to continue to work with students. Most of the paraeducators stated that their interactions with students helped to motivate them to be effective. Finally, paraeducators shared examples of students who exemplified success stories and those who were not successful. They offered reasons why they believed students were not successful using the WRS in the Monarch Program.
This chapter presented themes that emerged during the analysis of data that were collected via in-depth interviews with nine paraeducators working with students with complex learning disabilities in the Monarch Program. Paraeducators engaged in academic and non-academic duties during the course of the school day. The duties included providing instruction inside and outside of Wilson settings, supporting students in whole and small group formats, providing one-on-one support, collecting data, attending IEP meetings and translating for parents. Other themes that impacted their ability to support students were their knowledge and preparation not just to support Wilson but to assume their roles as a SECA. Some paraeducators did not receive the introductory WRS course and that impacted their ability to articulate the steps to implement the lessons. With the exception of two paraeducators, those paraeducators who had the training were able to speak with a sophistication that other paraeducators were not able to do. Finally, paraeducators identified factors that they believed impacted their sense of self-efficacy. They agreed that students would be successful if they learned how to read and that was their motivation for going above and beyond to provide instruction to their students. Paraeducators stated that students who did not “buy-in” to the Wilson model were often not successful. They expressed a need for more Wilson training and investigated Level 1 certification but were denied the opportunity to receive training beyond the introductory WRS workshop.
Chapter V: Discussion

Paraeducators have been the “go-to” individuals to support teachers as they implement instruction and meet the varied needs of students in the classroom (Carter, O’Rourke, Sisco & Pelsue, 2009). Previous research about paraeducators has primarily focused on summaries and descriptions of their roles and responsibilities, typically identifying the roles of paraeducators as being of minimal consequence. They included running errands for teachers, making copies and supervising students while they ate breakfast and lunch (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; French, 1998; Pickett, 2002; Jones & Bender, 1993; Pickett, 1999). Research to support or identify the role of the paraeducator in supporting reading instruction exists, but it lacks specificity as to the exact activities paraeducators complete. Importantly, the voice of the paraeducators who provide this support during reading instruction has not been heard.

The purpose of this study was to provide the perspectives of the paraeducators about their roles and responsibilities as they worked alongside special education classroom teachers to support instruction using the Wilson Reading System, a multi-part, sequenced reading intervention, in classrooms for students with learning disabilities. This context was selected due to the structure of the WRS and its emphasis on individualized and small-group instruction, as well as the structure of the Monarch Program, within the school district, where WRS was used. The study examined the paraeducators’ reports of their use of time in their elementary and high school classrooms and detailed the paraeducators’ knowledge about the intervention. The study also identified factors that contributed to their sense of personal success using the WRS during instruction within the Monarch Program. Finally, the study provided valuable insights and potential about paraeducator utilization, specifically the role of the paraeducator in supporting reading instruction.
The research questions for this study were (1) How do Wilson-trained paraeducators in the Monarch Program describe their use of time during the reading instruction period and beyond; (2) How do paraeducators describe their knowledge and skills for teaching students with complex learning disabilities in Monarch Programs; and (3) What factors affect paraeducators’ ability to be successful in supporting Wilson instruction?

Phone interviews with paraeducators revealed a strong desire on the part of the paraeducator to help students in the Monarch Program learn to read. Most of paraeducators in this study communicated a willingness to go to great lengths to support students in their classrooms, including one paraeducator who regularly gave up her lunch break to tutor a student. Paraeducators’ examples of how they spent their school day completing academic and nonacademic duties, details about their knowledge and preparation to support students with learning disabilities, and factors that contributed to their sense of efficacy, provided the foundation for this final chapter.

In this study, paraeducators reported that they engaged in both academic and nonacademic duties throughout the course of the school day. Some of the paraeducators were prepared to assume the academic duties and others were not. Their duties included tasks such as collecting data in Wilson and non-Wilson settings to inform instructional practices and to validate decisions for additional support for students. They also translated for parents during IEP meetings and supervised meals. These findings align with previous studies that identify typical duties for paraeducators. These duties, also identified as acceptable under the No Child Left Behind Act, included collecting data, providing personal care to students and supervising meals (Giangreco, CichoskiKelly, Backus, Edelman, Tucker, Broer, CichoskiKelly and Spinney, 1999). The academic duties of the paraeducator also included supporting students in non-Wilson
classes, reviewing assignments with students and assisting them with homework. Most reported feeling underprepared to complete these duties, particularly those who worked in high schools, but also some of the others.

Researchers on the topic of paraeducators all agree that if they are going to support instruction, then they must be prepared to do so (Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, Broer & Suter, 2012). It also been demonstrated that those who are well prepared are able to provide better instruction (Liston, Nevin & Malian, 2009; Malian, 2011). In the present study, the Monarch Program in this district provided a structure that included training for paraeducators as a critical aspect of the program. Not only were paraeducators required to meet the minimum requirements to become a paraeducator, they were expected to complete the Introductory workshop for WRS. Paraeducators in this study indicated that a majority of their school day was spent supporting the 10-part lesson of the highly structured WRS. This finding provides a clear example of the work of paraeducators that is much more academic in nature than it was twenty years prior (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012) and it specifically highlights the instructional components of what paraeducators can do. In the recent past, assigning paraeducators to perform instructional duties such as those identified in this study was discouraged and not considered to be in the best interest of the students (Giangreco, 2003). Indeed, several studies have found that paraeducators do not have the proper preparation to fulfill their academic duties (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay & Stahl, 2001, Giangreco & Broer, 2007; Tillery, Werts, Roark & Harris, 2003). The general consensus seems to be that qualified teachers should provide the primary instruction and that paraeducators can supplement that instruction (Giangreco, Broer & Suter, 2011; Giangreco et al., 2012).
Paraeducators in this study were engaged in supporting reading instruction for students with disabilities, using the WRS and in most cases, this support to students was provided under the supervision of a Wilson-certified teacher. If the teacher did not have Wilson Level 1 Certification, they were in the process of obtaining it. Paraeducators had to participate in the 3-day WRS Introductory workshop. It was found that while only five of the nine paraeducators attended this workshop, all nine of the paraeducators were in the classroom providing the support. The introductory WRS workshop was the only professional development they received specific to Wilson and was provided by the district. One paraeducator who did not have the initial training stated that she could ask the district manager and/or Monarch Program itinerant if she had questions about the WRS. Regardless of whether or not they participated in the training, all of the paraeducators talked about having some type of interaction with their classroom teacher who was a source of support. A majority of the paraeducators, seven of the nine, stated that they received feedback about how they were supporting students, which impacted their knowledge to support students in the WRS setting. Students who had been identified with complex learning disabilities and were being transported away from their home schools to locations where the Monarch Program was located, were being taught with the WRS by a teacher and a paraeducator. The latter was not always trained in the curriculum that s/he was assigned to support; this is aligned with the conditions that have been repeatedly noted: that those who are in most need of intense supports are being served by an underprepared cadre of school personnel (Carter et al., 2009; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Gaylord, Wallace, Pickett & Likins, 2002; Giangreco, 2013; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, Doyle & Suter, 2012; Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron & Fialka, 2005; Maggin, Wehby, Moore-Parten, Robertson & Oliver, 2009; Suter & Giangreco, 2009).
While findings from this study revealed that paraeducators provided reading support to students in instructional settings, consistent with the small amount of literature that exists on the topic (Cooke et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2007; Vadasy, Sanders and Peyton, 2006), there was one aspect of the study that proved atypical to previous studies. In contrast to the present findings, past studies revealed that paraeducators received no more than four to six hours of professional development after being hired. In this study, paraeducators were engaged in WRS training over a 3-day period where they received approximately 21 hours of professional development. This was significantly more professional development than what has been noted in previous research.

Three profiles of paraeducators were presented to illustrate the potential of paraeducators in academic settings. Based on the interviews, they were quite knowledgeable about the WRS and described what seemed to be adequate and appropriate academic supports. In the case of Profiles #1 and #2, three key components were in place: (a) effective training and preparation (the WRS Introductory workshop), (b) time to plan with the WRS teacher, and (c) a process to receive feedback on instructional practices coupled with explicit directions from the classroom teacher. These findings are consistent with studies conducted by Appl (2006) and Westover & Martin (2014) that identified the need for the paraeducator to receive feedback from the teacher about their job performance.

**Implications for Practice**

As evidenced in the research by the increasing number of paraeducators supporting students with disabilities, there does not appear to be a reduction of paraeducator utilization to support instruction in general and special education classrooms in the near future. Therefore, a greater emphasis needs to be placed upon paraeducator preparation and in developing models for work with special education teachers. Furthermore, the descriptions provided by the
Paraeducators in this study suggested two sets of duties that are better suited to be filled by two distinct roles, that of paraeducators and of paraprofessionals.

Colleges and universities need to design paraeducator programs that can prepare them to assume critical academic and social development responsibilities when they work in classrooms that serve special education students. Based on the findings from this small sample, the content of the preparation program should include, minimally, the following areas of study: an overview of special education purposes and services, knowledge and understanding of the range of learning needs of students with disabilities, “typical” language and cognitive development, principles of applied behavior analysis, and extensive practice in co-planning and classroom collaboration. This model is one for preparation of the paraeducator, one who is not the teacher of record, but rather has the foundational knowledge to follow through in a collaborative context.

Once employed, paraeducators need a combination of initial orientation to the setting and job responsibilities and ongoing professional development. Some of the topics that could be included for orientation include detailing the characteristics of the students they will support; articulating the do’s and don’ts of student engagement; and employing effective communication practices. Schedules for paraeducators should be completed prior to the start of the school year and they should include agreed upon lunch and break times. Administrators, or their qualified designees, need to provide ongoing professional development designed specifically for paraeducators regarding their academic roles. Topics can include, for example, strategies for supporting mathematics and reading instruction, intervention procedures for supporting a student with socio-emotional needs, and data collection procedures to document student actions and achievement. These duties all require directions and supervision on the part of the classroom
teacher. Nonacademic duties, such as hall monitoring or lunchroom supervision, need to be reserved for volunteers (parents or community) and/or paraprofessionals.

Although paraeducators indicated times when they engaged with the classroom teacher, there did not appear to be a consistent time for these interactions to occur. The paraeducators could have benefitted from a schedule that included protected time to plan with the teacher and to receive feedback about their support to students (Westover & Martin, 2014). Additionally, a dedicated block of time to engage with other paraeducators in the same role at the school could have provided extra opportunities to learn from one another. Discussions with other paraeducators were described by one paraeducator in this study as a daily occurrence. According to her, this practice of collegial coaching served as a form of development, which aided the paraeducator in her effort to support students. Ultimately, this practice fostered a sense of professional efficacy and job satisfaction for her.

Both academic and nonacademic responsibilities were described in this study. Nonacademic duties and responsibilities are best designated to the role of a paraprofessional. These duties include working in the cafeteria, supporting the cleanliness of the school in a maintenance role or providing transportation to and from school. These are examples of duties that paraeducators identified as taking time away from supporting instruction, detractors from what mattered most: providing direct academic support to students. The difference that paraprofessional and paraeducator titles convey could serve to distinguish the paraeducator as one who is solely responsible for supporting the academic endeavors of a teacher and students.

Limitations of the Study

There were nine paraeducators in this study who were all responsible for supporting reading instruction for students with learning disabilities. They all were in settings where the
WRS was used and stated that their daily academic duties were to provide instruction alongside the classroom teacher. When asked to describe their day, not all of them detailed the steps of the 10-part lesson plan. In fact, only four paraeducators described more than four of the parts. These findings present an interesting dilemma of the paraeducator not “knowing what they know.” More complete data, such as through observations of the classroom where instruction was taking place, would provide a fuller picture of what is actually occurring. Furthermore, the use of stimulated recall interviews while viewing video footage would provide a foundation for discussion with the paraeducator about their actions, which could further illuminate their knowledge.

Phone interviews with paraeducators were the only method used in this study but, given more time, additional interviews could have been completed. Interviews with classroom teachers would also have added to the self-reported roles and duties of the paraeducator. These additional interviews could have been used to triangulate and further enhance the trustworthiness of the data and could potentially provide a fuller context for the viewpoints of the paraeducators.

Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, three possible areas for future research emerged: (1) perspectives of students with disabilities on the role of the paraeducator; (2) paraeducators tendency to remain committed to their jobs in the face of low wages; and (3) paraeducators’ ability and skill in supporting the development of letter-sound relationships and phoneme segmentation.

In the current study, the paraeducators indicated that they provided support to students in varied instructional settings. These paraeducators shared their perspective regarding students and their commitment to learning to read as one of the factors that impacted their sense of self-
efficacy. Future research where the perspective of the student who receives the support of a paraeducator in both general and special education settings could serve to impact the interaction between paraeducators and students. The voice of students in elementary and high school classrooms could influence the hiring decisions of administrators.

Paraeducators are often described as committed to working hard in spite of low pay (Carter et al., 2009; Giangreco et al., 1999). Consistent with this research is the profile of paraeducator #1. Her description of making purchases with her own funds, not taking a lunch period because she was working with a student, and doing whatever she could to provide for the students supports the research. She stated that she did not continue to do the work that she did because of pay. She was committed because she wanted to give back, referencing the individual who helped her to learn to read. Research about the job satisfaction of paraeducators exists (Fisher & Pleasants, 2011), but more would amplify the voice of the paraeducator and recognize them as a viable support for the instruction of students. This attention could possibly attract more individuals to the field.

Paraeducators in this study indicated that they began the day with sound review, which was identified also as phonemic awareness. Future studies could be conducted to investigate the paraeducators’ skills and competencies in support of phonemic awareness and other critical aspects of reading instruction. Such studies could be completed in early elementary classrooms or in settings where Tier 2 interventions are being provided.

Concluding Remarks

In this current study, it was found paraeducators using the Wilson Reading System to support structured reading intervention lessons for students with learning disabilities could identify a new, previously unsupported role for paraeducators. Although there is no defined role
in the WRS for a paraeducator by the author of Wilson Language Programs, in this study the district defined their role in Wilson instruction as supportive, which is consistent with NCLB. Paraeducators were able to state their role in supporting this instruction, that they were not expected to introduce new lessons to students. They were needed to reinforce what the teacher presented, thus providing more individuals in the classroom making a purposeful impact on students. This knowledge of their role in supporting WRS instruction indicates that it is time that the field of education recognizes them as critical members of the educational team (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012). To accomplish this, there is a need for consistent communication with the classroom teacher. The structure of the WRS provides a foundation for collaboration between the teachers and paraeducators. Dialog about individual student progress, advancement of students to new books within Wilson and discussions to identify how the paraeducator will support the days’ lesson provide the context for the needed collaboration.

These findings suggest that paraeducators can be a viable source to support reading instruction support for students with complex learning disabilities, but to do so would require the kind of preparation for paraeducators that has been overlooked by the absence of consistent preparation programs. As an educational system committed to providing pre-service teachers what is necessary to stand before students in classrooms, the findings of this study indicate that the same must occur for paraeducators who are often on the front lines delivering, supporting and modifying instruction alongside that teacher. This is not a new suggestion; however, after years of research on the topic, it is one that still merits attention.
Appendix A

Script for the Principal Phone Call

Hello. My name is Cheryl Watkins and I am the founding principal of Pershing West Middle School. I’m a doctoral student at the University of Illinois at Chicago and I’m calling to seek your permission to include your school in a study that I’m proposing for my dissertation. I am specifically interested in your Monarch Program and the paraeducator who supports reading instruction alongside the teacher. I would like to conduct two phone interviews with the paraeducator.

If you agree, I will send information to you via fax. I’d like for you to distribute a flyer to the paraeducators in the program.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to conducting interviews with your SECAs.
Appendix B

Letter to the Principal

Dear Principal:

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois at Chicago. I am writing to share information about the study I am proposing to understand the role of the paraeducator in the Monarch Program at your school. Specifically, I am interested in their everyday practice during reading instruction using Wilson. Information gained from this study will inform the field about the work of the paraeducator.

As the founding principal of Pershing West Middle School, I had a Monarch Program in my school. I enjoyed watching the paraeducator/teacher team while they supported students using the Wilson Reading System. However, I do not know the details of the paraeducator role.

For this proposed study, I will conduct interviews at times deemed appropriate for the paraeducator. I will interview the paraeducator twice. The interviews will not take longer than one hour and will be conducted at an agreed upon time in an agreed place. For their participation, I will provide each with a gift card.

I am seeking your permission to send a flyer describing the study to the paraeducators/SECAs in your Monarch Program. I appreciate your support of this study. Thank you in advance for your help and consideration.

Sincerely,

Cheryl D. Watkins

C: Assistant Principal

Counselor/Case Manager
Cheryl D. Watkins is a doctoral student from the University of Illinois at Chicago’s Special Education Department. She is conducting a study about paraeducators (SECAs) who work in the Monarch Program.

The study seeks to understand the role of the paraeducator during reading instruction. Two phone interviews will be conducted with paraeducators.

Your participation in this study will provide a description of the work paraeducators complete on a daily basis during reading instruction.

Please consider participating in this study to share your knowledge about the role of the paraeducator in the Monarch Program. If you have questions, please contact:

Cheryl D. Watkins

Cdwatkins5@gmail.com

773-330-0717

This research is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Norma Lopez-Reyna, Special Education Department (312) 413-8761.
Appendix D

Participant Consent
University of Illinois at Chicago
Research Information and Consent for:
The Role of the Paraeducator in Supporting Reading Instruction for Students with Complex Learning Disabilities

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researcher any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Cheryl D. Watkins, PhD Candidate
Department and Institution: Special Education, College of Education University of Illinois at Chicago
Address and Contact Information: 1640 West Roosevelt Rd., Chicago, IL 60608
Phone: 773-330-0717 E-mail: cdwatkins5@gmail.com

Why am I being asked?
You are invited to participate in a research study done by Cheryl D. Watkins as part of the requirements for a doctorate in Special Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The study will examine the role of the paraeducator in supporting reading instruction for students with learning disabilities. You are invited to participate because you are a paraeducator (SECA) hired to support the special education teacher in the Monarch classroom, who has certification from the Illinois State Board of Education. A total of fourteen (14) paraeducators will be recruited for this study.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Illinois at Chicago. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

A maximum of 14 subjects may be involved in this research at UIC.

What is the purpose of this research?
The purpose of this qualitative research is to examine the role of the paraeducator in supporting reading instruction, alongside the special education teacher, for students with learning disabilities in the Monarch Program.

What procedures are involved?
If you agree to participate in this research study, you would be asked to do the following:
- Read this entire document.
- Sign and date the document.
- Fax the document to 312-996-1427
• Arrange and participate in one initial interview and one possible follow-up interview. It is anticipated that each interview will last 45-60 minutes. The researcher, Cheryl D. Watkins, will facilitate each of the interviews and they will be recorded using EVOCA™.
• Each participant will be provided a copy of the completed transcriptions of the audio recordings for accuracy.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?
There may be risks from the study that are not known at this time. You may experience the following:
• You may feel uncomfortable being audio recorded during the interview.
• You may feel uncomfortable with the length of the interview. Each interview is anticipated to last 45-60 minutes.
• You may feel uncomfortable answering some questions and discussing your experience.
• There is the risk that a breach of privacy (others will know the subject is participating in research) and confidentiality (accidental disclosure of identifiable data) may occur.

Even if you sign this consent form you may withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence, if you feel too uncomfortable to continue.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?
Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. Though it may give you the opportunity to reflect on your daily classroom practices. Overall, Cheryl D. Watkins looks to gain information about the instructional practices you exhibit in your classroom while supporting the instruction of students with learning disabilities in the Monarch Program. The information has the potential to further scholarly dialogue with peers and other researchers. This research is designed to protect the anonymity of those who are willing to participate. Your employer will not be involved during the process of this research, and therefore, your employment status will not be impacted positively or negatively as a result of your participation.

What other options are there?
Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the option to not participate in this study. You do not have to sign this form.

What about privacy and confidentiality?
No one from UIC will know you are participating in the study. Information about you will only be disclosed to others with your written permission, or if required by law or necessary to protect your rights (i.e. when the UIC institutional Review Board monitors the research and consent process). Study information which identifies you and the consent form signed by you will be looked at and/or copied for checking up on the research by UIC OPRS and State of Illinois Auditors.

Once the audio recordings are completed and converted to an MP3 format, the file will be downloaded from EVOCA and stored on a secure, password protected computer housed in a locked office at the Monarch Center. The files will be deleted from the EVOCA site. Audio recordings will be assigned a code and kept on a password protected travel drive that will be
locked in a file cabinet in a locked office at the University and will be destroyed 5 years after all of the data has been analyzed. Transcripts of the recorded interview will be assigned a code and will not contain your actual name or any other identifiers. These transcripts will be shared with you to insure accuracy and will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office at the University. All audio recordings will be used solely for research purposes and will only be heard by Cheryl D. Watkins, Dr. Norma Lopez-Reyna and one undergraduate student. All data will be destroyed 5 years after data collection has ended.

There will be a list of participants’ names that will include the participant ID number. This list will be stored separate from the other data in a locked cabinet in a locked office at the University. This list will be destroyed as soon as data collection has ended.

Any study information which identifies you, and the consent form signed by you, will be placed in a locked file cabinet in a locked office and will be looked at and/or copied for checking up on the research by Ms. Watkins. When the results of the research are published or discussed during presentations and conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity or the identity of your school.

**What are the costs for participating in this research?**
There are no costs to you for participating in this research.

**Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?**
You can choose whether or not to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. There are no consequences for withdrawing. You have the right to leave this study at any time without penalty.

**Who should I contact if I have questions?**
You may contact Cheryl D. Watkins if you have any questions about this study or your part in it. Ms. Watkins can be reached at 773-330-0717.

**What are my rights as a research subject?**
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu.

**Remember:**
Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

You will be given a copy of this form for your information and to keep for your records.
**Signature of Subject**
I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research.

______________________________  ______________________
Signature                                      Date

______________________________
Printed Name

______________________________  ______________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent                                      Date (must be same as above)

______________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

**PLEASE FAX YOUR SIGNED & DATED FORM TO 312-996-1427**
Oral Informed Consent Document

PARTICIPANT (First name only):

CALL BACK NUMBER:

Oral consent serves as an assurance that the required elements of informed consent have been presented orally to the participant or the participant’s legally authorized representative.

Verbal consent to participate in this telephone interview has been obtained by the participant’s willingness to continue with the telephone interview by providing answers to a series of questions related to what the participant thinks about how occupational therapists use clinical reasoning to make recommendations in RtI.

* Phone Script:
Hi. Before we get started, I’m going to ask that we take a few moments to get re-oriented to the study. Basically, I’m going to review the purpose of the study, give you an opportunity to ask any questions that you might have, and ask that you give me oral consent—which means that you agree to participate in the study. Ok?

You are being asked to participate in a study that is being conducted by me, Cheryl D. Watkins, as part of the requirements for my doctoral degree through the Special Education Department at the University of Illinois at Chicago. My advisor is Dr. Norma Lopez-Reyna and she is supervising my research. The study is called The Role of the Paraeducator in Supporting Reading Instruction for Students with Complex Learning Disabilities.

The purpose of this qualitative research is to examine the role of the paraeducator in supporting reading instruction, alongside the special education teacher, for students with learning disabilities in the Monarch Program. If you choose to continue to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete two phone interviews. Each interview is expected to last between 45-60 minutes depending on how long you want to talk and how much you want to say. The interviews will be audio-recorded and then transcribed by me or a UIC student/worker who has the approval of the university to help me with this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may stop participating at any time, simply by saying goodbye or hanging up the phone. Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw your participation from the study will have no effect on your relationship with me or anyone else at the university.

There are no apparent risks involved in participating in this research. However, you may grow tired of answering questions or answering the questions may feel like work. Remember, you can choose to withdraw your participation at any time simply by saying goodbye or hanging up the phone. Participation in this study may not benefit you personally, though it may give you the opportunity to reflect on your daily classroom practices. The information has the potential to further scholarly dialogue with peers and other researchers.
APPENDIX D (continued)

If you choose to participate in this study, your identity will be kept confidential. During the interview, I ask that you would refrain from using the name of your school or district and the names of people or students you work with or stating any identifiable information. Saying things like “a third grade boy” or the “school psychologist” is okay, as long as you don’t tell me the name of the school where that individual works or goes to school. If you accidentally say the name of the school or someone’s name, it will not be entered into the transcript. Once we’re done with the interview, I will give your audio recording a numeric code. I will be the only one who knows that the code corresponds to you. I will keep the code key in an electronic file on a password protected computer. Either myself or the student/worker previously mentioned will transcribe your interview. Again, the audio recording and the transcript won’t include your name-only your code. The transcriptions will be kept electronically on a password-protected computer and I’m going to back the files up on a password protected travel drive. I’ll only print out the transcriptions and summaries for analysis and to share them with my advisor. The hardcopies won’t include your name, only your code. At the end of the study, all of the transcripts and summaries will be deleted or destroyed. The results of this study will be disseminated through my dissertation, as well as potential publications or presentations. When the results of this study are disseminated, your identity and your participation will be kept confidential.

My contact information and my advisor’s information is on the email that I initially sent you or that was forwarded to you, which is how you got in touch with me. It was also on the consent form. Just in case you don’t have them handy, I’d like to give it to you again should you have any questions once we get off the phone. My name again is Cheryl D. Watkins and my phone number is 773-330-0717. You could also email me at cdwaters5@gmail.com. My advisor is Dr. Norma Lopez-Reyna. Her phone number is 312-996-4526. Her email address is nlr@uic.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, you can contact with University of Illinois at Chicago’s Institutional Review Board at 312-996-1711. This phone number was also included on the consent form that you signed.

Now that you’ve heard about the study again and what you are being asked to do, do you have any questions?

Would you like to get started?

________________________________________________________________________________________

Investigator’s Name (Printed) Investigator’s Signature

________________________________________________________________________________________

Date
Appendix E

Interview Scripts

Paraeducator Interview #1 Script

Thank you for volunteering for this study. You were selected because you are a paraeducator working in the Monarch Program and work alongside a teacher to provide reading instruction for students with complex learning disabilities. I will ask you some questions and would like your response providing as much detail as possible. If there is a question that you cannot respond to quickly, that is not a problem. Please take time to think about your responses.

Paraeducator Interview #2 Script

Thank you again for volunteering for this study. As you will recall, during the first interview I asked questions about your role in the classroom providing reading instruction to students using the Wilson Reading System. This time, I would like to follow-up on some of your responses to questions asked during the first interview. Again, I will ask you some questions and would like your response providing as much detail as possible. If there is a question that you cannot respond to quickly, that is not a problem. Please take time to think about your responses.
Appendix F

First Round Interview Questions

1. Tell me about you.
   a. How many years have you been a paraeducator?
   b. How many years have you worked in the Monarch Program?
   c. Talk about your education.
      a. What coursework did you have in education?
      b. What professional development have you taken?
2. Describe what you do as a paraeducator in a typical day
   a. . . . first as a paraeducator in general
   b. . . . as a paraeducator in the Monarch Classroom (using the Wilson Reading System instruction)?
3. What training did you receive to support reading instruction?
4. Specifically, how do you support students during
   a. Whole group reading instruction? How many students does this include?
   b. Small group reading instruction? How many students does this include?
   c. One-on-one instruction?
5. Describe the types of specific directions and feedback that you receive from your teacher.
6. Describe your role as connector with:
   a. Parents and families
   b. School community (other service providers such as Monarch Program itinerant/manager, OT, speech therapist or physical therapist)
   c. Outside of the school
7. Do you plan to enroll in a teacher education program to earn certification?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
Appendix G

Second Round Interview Questions

1. What, if anything, has changed about the duties and responsibilities you have in the Monarch Program?
2. If you are in another capacity, are you using any of the strategies you learned in Wilson?
3. If you are in the same role in the MSP, has anything changed regarding your responsibilities and duties? Are you doing the same kinds of things? Do you have any of the same students?
4. How effective is the Wilson program in teaching students how to read? What exactly about Wilson works? Describe.
5. Are there aspects of Wilson that you believe do not work very well? Explain.
6. In the first interview, you told me about “sound review,” the first step in a typical Wilson lesson. Describe that to me again; what is the structure of a typical lesson?
7. Where can you go to learn more about teaching students to read?
8. Describe a student for whom the Wilson program was effective. Please provide details.
9. Now can you describe a student for whom Wilson program was not effective? Please provide details.
10. Are there any issues or questions that parents might be more comfortable in approaching you about, vis a vis the teacher or another school staff member? Please describe.
April 15, 2014

Cheryl Watkins, MEd
Special Education
M/C 947
Chicago, IL 60612

Exemption Granted

RE: Research Protocol # 2014-0327 “The Role of the Paraeducator in Supporting Reading Instruction for Students with Complex Learning Disabilities”

Sponsors: None

Dear Ms. Watkins:

Your Claim of Exemption was reviewed on April 13, 2014 and it was determined that your research protocol meets the criteria for exemption as defined in the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects [(45 CFR 46.101(b)].

You may now begin your research.

Please be reminded of the need to obtain prospective Research Review Board approval of this research.

Exemption Period: Performance Site: Subject Population: Number of Subjects:

April 13, 2014 – April 13, 2017

UIC Adult (18+ years) subjects only
The specific exemption category under 45 CFR 46.101(b) is:

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You are reminded that investigators whose research involving human subjects is determined to be exempt from the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects still have responsibilities for the ethical conduct of the research under state law and UIC policy. Please be aware of the following UIC policies and responsibilities for investigators:

1. Amendments You are responsible for reporting any amendments to your research protocol that may affect the determination of the exemption and may result in your research no longer being eligible for the exemption that has been granted.

2. Record Keeping You are responsible for maintaining a copy all research related records in a secure location in the event future verification is necessary, at a minimum these documents include: the research protocol, the claim of exemption application, all questionnaires, survey instruments, interview questions and/or data collection instruments associated with this research protocol, recruiting or advertising materials, any consent forms or information sheets given to subjects, or any other pertinent documents.

3. Final Report When you have completed work on your research protocol, you should submit a final report to the Office for Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

4. Information for Human Subjects UIC Policy requires investigators to provide information about the research protocol to subjects and to obtain their permission prior to their participating in the research. The information about the research protocol should be presented to subjects in writing or orally from a written script. When appropriate, the following information must be provided to all research subjects participating in exempt studies: a. The researchers affiliation; UIC, JBVMAC or other institutions, b. The purpose of the research, c. The extent of the subject’s involvement and an explanation of the procedures to be followed, d. Whether the information being collected will be used for any purposes other than the proposed research, e. A description of the procedures to protect the privacy of subjects and the confidentiality of the research information and data, f. Description of any reasonable foreseeable risks, g. Description of anticipated benefit, h. A statement that participation is voluntary and subjects can refuse to participate or can stop at any time, i. A statement that the researcher is available to answer any questions that the subject may have and which includes the name and phone number of the investigator(s). j. A statement that the UIC IRB/OPRS or JBVMAC
Patient Advocate Office is available if there are questions about subject’s rights, which includes the appropriate phone numbers.

Please be sure to:

Use your research protocol number (listed above) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact me at (312) 355-2908 or the OPRS office at (312) 996-1711. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Charles W. Hoehne, B.S., C.I.P.

Sincerely,

Assistant Director Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

cc: Elizabeth Talbott, Special Education, M/C 147
Norma Lopez-Reyna, Special Education, M/C 947
Cited Literature


Giangreco, M. F. (2013). Teacher assistant supports in inclusive schools: research, practices and alternatives. *Australasian Journal of Special Education/FirstView Article/ March 2013, pp 1 - 14 DOI: 10.1017/jse.2013.1*, Published online: Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S1030011213000018


Giangreco, M.F., CichoskiKelly, E., Backus, L., Edelman, S. W., Tucker, P., Broer, S.,


VITA

Cheryl D. Watkins

EDUCATION
2015 University of Illinois at Chicago
PhD in Special Education
- College of Education, Community Engagement Grant (cash award), 2014
  - Conducted with Dr. Norma Lopez-Reyna
- Dissertation Proposal Defense, December 2013
- Albin & Young Fellowship Award in Special Education, 2004

2002 Northwestern University, Kellogg School of Management, Principal Preparation Program
Leadership Academy and Urban Network for Chicago (LAUNCH)

200 Lewis University
Type 75, Administration and Supervision Certificate

1992 M. Ed., University of Illinois at Chicago
Major: Special Education, Vocational Education

1987 Bachelors, Chicago State University
Major: Special Education, Educable Mentally Handicapped

EXPERIENCE
1987-Present Chicago Public Schools
- Instructional Support Leader, Network 11 – December 2013 to present
- Interim Principal, Chicago High School for the Arts, November 2013 to December 2013
- Leadership Coach, Burnham Park Network, August 2013 to November 2013
- Interim Principal, Pershing East Magnet School, June 2013 to August 2013
- Principal and Founder, John J. Pershing West Middle School, 2005 to 2013
- Assistant Principal, John J. Pershing Magnet School, 2002 to 2005
- Administrator, Project Manager and Teacher Facilitator, 1998 to 2002

1993-2004 University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), National Louis University, Governor’s State University, Columbia College, Chicago and Chicago State University,
   - Adjunct Professor

1992 Golden Apple Scholars of Illinois, Golden Apple Foundation - Outreach Coordinator
• Recruited high school students across the state who were interested in teaching

**PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION HIGHLIGHTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Award Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Dare to Be Great Award, Illinois Women in Educational Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>CAABSE Outstanding Educator Award, Chicago Area Association of Black School Educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Milken Educator Award, Milken Family Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Kathy Osterman Award for Superior Public Service, City of Chicago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Teacher Appreciation Day Award Winner, The Quaranan Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Teacher Achiever Award, Michael Jordan Foundation Education Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>The Kizzy Award</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Golden Apple Award, Golden Apple Foundation</td>
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**PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Organization/Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012-2014</td>
<td>Catalyst Magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-Present</td>
<td>Cornerstone Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Erikson Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011-present</td>
<td>R.S. Africa Special NFP</td>
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<td>2010-present</td>
<td>National Louis University Teacher Preparation Advisory Council</td>
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<td>2009-present</td>
<td>Advance Illinois</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Commission on School Leader Preparation in Illinois Colleges and Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-present</td>
<td>Golden Apple Academy (of Educators)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>2nd Vice-chair (2012-2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chair, Stanley C. Golder Award Selection Committee, 2014 to present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PRESENTATIONS**

**National Level**

• S-CASS, An Anti-bullying Strategy (2008 and 2010). Workshop presented at the Character Education Conference, St. Louis, MO.
• Accommodations and Modifications for Students with Disabilities (2000). National Conference for the Training of Paraprofessionals, Portland, OR.
State Level
- Paraeducator Role in Supporting Students (2000). Workshop presented at the Paraprofessional and Service Related Personnel Conference, American Federation of Teachers, Oak Brook, IL.

Local Level
- Relieving Stress (2000). Workshop presented at the Chicago Teacher’s Union, Quest Conference, Chicago, IL.

PUBLICATIONS
- You Can Do Anything (1993). Diamonds, Quarasan, Inc., Chicago, IL.