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A Teacher's Toolbox for Building Communication - Among Professionals Who Service Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to observe and document the communication and collaboration between new special education teachers and veteran support staff; culminating in the creation of a resource, describing effective communication skills and strategies. A quick-reference communication guide will be designed according to the feedback gathered from the professionals within the education field as well as from special education teachers. The data included is applicable to seasoned teachers being relocated to new sites, as well as individuals new to the teaching profession. Initial implementation and access to the guide will be available through the local County Office of Education, Human Resource Department.

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"It is human nature not to listen attentively if one has the impression that what is being said is going to be irrelevant or unimportant."

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CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

Special education has existed informally since the 1960s, as a component for providing special services to students who were under the care of school psychologists (Pugach & Johnson, 2002). It was during this time that the role of the school psychologist began to be thought of in terms of working with teachers in order to support students. Tractman (1961) argued that if psychologists taught teachers strategies for effectively reaching their students, instead of directly meeting with students individually or in small groups, as was the practice of the day, the psychologist's influence could be multiplied greatly. Coincidentally, those seeking to develop the principles of behaviorism for use with students, argued that if specialists would teach these principles to teachers, more students would be reached than if the specialists tried to work directly with students (Tharp & Wetzel, 1969). The concept was also applied to special education teachers. In some programs, special education teachers did not work directly with students. Instead, they were assigned the task of teaching general education teachers to effectively instruct the students in their classrooms who had disabilities, by modeling strategies, techniques and providing professional development to the teachers.

These predecessors to today's concept of collaboration tended to assume that special educators and other specialists possessed critical knowledge and skills that would benefit general education teachers. That is, the specialists were the "givers" and the general education teachers were the "receivers." However, as federal special education laws were enacted, it became clear that reciprocal sharing was needed; when special education teachers told general education teachers how to better instruct students in their classrooms, the general education teachers often rightfully felt that their own expertise was being ignored. What has evolved is the recognition

that everyone involved in educating students, has a contribution to make in the designing, implementing, and monitoring of a learner with a disability or as it is appropriately referred to today special needs.

Historically the education of children with disabilities/special needs has been primarily one of separation. That is until the federal government authorized the following improvements. The Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, followed by the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Next the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 and the No Child Left Behind, (NCLB) Act of 2001. All of which have contributed to developing an environment of uniting general and special education students by emphasizing accountability and improved academic achievement (Green, J., 2008). While communication is a key component of this new environment, so are goal relationships, perception and capacity building, or the practice of having certain structures and conditions in place, which must remain in place over a period of time in order to facilitate collaboration.

Communication, collaboration and teamwork; are buzz words used in many of today's professions. The premise is that select individuals are asked to bring their area of expertise to a group; where the focus is on a desired goal or outcome that will incorporate each of the individual's suggested concerns, input or strategies.

In the realm of special education, students are serviced pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, or when the student matures to age twenty-two. The IEP team comes from various areas, anyone from adaptive physical education, behavioral specialists, court ordered liaisons to site administrators and the special education teacher, or any individual who has a vested interest in generating and implementing positive outcomes for a student, in the areas of academic, social/emotional, behavioral, vocational, community, recreation and leisure, domestic and

functional academic domain. "Every team member contributes to building and sustaining structures that support the education of students…The adults in the classroom are models of collaboration for the students. They demonstrate that any successful team is based on the positive interaction of all the participants" (New York City Department of Education, 2014).

There are so many different service providers for special education students with moderate to severe disabilities, getting all of these talented and well educated individuals to come together, minus their egos, to work as a member of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) team, can be a daunting task; especially when you are the new teacher to the team, and your duties include leader or case manager, coordinating their activities. There has always been reluctance and opposition from existing staff members, who for many years have been exercising their skills and perceptions, at the same site or program; with little guidance, support, or training in how to adjust and implement effective communication skills and interactions. How can the new special education teacher establish a relationship, build trust and work effectively with veteran staff? What communication skills are necessary for a positive, productive and collaborative atmosphere? And what shared, user-friendly tools are available to teachers in order to access previously gathered information on communicating with veteran staff?

The concept of communication and collaboration during the IEP development, denotes an interactive process whereby school personnel in general education and special education, related services and support personnel, families of students, and the students themselves are working together and sharing their diversity of knowledge and expertise to define needs, plan, implement, assess, and follow up on ways of helping students develop to their fullest (Dettmer, Thurston, Knackendoffel and Dyck, 2009).

Communication and in this case public relations; are simply the practice of good people skills. As a new member of an IEP team, first impressions are extremely important, and the ability to clearly and appropriately express thoughts, wants and opinions, can set the tone for IEP team member buy-in, especially when your responsibilities include leading and directing other members. With the initial groundwork of courtesy and respect for others; taking and listening communication skills become the next level. Support from members will come only if the structure has credibility, confidence and trust, all elements that are crucial building blocks towards meaningful collaboration.

Problem Statement

 Studies indicate that many states, counties and districts provide Special Education Handbooks to their paraprofessionals or instructional assistants, outlining roles and procedures at the classroom level, yet neglecting to provide the same scope of guidelines for the next level of professionals, the teachers, service personnel and administrators. Very little has been done to equip this integral sector of educators with the necessary skills to communicate effectively with their academic peers. The problem is revealed, where can teachers turn and what tools are available when they need to brush-up on their communication skills; especially when they have been relocated to a new program site or classroom with veteran staff?

It can be difficult being the new kid on the block, the new student at school, the newest member of a group or the new special education teacher on the IEP team. While teachers have been taught how to build, present, share and exchange academic curriculum with general and special education students; they may not have been schooled in appropriate communication

principles that focus on adult team building, public speaking, receptive listening skills and adult conflict resolution practices.

Effective communication and interaction skills are essential to successfully build and maintain collaborative relationships with colleagues, students and families. Through good communication skills team members can create an atmosphere of open communication, clear concise messages, probe for clarifications, recognize nonverbal signals, and develop mutual understanding (Cook, 2011). Communication as an art form has a set of skills that need to be mastered and routinely practiced, in order to have successful exchanges (DeBoer & Fister, 1995).

Communication in classrooms that serve students with emotional problems as well as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can be taxing because of the number of professionals serving students usually in a one to one capacity. These professionals range from behavior technicians to one to one aides along with agency professionals responsible for serving students as identified on a students Individualized Education Program (IEP). Managing adult personnel that sometimes outnumbers the students in the classroom presents formidable challenges for a new teacher. Although the teacher has obtained a credential to teach students in a specialty area, their expertise and skill level can be undermined by the perceived expertise of ancillary personnel. When this occurs, communication is often strained and role confusion and diffusion occur. Unfortunately, little has been done to mitigate this growing problem. Case study analysis, where a certificated teacher analyzes the manner and style of communication within a specific classroom is needed to better inform new teachers and veteran teachers in how to interact and communicate effectively in order to reduce the power imbalance that exists nowadays in classrooms where students with severe disabilities (SD) have additional adult supervision.

Purpose of Study

My action research will focus on improving and expanding the circle of communication with all educational staff. Through my observation, documentation and gathering of information related to communication, I will be able to understand the levels of strength, support and success that were demonstrated during the study, by the use of these simple communication tips and practices. From this experience I will be able to produce a handbook…A Teacher's Toolbox for Building Communication.

My research will investigate communication skills (Friend & Cook, 2000), contemporary perspectives from school professionals on creating partnerships through collaboration (Friend, 2008). Review of established best practices, presentation of communication tips and models for teachers on how to host small group dialogues (Hollingsworth, 2001). Various human resource teacher and staff handbooks from the field of special education, outlining the roles of teachers and support staff which present cooperative techniques used by IEP support personnel (ASEC, 2001); along with the administrative support or direction that is available, to facilitate the meaningful and professional communication skills that are needed by a new teacher when confronted with veteran support staff.

Thesis Project Questions

Within the context of my action research project I propose the following questions:

1.   What constitutes appropriate communication and interactive skills between and among professionals working with students with moderate to severe disabilities?

2.   What shared, user-friendly tools are available to teachers in order to access previously gathered information on communicating with veteran support staff?

Theoretical Model

Many theorists have researched communication skills and the significant role that effective communication techniques play in successful collaborations and teaming. To dissemble the collaborative process, is to uncover its foundation, the principle of communication. Without positive and productive communication, blame can be placed on a failure to understand goals, a lack of respect for individual perspectives, posturing for authority, and a reluctance to cooperate.

The theoretical model that forms the basis of my study emanates from communication theory; considered to be a field of information and mathematics that studies the technical process of information and the human process of human communication. According to one of the early theorist of communication Claude Shannon, (1948); "The fundamental problem of communication is that of reproducing at one point either exactly or approximately a message selected at another point."

History reveals that in the early 1920's communication theory was linked with the development of information theory; as shown in the work of Harry Nyquist and then Ralph Hartley, in separate studies they framed information as a measurable quantity, a sequence of symbols or decimal units used in the transmission of information or intelligence. By the 1940's many countries were shrouded in a second world war and it was Alan Turing that used statistical

analysis of information, to break the German enigma ciphers. It was the 1948 publication of the

Bell System Technical Journal an article entitled "A Mathematical Theory of Communication"

by Claude Shannon that ignited the development of communication theory. The model

established by Shannon and Warren Weaver consists of a sender, a message, a channel where the

message travels, noise or interference and a receiver. Their research showed that communicators

would frequently blame the audience for not accepting a message; yet they found that it was the

sender, or the channels chosen that were not being applied correctly. This first model led to the

discovery of a missing component in the communication process – feedback. Without feedback

there was no way of knowing if the receiver received or even understood the message. It was the

studies by Shannon that would prompt research on new models of communication from other

scientific fields like sociology and psychology. The sociologist and communication theorist

Harold Lasswell in his work "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society" (1948),

stated the communication process as "Who (says) What (to) Whom (in) What Channel (with)

What Effect", or otherwise known as Dance Model.

   During the 1930's Walter Lippmann, a nationally syndicated columnist for the New York

Times, shared many of Lasswell's opinions on communication in society, or the ability of

average citizens to make sense of their world, based on a shared communication and the pictures

that were in their heads; all leading to his views on the barriers to effective communication, or

what is known as "The Seven Cs of Communication: clarity, credibility, content, context,

continuity, capability, and channels".

   While these first studies prompted more researchers to expand on the topic, it is Wilbur L.

Schramm (1907-1987), who is considered to be the "founder of communication study". He took

the earlier works a step further; communication is something people do, to understand the human

communication process, you must understand how people relate to one another and how that relationship will affect both the sender and the receiver separately. You must also include the social environment, and note the influence that it will have on the perspectives of both the sender and receiver as well. The research of Schramm focused on the experience of the sender and receiver/listener; concluding that communication is possible only when there is a common language between these two parties.

Even the highly publicized accounts of the 1924 through 1932 experiments in worker productivity, at the Hawthorne Works electrical factory outside of Chicago; have influenced communication models and theories. With the Hawthorne effect, we do not always need words to communicate – the company could not afford to raise employee salaries, so instead they repainted and refreshed the employee workspace. As a result the employee productivity increased and researchers concluded that the physical improvements to the building, communicated a message of "We care" to the employees. Possible explanations for the Hawthorne effect may have included the impact of positive feedback from the experimenter. Receiving feedback on employee performance may have improved their skills and motivation. The Hawthorne effect validates that people seek out attention. Sometimes, this can become confused or completely lost in translation, because of poor communication from the sender to the receiver. Evaluation of the research connected to the Hawthorne effect continues to this day.

Communication theory as it relates to the present professional life can be divided into two perspectives: First, an everyday view of communication; meaning the exchange of information, the flow from one person to another, a simple activity among so many others such as planning, controlling, managing, it is the "what" we do in our daily lives (Deetz, 1994). Second, the scholarly view defines communication as the process by which people interactively create,

sustain, and manage meaning (Conrad & Poole, 1998). Communication is not just one more thing that happens in our personal and professional life. It is the vehicle by which we produce personal relationships and professional understanding, it is "how" we chart, regulate, manage, persuade, comprehend, direct, love, and so on.

Communication theory also has a value for measurement; in order to achieve competent communication, there must be a triumphant balance between effectiveness and appropriateness. For the purpose of this context, effectiveness is the extent to which you achieve your goals in an interaction. Example – "Did you get the raise?" Whereas, appropriateness refers to satisfying social expectations for a particular situation; did you assertively ask for the raise, or was it a meek inquiry? There are many circumstances in which a person is effective without being appropriate; consider a job applicant who lies on a resume to get a job for which he or she is unqualified. That individual might be effective in acquiring the position, but is the act of lying appropriate? An opposite situation may occur that can affect people who are appropriate to the point of failing to achieve their goals. Consider the individual who doesn't wish to take on any additional tasks at work, but says nothing because he or she fears causing conflict, therefore sacrificing effectiveness for appropriateness. The simple rule to remember value in communication is; when faced with communication decisions, the successful, competent communicator always considers how to be both effective and appropriate.

It is from this foundation of communication theory, that I have chosen the research of Marilyn Friend and Lynne Cook, in order to engage and emulate their theories on collaboration through effective communication and interaction skills. Their strategies as well as those from the collaboration and communication text by Dettmer, Thurston, Knackendoffel and Dyck, are the origin of this investigation.

According to Friend & Cook, (2004), "Communication skills can have a huge effect on the development of collaboration, or they can inhibit it." For collaboration to be operational and successful the process must have regular face-to-face interactions, mutually agreed upon goals, a format for discussing the issues, task performance or monitoring, and accountability for individual responsibilities. Numerous models of communication and communication skill sets have been described in literature and at various professional seminars; the following two concepts and strategies, are but a glimpse into acquiring appropriate communication skills and the important role that they play in collaboration.

Listening is the place to begin in order to enrich your communication for collaboration, as an education professional listening may be very perplexing. As a teacher we instruct our students daily to – "pay attention and listen, look and listen, use your ears not your mouth, you have two ears and one mouth, there is a reason for the greater number" and so on. To reverse the roles and practice what we preach may be a foreign concept. During collaboration, teachers and educational support staff may be distracted by thoughts of upcoming IEP deadlines, other student caseloads, or an upcoming training or conference. As a teacher you may be so tired by the end of a hectic day that you are unable to follow what the speaker is saying. Or imagine you are the IEP parent, and have become overwhelmed by the special education acronyms and can no longer follow the information that is being shared.

Friend & Cook (2002), state "One of the most effective communication skills you can learn is to use silence…during awkward or difficult interactions, a few seconds of silence can help you to listen more carefully…allow you to learn more information by encouraging others to continue speaking…while providing you those seconds to think about your response."

During these moments of silence, another example of effective communication can occur; the use of nonverbal signals to promote others who are speaking. Body language is a powerful tool in communicating wants and needs. In a sitting position, slightly leaning forward and occasionally nodding your head in a positive manner, would indicate that you understand the situation and want to know more. Adversely, leaning back in your chair, gazing at your watch, checking your cellphone, or looking away from the speaker, can convey that you are disinterested in the speaker and/or the message that they are trying to impart. By communicating with your body, you are sending key signals to the speaker, without interrupting the delivery of the communication.

While in a collaborative situation, the individual communicator must be able to master and exhibit proficiency with verbal and nonverbal communication. When he can productively exchange information, he can reach out beyond his self, and achieve a state of "other-focused". When this is done while working with other members, he will have gained an important position on the team. Hopefully this individual is the new teacher, case manager or team leader.

Educators, support staff and professionals, along with parents and their students play significant roles in the planning and implementation of a student's special education program. Recognizing and respecting the contributions of each individual will advance the desire and expectations for student achievement, encourage productive IEP team collaboration, are devoted to the best education and services to students with special needs, along with promoting a positive school climate with minimal conflict or discord. When good communication skills are put into practice, team members can develop an atmosphere of open communication, clear and concise messages, a sincere quest for clarifications, recognize nonverbal signals, and foster mutual understanding (Cook, 2011).

Researcher Background

During my teaching career, as with so many of my peers I have been transferred or relocated into different programs, and different sites. As the new person on the IEP team; especially as the teacher or designated case manager, I had to quickly discover the nuances of the IEP support team and rally them together for the benefit of the program, and more importantly the student.

Over the course of my professional career, many of my supervisors have labeled me "the clean-up teacher" based on my personality and track record for initiating and encouraging positive change at my assigned class sites. Many times the hidden agenda, or so called edict from administrators is to have me mend the fences and repair the bridges, in essence improve the damaged lines of communication between the district sites and the county offices or classrooms. I have been directed to work my public relations (PR) magic, to improve the rapport between the program, the site, the district, the staff and the students, the parents, and the service personnel; many of who may have soured or become complacent with their responsibilities. As the new teacher I am to make the environment safe, positive and productive; without being annoying, causing too much of a riff or "pissing" people off.

While a new teacher can be very low on the educational pecking order, it is within their realm of responsibilities to coordinate all support staff, into a cohesive IEP team, with the hope that everyone will rally behind the new teacher's suggestions, requests and directives.

The goal of my research is to become a better teacher and case manager, in the field of special education, moderate to severe through improved communication with support and service staff. The byproduct of this personal goal is to foster a positive collaborative attitude that will strengthen the efforts of the group or IEP team and lead to a successful and productive outcome for the student and their family.

Definition of Terms

    Communication: As stated by the American Heritage Dictionary third edition (1994): 1. To make known, impart. 2. The exchange of thoughts, messages and information. When coupled with our facial expressions, posture, and other nonverbal signals, the words we choose and the way we express them comprise our communication skills. Communication skills can be taught and learned readily and they have an enormous effect on the development of collaboration, or they can inhibit it (Friend & Cook, 2004). In many familiar situations when all is well and interactions are positive with family, friends and colleagues we do not need to have exemplary communication skills; they know what you mean and do not take offense or misinterpret your words. But when controversial or awkward situations present themselves, then excellent communication skills are not just helpful, they are essential (Bradley & Monda-Amaya, 2005). If we do not practice these skills when it is easy to do so, it is unlikely that we will suddenly have them when the situation demands there use.

    Collaboration: To labor together or work jointly in cooperative interaction to attain a shared goal or the technical definition of collaboration is that of "a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (Friend & Cook, 2007, p.7). The most critical word in this definition is *style* because collaboration refers to *how* you interact with others, not *what* you are doing. Professionals cannot be coerced into being collegial. Teachers are accustomed to being in charge and virtually making all the day-to-day decisions in their classrooms. They cannot be ordered to just go out and collaborate with each other, without incentive and time, structure and practice, encouragement and positive feedback about their effectiveness. Collaboration does not occur because of good intentions; it requires learning the skills to make it a reality.

Collaboration depends on the development of trust, respect, and a sense of community among participants.

IEP: The Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a written plan outlining the appropriate special education programs and services to be received by a student with special education needs.

Special Education Teacher: In addition to the responsibilities listed above for teachers; holds qualifications in accordance with the regulations under the Education Act, to teach special education, monitors the student's progress with reference to the IEP and modifies the program as necessary; assists in providing educational assessments for pupils.

School Principal and/or Program Principal: Carries out the duties prescribed in the Education Act regulations and policy documents or program memoranda and board policies. Ensures that appropriately qualified staff are assigned to teach special education classes, communicates Education Act board policies and procedures about special education to staff, students, and parents. Ensures that the identification and placement of exceptional pupils, is done according to the procedures in the Education Act regulations and board policies; consults with the school board to determine the most appropriate program for students with special needs; ensures the development, implementation, and review of a student's IEP, including a transition plan, according to Education Act legal requirements; ensures that parents are consulted in the development of their child's IEP and that they are provided with a copy of the IEP; ensures that appropriate assessments are requested and that, if necessary, appropriate consents are obtained.

Teacher: Carries out the duties prescribed in the Education Act, regulations and policy documents or program memoranda; provides the program for the student in the regular or general education class; communicates the student's progress to parents; works with other school board staff to review and update the student's progress.

Team, Teamwork, or Teaming: Joint action in which persons participate cooperatively; also joining forces or efforts so that each individual contributes a clearly defined portion of the effort and subordinates personal prominence to the effectiveness of the whole. Communication serves as the foundation for teaming, involves the exchange of information between teachers, support staff, and parents; whose mutual goal is to assist the child/student in learning. Effective teaming is critical to the success of the delivery of services by all parties involved. Accomplished teaming requires that team members share a common vision for achieving their mutual goal. The beliefs they have about curriculum and instructional practice support this vision.

Summary

Chapter one provided an overview of the problem; strained communication between the new special education teacher and veteran support staff. Established the purpose of the study; to observe, interview and document the communication between these collaborative individuals, who address the special needs and provide support for students.   Two thesis questions have been presented, directly related to the need for improved communication in this educational setting. History has shown that communication can mean different things to many different people in a variety of different situations. And that acquisition of a set of particular communication skills does not guarantee success. Consistently good communicators are those who understand the principles behind communication, routinely practice and maintain communication skills, and are successful in their ability to appropriately and effectively perform communication skills as the situation warrants.   This chapter also illuminates the idea for production of a simple communication maintenance tool, "The Teacher's Toolbox" which has a design concept that will

provide easy access to assistance for building on communication skills, in order to enhance the

collaborative process, directed towards a successful and productive outcome.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"Research is complete only when the results are shared with the scientific community."

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of a literature review is to identify a specific problem statement. With regard to my topic, "What constitutes appropriate communication and interactive skills between professionals working with students with moderate to severe disabilities? What shared, user-friendly tools are available to teachers in order to access information on communicating with veteran support staff?" Communication was the base or foundation in this construction process. Interactive skills followed and would build from the communication; teamwork was the vehicle that erected the productivity.

The premise of teamwork is that select individuals are asked to bring their area of expertise to a group or team. The focus is on a desired goal or outcome that will incorporate each of the individual's suggested concerns, input or strategies. In the realm of special education, this team may include individuals from a long list, depending on the needs of the particular student in question.

In the literature review I wanted to find established best practices on communication between teachers and support staff, information that would go beyond the various standard human resource (HR) handbooks in the field of special education. Typically the HR handbooks outline the roles and responsibilities of all staff, as related to the daily interactions with students. The mention of administrative support in this context is along the guideline of chain of command, for disputes or contentious situations. The administrator is to set a positive tone and oversee the productivity of the various classrooms or sites. Their role is not teacher mentors; it is not their objective to sit down with new teachers and pass on educational wisdom or meaningful professional communication skills. Much of the administrative and teacher interactions are

limited to the IEP forum. The search revealed common sense tips for oral presentations and strategies for improving communication in small group dialogues or IEP meetings. The research shows that there are strategies in place to train and encourage personnel, to strengthen collaboration and empower teamwork. Many of the communication seminars focus on teacher and student interactions, as well as teacher and parent communication journals or logs. The communication and collaborative practices between general education and special education teachers comes under another set of topics; mainstreaming or inclusion, and co-teaching. The basis for any collaborative effort to be successful is appropriate communication. The dynamics of the communication style and/or perceptions between a new teacher and the veteran support staff, have had limited research.

Search Procedures

A search through various computerized databases; keying in: (a) communication, (b) communication theory, (c) effective communication skills, (d) strategies and models for appropriate communication, (e) communication and collaboration partnerships, (f) communication and conflict resolution, (g) communication resources for educators, (h) special education teachers, (i) inter-professional relationship, (j) beginning teachers, (k) teacher attitudes, (l) teacher surveys, (m) history of special education. These key phrases were used independently and collectively, to locate specific topics. Review of academic course texts, including the sub-topic "collaboration, consultation, and teamwork for students with special needs" along with "communication, collaboration and teamwork", were also employed.

Criteria for Selection

Studies were included in this review if: (a) the procedures and data-based results were published between 1990 and 2014; along with historical information dating from 1900 to 1990, (b) the participants were professionals in the field of education, with an emphasis on special education providers, (c) the study was not limited as to the number of participants, (d) the purpose of the study was to examine communication skills, interactive styles and appropriate development of communication strategies between professional individuals in the field of special education, and (e) the purpose of the study was to examine shared resources available to education professionals to improve their communication skills. Studies were excluded from this review if: (a) the participants were students with or without special needs/disabilities, (b) the setting was pre-school or post-secondary academic level, and (c) the setting was a hospital or other clinical environment.

Review of Literature

First, I examined studies related to developing effective communication, the ability to clearly and appropriately express thoughts, wants and opinions, in conjunction with listening and interaction skills within the framework of education. Second, I reviewed studies and human resource handbooks on the roles, responsibilities and training of support staff; with regard to the impact that each professional has on the team, and ultimately the student. Third, I investigated studies that focus on the concept of meaningful collaboration and teamwork, as an interactive process of school personnel, related services and support personnel; with an additional emphasis on how to create partnerships through collaboration, given the contemporary perspectives of special education school professionals.   And fourth, I explored studies that review the critical

role of school leaders, principals and administrators in special education and the tone or support that was offered to the collaboration process. This emphasis was not just during a staffing or at an IEP meeting, but throughout the course of the academic year.

There are many practical texts within the teacher preparation arena; *"Interactive Teaming: Enhancing Programs for Students with Special Needs"* – Correa, Jones, Thomas, and Morsink (2004), or conversely, *"Collaboration, Consultation, and Teamwork for Students with Special Needs"* – Dettmer, Thurston, Knackendoffel, & Dyck (2009), that share insight into building effective communication skills. The literature review showed that communication within the field of education comes in many forms. "The Parent Handbook for California Common Core Standards" is now available in Spanish to facilitate effective communication with parents, school site councils, and to provide a detailed overview of what students will learn in English-language Arts and Math, http://www.cde.ca.gov/handbook/spanish (2011).

Communication Collaboration and Teamwork

As stated by McGregor, Halvorsen, Fisher, Pumpian, Bhaerman, & Salisbury (1998), although a number of collaborative strategies have been developed, research suggests that general educators are more likely to interact collaboratively with other general educators than with special education staff. Changing roles suggest that educators of all types develop a wider range of collaboration skills that facilitate cooperative planning and instructional activities (President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). These current efforts are in response to promote policies and practices that look to improve the educational performance of students with disabilities. The challenges or barriers that must be overcome to accomplish these goals are clearly stated in many studies. In order for students to be successful, teachers and

support staff must be able to exhibit and model successful communication styles. Creating positive and productive partnerships that will strengthen collaboration, all stem from effective and appropriate communication skills (Cook & Friend, 1993; White & White, 1992; Bauwen & Hourcade, 1995; Walter-Thomas, Korinek, & McLaughlin, 1999; Thousand & Villa, 2000; Garner, N.G., 1997; Friend & Bursuck, 2002; Fry, N., 2001; Friend, M., 2008; NASDSE, 2002; Applied Collaboration, www.appliedcollaboration.net).

Support and Training

Teachers are in the business of educating students; it does not mean that they afford time for their own personnel growth and development in the field of education. Obtaining teacher support or getting teachers on board with new requirements can be a frustrating task. Especially when teachers tend to enjoy greater job longevity than administrators, and often believe they will outlast many administrative directives or initiatives. The studies reflect that an overwhelming percentage of professionals in the field of education, find it most frustrating not to have had, "Training right from the start, as opposed to long after the policies have been put into place" (Green, J., 2008). Much of the research done by the Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education (2003), focus on the preparation of special education professionals and its impact on beginning teacher quality and student outcomes; and the advantages and disadvantages of preparation alternatives.

Summary

In this section I have reviewed key studies relevant to my two research questions by using keywords or phrases connected to the research topic: appropriate communication, interactive skills between professionals, working with students with disabilities, shared and/or teacher-

friendly tools on communication and collaboration, and communication between new teachers and veteran support staff.

The literature review of communication theory provided the link between successful collaboration and effective communication techniques. It brought insight into the work of early communication theorists Claude Shannon, Warren Weaver, and Harold Lasswell. But it is Wilbur L. Schramm who is considered the founder of communication study. The work by these gentlemen proved to be interesting and has provided the historical foundation that led to the present day research of Marilyn Friend and Lynn Cook.

There was very little information that was directly related to the second thesis question, regarding user-friendly and shared communication tools for teachers dealing with veteran staff and service providers. This lack of information would continue to validate the need for a teacher's handbook or tool that would deal effectively with the communication dilemma that hindered the teacher and veteran staff, and would provide a foundation for appropriate workplace interactions and collaboration.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

"Practical action research is intended to inform and guide instruction in a local practice

which may impact larger issues. Teachers who seek positive change in the classroom

must become active participants in the classroom and conscientious observers

of the learning process."

McMillan & Schumacher, 2010

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The methods section will address the research design and data collection plan in order to answer the following research questions:

1. What constitutes appropriate communication and interactive skills between and among professionals working with students with moderate to severe disabilities?

2. What shared, user-friendly tools are available to teachers in order to access previously gathered information on communicating with veteran support staff?"

This action research incorporates a phenomenological approach to ascertain if the "lived" daily experience of working with students with moderate to severe disabilities impacts communication and interactive skills and if so, what does that impact portend for service delivery. Since the team of professionals share common behaviors, values and beliefs in regards to working with students with moderate to severe disabilities over a period of time (new versus veteran teachers and support staff), an ethnographic approach to analyze if disparate or common themes arise. Allowing me to pull from both models, I was able to incorporate ethnography, phenomenology and case studies; related to all members of the IEP team, with the attention centered on the new teacher and their individual skill set for communicating with staff.

I wanted the countless hours of research, literature review, observation, surveys and conversations, to come together in a viable product that could be shared with my educational peers. After much counseling and consideration I decided the focus of my action research should be on the creation of a product. With the foundation in place, the image or plan for the Teacher's Toolbox for Building Communication was created. The need for a comprehensive resource

manual focusing on teacher/staff communication skills within the Monterey County Office of Education was overwhelming. My research question then became, "Could I create a user–friendly, quick reference guide or tool for teachers that will assist and support positive interactions when communicating with veteran support staff?" The answer was – yes. The next section will focus on the methods used to gather data, the setting, participants and the process of compiling this important information.

Overall Research Design

As an educator, I am grounded in the process of sharing information or exchanging skills. A majority of the time spent in the academic profession is based on lessons, lesson plan creation, and how to deliver specific knowledge. That foundation was carrying over into this action research project; I needed to create a product. Gathering the research data was only half of my responsibility; engineering the product would be the other half. The vision for the Teacher's Toolbox would include a compilation of tips, techniques, best practices and resources related to communication skills. It will be available to educational personnel via the Human Resources Department at the Monterey County Office of Education.

The American Heritage Dictionary (2007) defines toolbox in the following way; (*noun;* 1. a case for carrying or storing tools and 2. c*omputer terminology,* a set of precompiled routines for use in writing new programs). Within the context of this research project, the word "toolbox" will be used as a descriptive word or play on words. The Teacher's Toolbox for Building Communication is the title for the quick reference guide, article or handout, to be used as a resource for all teachers.

A qualitative design was employed to collect information on the skills or practices required of a new teacher to communicate and deal effectively with support staff. This action research project was conducted in four phases: 1. Selecting a focus, topic, or issue to study; for how to improve communication practices and collaboration between the new teachers and support or service providers. 2. Collecting data; through the use of qualitative and quantitative methods which incorporate interviews, surveys, observations of staff interactions and patterns in behavior. 3. Analyzing data; to reflect on any changes in respect to the study. 4. Taking action based on the results; implementation of practices that have proven positive results relating to the specific issue or focus.

With the action research design format the case studies were incorporated where the focus is on the setting, the participants and the data collection period. A phenomenological study was used to highlight the new teacher's perspectives, along with descriptions of their experiences relating to interactions with support staff and communication styles. And within the literature review process analytical studies were exhausted to discover the various educational documents which would provide explanations of the past, and to shed clarity on current professional communication practices and issues.

While the focus of a considerable number of new teacher training and preparedness courses falls on models of design, ethics and job orientation, the focus for continuing education of seasoned teachers, looks to curriculum, best practices and Common Core. When is there time for shared wisdom of experience and on-the-job self-improvement? The justification behind creating the teacher's toolbox is to equip individuals with a solution to common communication problems, everyday concerns about classroom interactions, support staff protocol and school site collaboration. Therefore the results of this action research process were localized to the data

collection arena. This study with its data collection tools as related to communication could be used as a professional growth training seminar topic, or part of the orientation manual that is traditionally circulated at the beginning of each school year. The communication "toolbox" goal is to improve team building and collaboration, professional growth, and ultimately improve the daily interactions between all individuals connected to a special needs student within the class, program or school.

Setting

The setting for the action research study is a public high school in the Monterey Peninsula Unified School District (MPUSD). The class site and program are part of the Monterey County Office of Education (MCOE), located in Monterey County, in the Central Coast region of California. The following information is taken from the State of California Census, MPUSD and MCOE websites.

Community. The Monterey Peninsula Unified School District (MPUSD) is located in Monterey, CA and includes 25 schools that serve over 12,000 students in grades kindergarten through twelve. MPUSD spends $8,787 per pupil in current expenditures; with 57% on instruction, 38% on support services, and 5% on other elementary and secondary expenditures. There are 24 students for every full-time equivalent teacher, which is equal to the CA state average 24 students to 1 teacher. At MPUSD, 10% of students have an IEP for special needs services and 27% are English Language Learners (ELL). ELL students are in the process of acquiring and learning English language skills.

Monterey County is a region of great demographic, economic, and cultural diversity. These forces create communities with unique needs. The strength of Monterey County's educational

system is derived from the wide diversity that can be found in the 24 school districts and 134 schools, all working to serve 70,000 students.

School. All schools included in the project are public general education schools that host special education classroom sites on their campuses. They include elementary, middle and high school settings, which service students in kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Monterey County Office of Education (MCOE) is the districts' single source for business, technology, professional development, credentialing, education, teacher recruitment, and support services, to improve teaching/learning in the classroom and increase achievement for all students. MCOE serves as the connection between schools, districts, state and federal governments. They monitor legislation and offer its staff resources to inform and train district administrators in order to stay current with changing laws that affect education.

Class/Program. The class in which the research project is located is a moderate to severe Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Program, on a high school campus. The focus of the program is the development of the following: social skills, expressive verbal language, receptive language, non-verbal communication skills, functional symbolic communication system, response to an appropriate motivational system, developmentally appropriate tasks and play, fine and gross motor skills, attention to the environment, functional activities, cognitive skills, concept development as well as academic skills, independent organizational skills, along with replacement of dysfunctional behaviors with more appropriate behaviors, and other behaviors that promote success in general education classrooms. All students presently receive the following services once a week from support personnel: occupational therapy, adaptive physical education, speech and language. Additionally all students receive assistive technology support once a month in the form of consultation services.

The students come from diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds and all have English as their primary home language. The ratio of students to staffs is one to one (1:1); with support and/or service personnel in the class the ratio increases to one to two. The maximum student population for this program site and physical building is ten; presently there are seven students, five of whom are males and two females. One male student has 1:2 or two contracted behavioral aides, another male student has a 1:1 behavioral instructional assistant, while a third male student has a 1:1 instructional assistant. The four instructional/contracted aide staff is observed twice monthly, for one to two hours per session by their supervisors; making for additional adults in the classroom at unspecified days or hours of the week. Two veteran female instructional aides are assigned to the classroom, along with one female credentialed moderate to severe teacher, with six years of experience in both the ASD and the emotional disturbed (ED), otherwise known as the Therapeutic Intervention Program (TIP) at both the middle and high school levels.

It is important to note the dynamics, or orderly chaos that is connected to the frequently balanced, yet sometimes grossly exaggerated ratio of staff or support personnel to students in the moderate to severe programs. Ultimately the staff, and their positive or negative verbal exchanges, greatly affects the atmosphere in the classroom and the productivity of the students.

Participants

Three different groups of special education professionals: teachers, support staff, and administrators will be the focus of the research. While students from a variety of special education classroom sites will be observed during the interactions between teachers and support staff, they are not the focus of this research.

New Teachers. Individuals who possess a teaching credential, instructional specialists or teachers not new to teaching but new to a specific site; to include both general and special education teachers, and are dealing with staff or support personnel who have been at the same site for a number of years.

Old/Veteran Staff and Support Personnel. Individuals that have been employed in the field of education for more than five years, from a variety of educational or professional backgrounds which could include: instructional assistant, behavioral specialist, speech and language therapist, adaptive physical education, occupational therapist, mental health support personnel, school psychologist, assistive technology, etc.

Administrators. Professionals that are employed in the field of general or special education for more than ten years, as program principals/specialist, site principals, local education administrators (LEA), department supervisors, and superintendents.

All individuals who participate in the research study will be over twenty-one years of age; gender will be close to 50/50 mix, from a variety of ethnic, financial, and academic backgrounds, and from different cities and school locations within Monterey County.

Data Collection Procedures

The research began by gathering current studies and research procedures pertaining to the subject of communication and collaboration between teachers and support or service staff. A formal presentation of the research-study abstract and overview was shared with Ms. Mariphil Romanow-Cole, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education at Monterey County Office of Education. Her data collection approval was needed along with encouraging her buy-in with the proposed finished product (A Teacher's Toolbox). It was the hope that the collection of

communication tips will be incorporated into the Human Resource Department to be used as an orientation tool, and have shared access by the MCOE employees. The participants, prior to collection of data, would be attending their regular employment routine. The researcher would contact individuals within Monterey County to request and confirm their participation in the study. If they choose to become subjects in the research, they would sign a consent form that has all the information on the research project, as well as other legal facts pertaining to the study.

The first step to the data collection process was to schedule with the teacher and administrator participants a block of time in which the survey packets would be explained, handed out, and the observations or interviews initiated. The physical classroom observations where set for thirty minutes to hour long periods of time. The goal of the observation was to witness the interactions between teacher, staff or service providers, and administration; not between education personnel and students. Therefore, the activity or lack of activity in the classroom or office was of little concern to the research. A staff member or teacher could be headed out to their break or lunch; it was the communication that took place prior to their leaving or upon their return that was significant. The observations were geared at physical layout of the rooms or environment, atmosphere that might lead to or affect communication tone, comfort, or hierarchy. There would be no tallying, baseline or judgements made as to how many positive or negative comments were exchanged. And most importantly the communication topic (work or student related versus personal chatter), and its delivery/reception, or the exchange that would take place from one individual to another. These observations would be logged by the researcher in a neon colored, college ruled, junior composition book. No audio or visual recordings would take place in this study.

The second step included establishing the data collection materials. An unmarked, open manila envelope containing the two paged consent to participate letter, defining the study and requesting a signature, along with the communication worksheets was assembled. The five different communication worksheets, survey questionnaire and assessments, had been created, none of which had more than twenty questions and could be completed in 15-20 minutes. All of the forms were used to evaluate the participant's communication behaviors and perspectives. The five separate titles are as follows (see Appendices A-E): Effective Communication Worksheet, Communication Survey Questions, Communication and Managing Conflict, Proverbs Define Communication and Interaction Styles, and finally Do You Listen?

The Effective Communication Worksheet has only 10 simple questions (see Appendix A): Examples - Do you make eye contact? Do you ask questions to clarify information? Do you listen for and remember important points? Do you nod your head or use gestures to show interest? The participant will mark with an X in the three bracket scale of "Often, Sometimes, and Never" to show the degree in which they take part in the listed behaviors.

Participants were asked to characterize their communication style, behaviors and attitudes on the "Communication and Managing Conflict" survey (see Appendix C). Here two major concerns on communication and engagements are expressed: 1. Importance of achieving your personal goals?   2. Keeping a good relationship with the other person; especially when you are dealing with work place conflict and/or collaboration partnerships. The participant would pick one of five descriptions that classified their communication style, ranging from the shark (a competitive or forcing style), to the fox (a compromising style). Other communication styles included avoidance, accommodation, and collaborative; or referred to by the animal metaphor, the turtle, the teddy bear, and the owl.

The "Do You Listen?" worksheet was composed of twelve yes or no questions (see Appendix E). Examples include: Do you listen to your co-workers? Do you allow your co-workers to make choices, even poor choices? Do you give co-workers permission to express their feelings? At the bottom of this page there was an area for the participant to express additional comments or opinions to these questions. The participants were also instructed to use this area or the back page to share any communication tips or quotes that they felt were helpful in the workplace.

While each of the three different groups of participants was given the same manila packets of questions; interviews were conducted based on the time availability of the participant. The setting would vary from a work place to an informal meeting at an office or local restaurant. A ten to twenty minute interview would be conducted with each participant; with the focus being on their personal comments and/or historical perspectives on work place communication. Participants were asked to share positive and negative opinions about the type of communication that they experienced at their individual sites; and to list suggestions that they felt would improve communication and interactions with their co-workers.

The final step would be to gather all the data collection materials which included each participant's responses from the surveys, interviews, and observations. Then arrange this information into a visual display or graph with reference to commonality, strengths or weaknesses, and positive tips that enhanced communication and collaboration.

In March of 2015 the researcher distributed the questionnaires to the three groups of participants, initiated the observations, collected data, and separately interviewed the participants. During the following 4-6 weeks the researcher collected, recorded, and started to process or analyze the individual findings.

Data Analysis

The anticipated benefits of the research would be to improve and expand the circle of communication with all educational staff. A byproduct of the research would be the creation of a shared resource describing effective communication skills and strategies.

Content analysis was employed for the classroom observations and interview portion of the study. This practice allows the researcher to process and interpret communication content. The identification of keywords, frequencies, and structures is then transformed or assigned a coding frame or key. The key will enable the data to be transformed into a quantitative format, a graph or visual display of the data. The observation and interview emphasis was based on the formula of Harold Lasswell and his fundamental questions relating to content analysis; "who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect?"

Information gathered from the five different communication surveys will be handled in the same fashion. The individual responses from each group of participants: teachers, support/service staff, and administrators will be reviewed separately, coded and the data will be assigned to a graph for that particular group. In order to visually display and compare the results from each group of participants a table, bar, circle or pie graph will be utilized.

A key component to the classroom observations would be the physical layout of the rooms and the tone or atmosphere that would be experienced by the researcher. Individual space or work areas will also be noted, as well as proximity to peers and/or students. This observational data will be included in the form of brief narratives about the various moderate to severe settings that are to be examined. The belief that a happy, pleasant work environment well equate to

productive employees is a direct connection to the Hawthorne experiment described earlier and a key element in communication theory.

Personal comments offered by the individual participants in the form of negative and/or positive insights related to their work site communication and collaboration will be analyzed for patterns, strengths and weakness areas. The tips or opinions discovered will be reviewed for commonality as to a specific statement that could be made about the communication style of a particular group when interacting with another group. They will then be incorporated into the building of the handbook or toolbox.

According to Friend & Cook (2004), "Communication skills can have a huge effect on the development of collaboration, or they can inhibit it." For collaboration to be operational and successful the process must have regular face-to-face interactions, mutually agreed upon goals, a format for discussing the issues, task performance or monitoring, and accountability for individual responsibilities.

The research investigated communication styles and contemporary perspectives from school professionals on creating partnerships through collaboration (Friend & Cook, 2000, 2008). Through observation, documentation and gathering of information related to communication skills, the research shed light on the levels of strength, support and success demonstrated during interactions between individuals who service students with moderate to severe disabilities, specifically new teachers and old/veteran support providers.

Threats/Limitations

There were no foreseeable risks with the research proposed herein, beyond the risks normally encountered in everyday life.

Summary

I went back to my thesis questions; first what are appropriate communication skills and second what user-friendly tools that were available to assist with workplace communication and interactions. With these two questions in mind, the next consideration was the participants and the setting. The overall choice of the research design construction then became a qualitative method. The focus groups were professional individuals who worked with special education students in the moderate to severe realm. These educators included teachers, support staff and administrators; some with decades of experience, while others were new to the field. The data collection process consisted of surveys, observations and interviews with all of the participants.

In the late spring of 2015, after data collection the participants were formally thanked for their time and effort connected to this research project. The methods for the data collection were scrutinized for validity, bias, and limitations. Processing and analysis of the data findings were incorporated into graphs and brief narratives describing the overall research results. This information would be used in the following chapter and would serve as the foundation for the outline and initial draft for the communication handbook.

Furthermore, the researcher will share her findings with her academic community through a dialogue with co-workers and administrative personnel so as to potentially implement effective communication skills. Upon approval from MCOE, the finished product, "The Teacher's Toolbox for Building Communication", will be made available to MCOE/HR department for shared use among its employees. Moreover, the researcher will prepare to share her findings at the CSUMB 2015 Capstone Festival.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

"You can have data without information, but you cannot have information without data."

Daniel Keys Moran

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

While the exact format of a research paper varies across disciplines, they all share certain features in common: Introduction, literature review, methodology, data analysis, results (or findings), discussion and conclusion, (often these two are combined). In a qualitative paper the basic description of your findings may include SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats). This section is purely descriptive and will reveal the factual matter of the data collection results; not their implication or meaning.

Special education can be viewed as a problem-solving discipline wherein professionals make educational decisions, often in teams, to render the best academic and social benefit for students with disabilities. Remember that each individual service provider has a unique set of skills and perspectives that they bring to the collaborative process. Getting everyone to agree on a student's goal or IEP plan can be a challenge. But, if the team of service providers, including teachers, support staff, and administrators do not practice appropriate communication skills and exhibit professional interpersonal behaviors; their voice or opinions will not be hear or understood. The key component to a successful and productive collaborative process then becomes appropriate communication skills.

Collecting accurate data was a critical feature of the action research. The data and its analysis would inform the researcher as to the strengths, weaknesses, and value of the two thesis questions: What constitutes appropriate communication skills among professionals working with students with moderate to severe disabilities? What shared, user-friendly tools are available to teachers to improve communication with veteran support staff? The data would inform and/or

confirm for the researcher which communication skills were valued and needed to be shared with other special education professionals.

Communication Data

The four week data collection process produced a sufficient amount of information from all three of the participant groups. There was a total of 38 research surveys distributed 10 to teachers, 22 to support staff, and 6 to administrators. Of the 38 total only 6 were not returned, and these were all from the support staff group. The criteria for selection had been met and the final participant numbers then became 10 teachers, 16 support staff, and 6 administrators. The results of the five communication surveys, from all of the participant groups appear in the next few pages in the form of visual graphs or tables. With this portion of the data collection complete the researcher was able to view the related variables and identify the limitations of the research.

Observational data is most accurate when it is immediately recorded, rather than at a later date. Trying to remember how a participant performed or interacted with another staff member must be noted immediately, not at the end of the session, not a day or two later. Each of the site observations which focused solely on the participant communications and interactions, were immediately recorded during the observation in a journal. The researchers' comments about the observation were added following the observation; anywhere from half an hour to four hours later. There was a separate journal used for each of the various sites. The presence of an unfamiliar individual in the classroom did contribute to the validity of a portion of the research.

Data taken from the three groups in the form of interviews or narratives will appear in its entirety as Appendix F – Research Participant Comments. Significant quotes from various individuals will be discussed in Chapter 5: Action Plan.

Effective Communication Worksheet. The first survey given was the "Effective Communication Worksheet," (see Appendix A) where the participant was asked to evaluate their communication behaviors. They were instructed to place an "X" under the heading of "Often, Sometimes, Never" to describe the degree to which they use each behavior listed. In Tables 1.1 – 1.3 the results will be illustrated.

Table 1.1

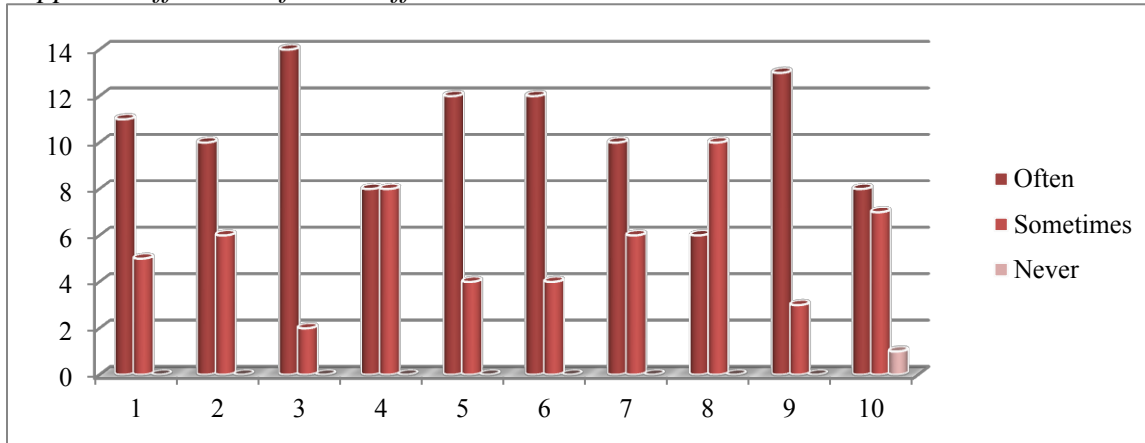*Teacher Results for the Effective Communication Worksheet*
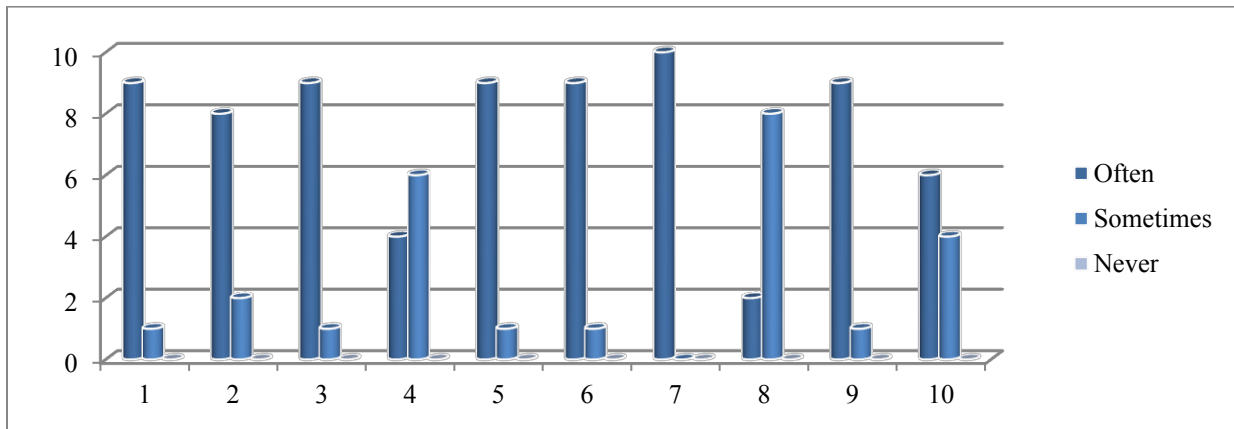
Note. Teacher participants = 10. Survey questions = 10.

For the majority of the ten questions the teacher and administrator groups are closely aligned. The support staff had a higher number of participants that selected the "Sometimes" category. The administrator group was in 100% agreement on the following; question nos. 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 (see Appendix A). One of the most interesting responses, where the teacher and the support staff groups came together was for question number 8, "Do you ignore outside distractions?" The percentages for "Often" were under 38% for both groups and 62-80% for the "Sometimes" category. While the administrators scored an even 50/50 percentage with "Often and Sometimes".
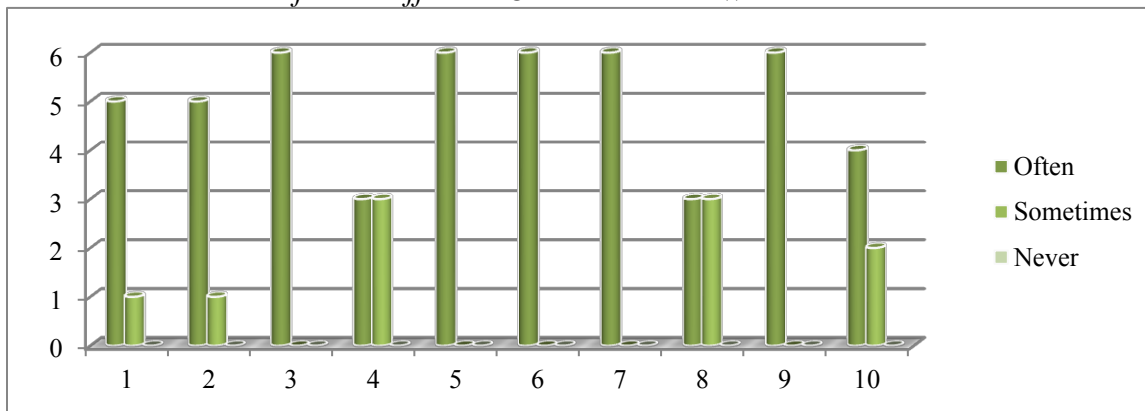
Table 1.2

Support Staff Results for the Effective Communication Worksheet

Note. Support Staff participants = 16; two participants did not complete this survey. Survey questions = 10.

Table 1.3

Administrator Results for the Effective Communication Worksheet

Note. Administrator participants = 6.   Survey questions = 10.

Only one participant from the support staff group marked an X in the "Never" category. That was for question number 10, about "suspending judgement and remaining neutral".

Communication Survey Questions. The next survey was entitled "Communication Survey Questions," (see Appendix B). The participant would rate each question by placing a number

which corresponded to a term next to the question: Never -1, Not Often – 2, Sometimes – 3,

Often – 4, Always – 5. For Questions 1-10 they were to add all scores and divide by 10 for the

average total score (see Table 2.1). The same instructions were given for questions 11-20, add

all and then divide by 10 for the average score (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.1

Teacher, Support Staff and Administrator Results for questions 1-10
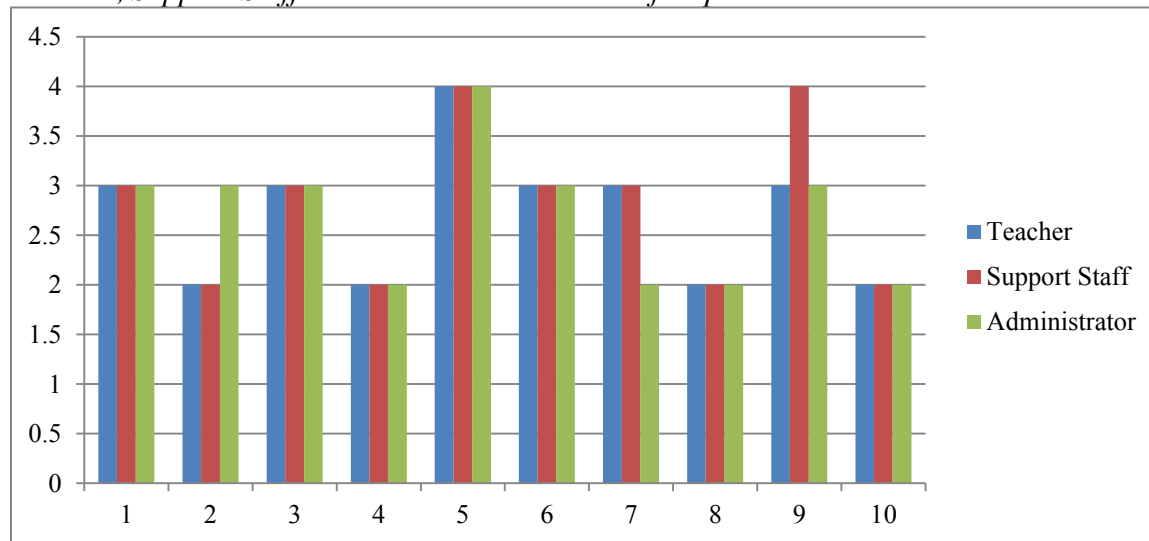
For questions 1-10, the average response for the individual participant groups was 2.60 or the

equivalent of a 3, which corresponds to the response "Sometimes". The scoring key for this

evaluation will then reflect the following: 1-2.5= effective communication skills, 2.6-3.5= needs

improvement and 3.6-5= destructive communication habits. The combined average score of 2.50

shows that all participants are at the lowest range of the effective communication skills, just shy

of a 2.6 score which would put them into the next level of needs improvement. The participants

were very clear on their responses. Only two percent of the participant's waivered and circled

two different categories for the same question. Suggesting that their response was somewhere in
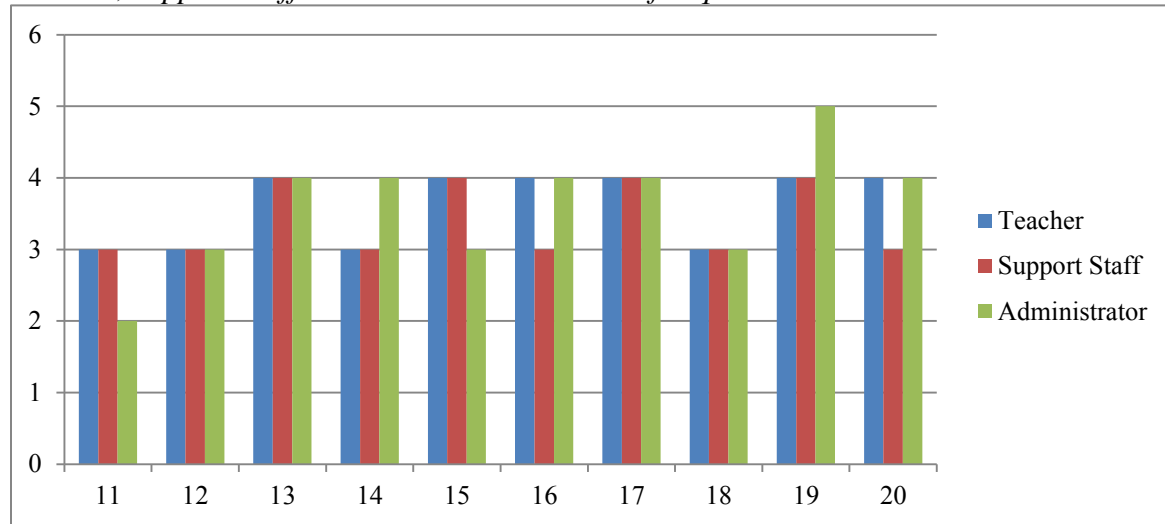
between which affects the scoring results.

Table 2.2

Teacher, Support Staff and Administrator Results for questions 11-20
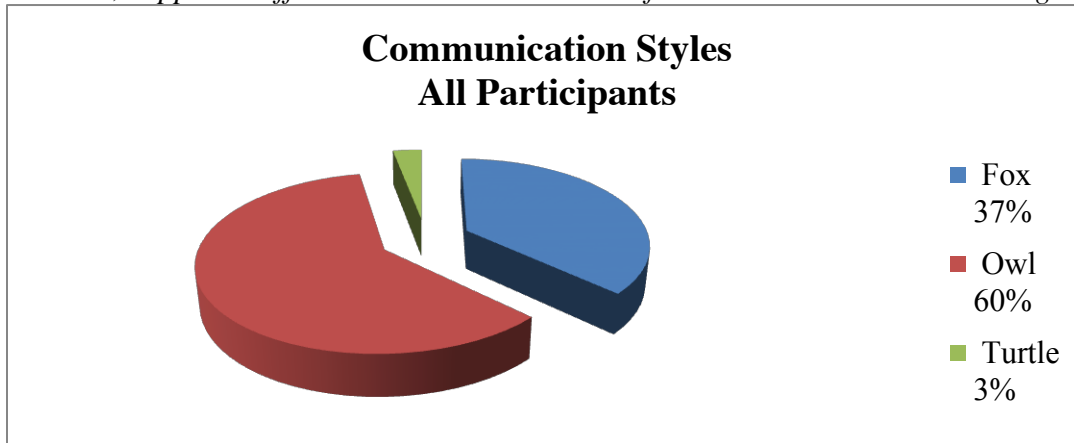

For questions 11-20, the average response for the teacher and the administrator participant group was 3.60 or the equivalent of a 4, which corresponds to the response "Often". The average response for the support staff group was 3.40 or the equivalent of a 3, which corresponds to the response "Sometimes". The scoring key for this section of the evaluation will then reflect the following: 1-2.5= very poor communication, 2.6-3.8= satisfactory and 3.9-5= effective communication. The most notable response was to question number 19, "When someone says something I'm not sure about I ask for clarification." The administrator participants averaged the highest score which was a 5= always.

   Communication and Management Conflict. The participants were asked to pick one communication style that best described them and their interactions in the workplace (see Appendix C). The first few participants in the action research project had difficulty with this portion of the research. The original instructions asked the participants to look at two different aspects of their communication style and then assign a number value to the different styles. The instructions proved to be confusing as noted by the first six participants' responses. The

instructions were then modified by the researcher and the confusion was eliminated. The results of this survey are displayed in a pie graph. Table 3.1 illustrates the results of this survey. The owl was the most popular choice followed by the fox and then the turtle.

Table 3.1

Teacher, Support Staff and Administrator Results for Communication and Management Conflict

The Turtle (withdrawing) – Turtles withdraw into their shells to avoid conflicts. They give up on their personal goals and relationships. They stay away from the issues over which the conflict is taking place and from persons they are in conflict with. Turtles believe it is hopeless to try to resolve conflicts. They believe it is easier to withdraw from the conflict than to face it.

The Fox (compromising) – Foxes are moderately concerned with their own goals and their relationships with others. Foxes seek a compromise, a solution in which both sides gain something, a middle ground between the extremes. They are willing to sacrifice part of their goals and relationships in order to find agreement for the common good.

The Owl (confronting) – Owls highly value their own goals and relationships. They view conflicts as problems to be solved, and seek a solution to both their own goals and goals of the other person. Owls see conflicts as a means of improving relationships by reducing the tension between two persons. Owls are not satisfied until a solution is found and tension and negative feelings have been fully resolved.

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Proverbs Define Communication and Interaction Styles. The proverbs that were listed in the survey could be thought of as descriptions of workplace communication styles and interaction behaviors (see Appendix D). The participants were to carefully read each of the proverbs and using the following scale: 5 = Very typical of the way I act, 4 = Frequently typical of the way I act, 3 = Sometimes typical of the way I act, 2 = Seldom typical of the way I act, 1 = Never typical of the way I act; indicate how typical each proverb was to their daily interactions with co-workers.

The graph indicates that among the three groups, their scores and averages are fairly similar as shown in Table 4.1. A few of the questions stand out with higher scores for the teacher and administrator group. They are as follows: question numbers 2, 7, 9, 10, and 12 (see Appendix D).

Table 4.1

Proverbs Define Communication - Results for Teacher, Support Staff and Administrators
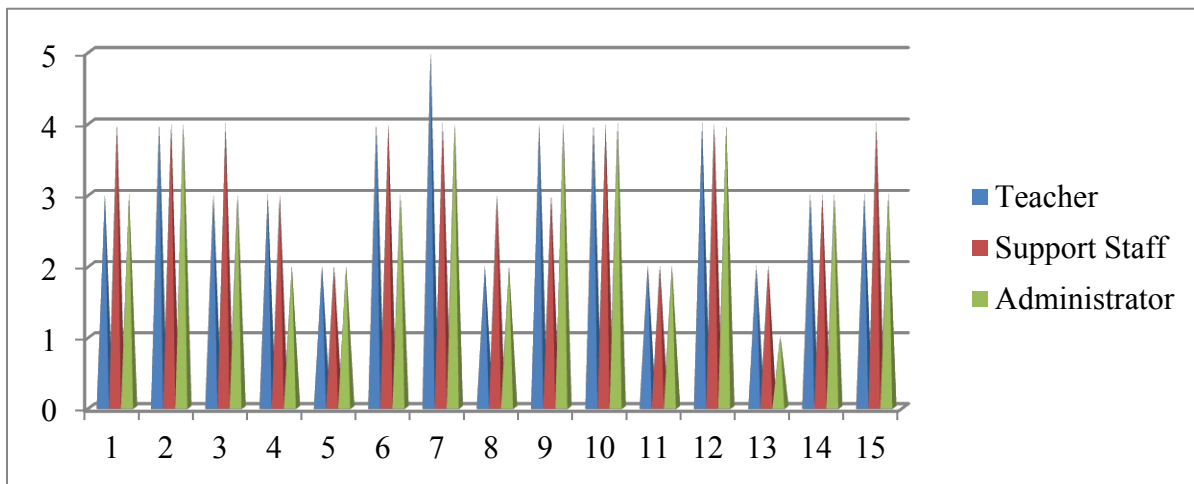
Across all three groups of participants question number 13, "Tit for tat is fair play" received the lowest scores; for administrators a 1 and for teachers and support staff a 2.

Do You Listen? This was a simple assessment of co-worker motivation, with "Yes and No" responses to 12 questions (see Appendix E). Again the scores for the teacher and administrator groups are most closely aligned. The support staff scores varied as shown in Table 5.1. There were more "No" responses from the support staff participants. One of the administrator participants declined to complete this survey, stating that they no longer worked directly with the student population.

Table 5.1

Do You Listen? Results for Teacher, Support Staff, and Administrator
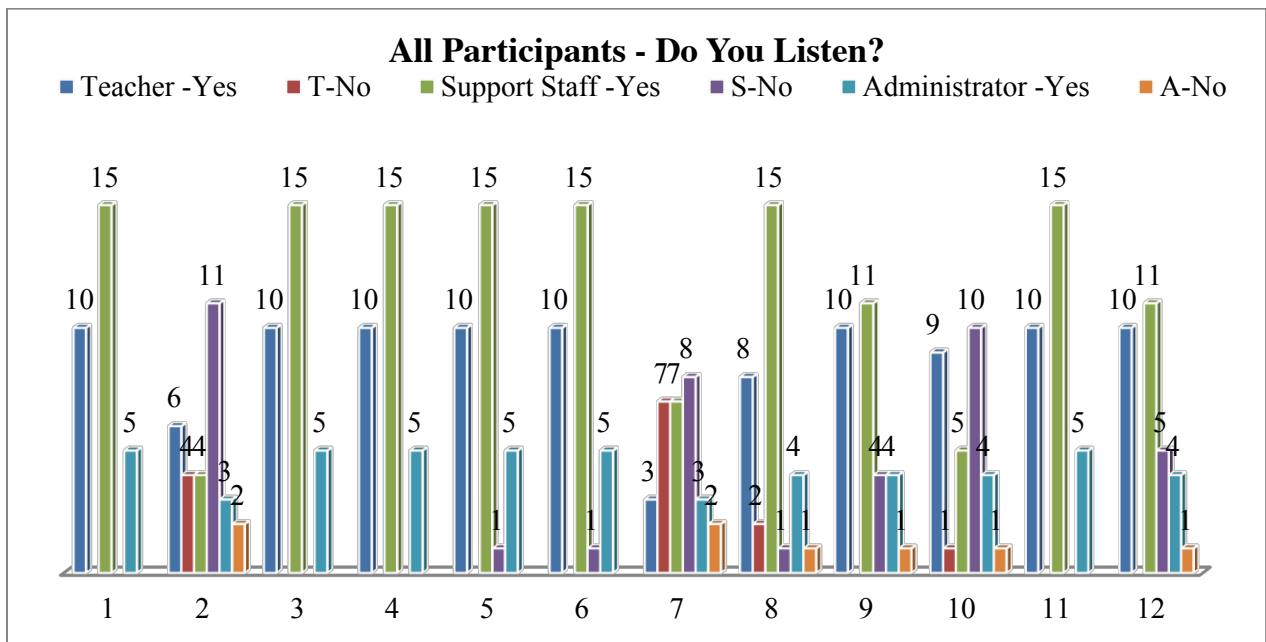
Note. Teacher participants=10, Support Staff participants=15/16, and Administrator participants=5.

The following: question numbers 1, 3, 4, and 11 received 100% "Yes" answers from all three participant groups.

Threats and Limitations. As stated in chapter three, the researcher commented that there would be no foreseeable risks proposed herein, beyond the risks normally encountered in

everyday life. The researcher was later reminded by an administrator participant that it would be naive to suggest that there would be no risks, "there are always going to be risks in research!"

As stated at the beginning of this section, there were initially 38 survey packets that were distributed among the three different groups of participants. Of that number 32 were returned and as the researcher I was concerned as to what had become of the missing six support staff surveys.

The first two were clearly explained by a teacher stating that she had forgotten to communicate to her staff that a researcher would be observing the class and handing out survey packets. Two of the support staff would convey to the teacher that they were not allowed preparation time at work to complete the surveys. They also stated that they did not like being observed by another teacher and wanted to know why they were being observed.

Two other support surveys were not returned from a site, where the thesis researcher had previously worked for two and a half years. There was no comment or explanation as to why they were not returned. The new teacher and the two other remaining support staff did complete their surveys and submitted them to the researcher.

The remaining outstanding support staff survey had been assigned to an individual who presently works under the supervision of the thesis researcher. Comments had been made by the support staff about the survey, including it had to be re-done and promises to return the survey, as of this date the survey has not been returned.

Summary

The communication survey packets had been distributed and collected from the 32 participants. Each individual participant was connected to one of the following groups: teacher,

support staff, or administrator. The scores for each group were tallied and the results were graphically displayed as a series of Tables 1.1 – 5.1.

The data collection for the classroom or site observations had been completed. This procedure allowed the researcher to witness firsthand the communication styles and interactions that took place between the teachers, support staff, and administrators who serviced students with moderate to severe disabilities. The observational data included descriptions of the physical layout of each classroom or site. Notes were made by the thesis researcher, expressing the tone or atmosphere of the particular site that was being experienced. The details, adornments, or room decorations that had been made to the different sites was also noted. It was acknowledged that there were no set standards for organizing the moderate to severe classrooms or worksites.

The individual interview notes had been organized and transcribed into a single document that appears as Appendix F. These personal comments would be reviewed by the researcher and those with similar concerns or reoccurring themes would be grouped together for further analysis.

These preceding elements of the data collection process: survey, observation, and interviews became the foundation of the analysis development. The information and its examination would lead to possible answers to the thesis questions. The collected data allowed the researcher to explore more closely what type or style of communication was taking place between the special education professionals. The data provided insight into the present levels of communication and interaction practices that were occurring among the three distinct group's teachers, support staff and administrators.

The data results would resolve part of the first thesis question; what are appropriate communication skills? The results showed that in some areas two groups were aligned, but it did

not indicate that all three of the groups were completely united or affiliated with one another.

Yet all of the participants worked in the same field of special education, all serviced students

with moderate to severe disabilities.

The findings did support the purpose of the study; to improve and expand the circle of

communication with all educational staff. The collected data showed that there was a need for a

user-friendly tool that would provide the information to improve communication skills, enhance

work place interactions, and produce successful collaborations.

CHAPTER 5: ACTION PLAN

"To write it, it took three months; to conceive it three minutes;

to collect the data in it all my life."

F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1896-1940

CHAPTER 5: ACTION PLAN

Introduction

This action thesis project required the researcher to focus on communication skills and subsequent interactions between a new teacher and veteran support staff. The following chapter will evaluate and interpret the research findings, with respect to the two original thesis questions: What constitutes appropriate communication and interactive skills between and among professionals working with students with moderate to severe disabilities? What shared, user-friendly tools are available to teachers in order to access previously gathered information on communicating with veteran support staff?

The new special education teacher assigned to a moderate to severe classroom must have in their professional repertoire of skills the ability to observe, assess, communicate, and problem solve with a diverse team of veteran support staff assigned to the room. This team of devoted special educators then relies heavily on communication, as an essential part of their daily success and productivity.

The next few sections will provide an overview or analysis of the data collected and how it relates to the question of what constitutes appropriate communication in the special education setting where educators serve students with moderate to severe disabilities. The following accounts will also confirm the need to provide a shared, user-friendly tool to facilitate support to the new teacher, service personnel, and administrators who function in this demanding sector of special education.

Implementation and Logistics

   The communication surveys revealed some interesting personality characteristics about special education professionals who service students in the moderate to severe settings. None of the participants, from any of the three groups selected the shark (forcing) as their communication style. While there may be a need for sharks in education, the consensus is that these individuals do not directly service students and are most likely higher up on the pecking order as superintendents or politicians. Nor did anyone select the teddy bear (smoothing), they think that conflict should be avoided.

   The majority of the participants decided on the owl (confronting), individuals who highly value their own goals and relationships. The position of special education teacher in a moderate to severe classroom can be potentially volatile. It often says, "I want to be in charge, in control of the environment or situation. I am not as concerned about what you think of me, but that you respect my role as teacher and the responsibilities that I must perform." The owl views conflicts as problems to be solved, they seek a solution in which both sides gain something. For many special education teachers this conflict means improving relationships by reducing tension between two persons; that may involve a students' challenging behavior, a situation with a difficult parent, or a determined service provider.

   The results of the communication survey questions disclosed that the teacher's and administrator's score of a four translated into effective communication. The research would suggest that it was because they understood and practiced the necessary communication skills. Yet, the support staff's score of a three shows that this group of participants is at the middle range of the satisfactory level. Why didn't all three groups of individuals come together and

55

align more closely in their scoring? If two of the three groups used effective communication

skills, why had the third group not been introduced to the common language that was spoken in

the moderate to severe classrooms? This present communication situation could be altered with

the presentation of a user-friendly tool that would teach all three groups the appropriate

communication skills.

On the first worksheet an interesting question was asked; do you ignore outside distractions?

The moderate to severe classrooms are continually experiencing outside distractions; not just

daily but sometimes hourly. The teachers and support staff were united on this question with

"sometimes" as their given answer. Administrators gave a 50/50 response with "often or

sometimes" which would suggest that they remember their teaching days of moderate to severe

distractions, but have learned to process and move forward with their present administrative

obligations.

The distractions that occur in a moderate to severe class can be many, each having the

potential to play havoc on effective communication and work place interactions. Service

providers can be in and out throughout any given day; conversations can be cut fleeting or

abbreviated because of continual interruptions and ongoing student needs. The assessments,

observations, and instructions are perpetual; often including a parent, a new student, a district

representative, a school psychologist, or a behavioral specialist. Onsite maintenance will make

frequent inspections to the room to ensure that equipment is safe and operating properly.

Administrators stop by as part of an educational/building planning group. A student can be

having a severe behavioral emergency. Or better yet, the thunderstorm or fire drill may be

causing all of the students to display anxious and inappropriate behaviors. These are just some

of the outside distractions that are shared by the teacher and support staff in the moderate to severe classrooms.

If appropriate communication skills were shared and practiced, a common language would be spoken among all the special education professionals. No one would feel disrespected or ignored. There would be a mutual understanding between this unique group of special educators, who give of themselves to provide extraordinary skills and talents to students with severe disabilities.

Two different themes emerged from the research on communication among special education professionals who service students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Theme I. Appropriate communication skills must include respect, trust, co-worker appreciation or recognition, and integrity. This information came to light via the personal interviews with various participants. As stated by Dettmer et al. (2009), "Educators do not need to think alike – they just need to think together."

Many of the participants commented that, "gone are the days of the ALL staff orientations at the beginning of the year…nobody gets together any more for trainings… and we only get a visit from the big boss, usually when something has gone wrong." Yes, the classroom is a place of business and everyone needs to act professionally. When teachers model appropriate behavior and acknowledge one another for providing instructional and social support to students within a classroom environment it allows students to view role models using proper communication skills. Encouraging comments such as, "How are you doing? Great job on the math lesson! Are you doing okay after that behavioral incident with your student?" These phrases are part of the social skills that are being taught to the students and salient role modeling, when done on a

regular and consistent basis offers students with severe disabilities an opportunity to observe and imitate communication and social skills.

The data results for the Effective Communication Worksheet (see Table 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3) showed that only one individual out of 32 checked the "Never" box. The majority of checks came in the "Sometimes" category, followed by "Often" with an average of four boxes checked. Concluding that all of the participants are aware of what effective communication is; yet all of the special educators need to put this valuable information into practice with more regularity.

Theme II. The Hawthorne Effect references a tendency of some people to work harder and perform better when they are participants in an experiment (Cherry, 2010). Individuals modify or improve an aspect of their behavior in response to their awareness of being observed. Conversely, management can make workers perform differently by creating a context where they feel differently, thus reducing the overarching sense of being supervised or in some cases micromanaged.

This Hawthorne Effect quickly became apparent in a majority of the moderate to severe classrooms. The physical layout of the rooms allowed for smooth or improved traffic flow. There were areas set-up for personal space between student/staff, and allowed for a Quiet or Break Area. Teacher and support staff had staked out their territory, established a presence, and then leveled the playing field by sharing and supporting both students and staff from their individual areas. The more organized and clutter-free classrooms had limited wall decorations with soothing, tranquil color schemes of blues and greens. Many of the students in these rooms worked independently with minimal staff directives. As a researcher I was taken in by the tone and atmosphere, the rooms felt very comfortable and I wanted to participate and be a part of the

group. Teacher and support staff expressed the following comments: "As a team we discussed how we could make this situation into a safe, positive, and productive environment." "The classroom had to be a place where the stress was reduced and students/staff went home – at the end of the day, happy." "We formalized our roles as individuals and collectively. We established a daily de-briefing; end of day review, what had worked and what had not, student behaviors, but more importantly our own needs and concerns that related to the class." "We all took ownership of the room, the students and any challenges that would confront us."

Goal of the Toolbox

This action research, coupled with the graduate coursework, has provided the ultimate opportunity to compile and produce a shared, user-friendly guide or toolbox of simple communication tips. Included in the toolbox are best practices for co-worker interactions, along with models for teachers, support staff, and administrators on how to expedite meaningful and professional communication skills. The following are excerpts from the Teacher's Toolbox:

- I will initiate conversation, listen respectfully, contribute appropriately and practice good nonverbal communication.

- "Be here now. Be in the moment. Learn how to orchestrate not conduct." W. Jones (personal communication, November, 2012)

- Affirmation - Communication skills were very good; I orchestrated the meeting, did not conduct. Listening skills good, paid attention to the body language of the participants and addressed individual needs. My attitude was positive and receptive, which was conveyed through verbal and nonverbal communication.

- I am guilty of too much talking, when I need to be concise.

Action Plan for Building the Toolbox

The communication and collaboration between special education teachers, support staff, and administrators had been well documented in the action thesis. The research data had confirmed the problem statement that very little had been done to equip educators with the necessary skills to communicate effectively with their academic peers. The next step was to compose the quick-reference guide or "The Teacher's Toolbox for Building Communication" as a viable means to correcting and improving the communication and interactions between the three groups of co-workers.

The proposal to produce the toolbox had received preliminary approval in March 2015 from the Monterey County Office of Education (MCOE), and Special Education Administrator Ms. Mariphil Romanow-Cole. In March it was agreed that the printed and bound thesis, along with the initial draft or layout for the toolbox would be delivered to the MCOE administrator by June 15, 2015; for draft approval. There would then be a 30-day window to modify and make corrections. Final approval was set for July 15, 2015. Time was allowed for print/production with a launch target date set for August 3, 2015, the MCOE Staff Orientation Day.

All of the communication tips, quotes or text portions of the toolbox had been catalogued. A short range of complimentary graphics were examined and then both portions would be assembled into a visually appealing, user-friendly handout. There had been two brief discussions with MCOE program principals about converting the handout material into a Power Point presentation format and sharing the information at monthly staffing's for the various special education programs.

Conclusion

The research experience has shown that working in the field of special education can be extremely demanding. The data has established that a common language must be shared, among all groups of special education professionals who service students with moderate to severe disabilities. The language or appropriate communication skills must be respectful, honest, sincere, and routinely practiced. And finally that communication and collaboration can't be forced.

Your team may be chosen for you, but its effectiveness will lie solely with the team members and their attitudes or perspectives on collaboration. Whether you are a teacher, support staff, or administrator, servicing students with disabilities and their families require a distinctive set of skills. Effective communication skills must be a significant part of that set.

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Appendix A

Effective Communication Worksheet

Use the checklist to evaluate your communication behaviors. Put an X mark [X] in the box that shows the degree to which you use each of the behaviors listed.

	Often	**Sometimes**	**Never**
1. Do you make eye contact?	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
2. Do you watch the person's body posture and facial expressions?	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
3. Do you empathize and try to understand feelings, thoughts, and actions?	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
4. Do you keep from interrupting and let the person finish, even when you think you already know what the person means?	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
5. Do you ask questions to clarify information?	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
6. you nod your head or use gestures to show interest?	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
7. Do you listen, even if you do not like the person who is talking or agree with what the person is saying?	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
8. Do you ignore outside distractions?	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
9. Do you listen for and remember important points?	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
10. Do you suspend judgment about what is said – do you remain neutral?	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Appendix B

Communication Survey Questions

1) Never   2) Not Often   3) Sometimes   4) Often   5) Always

1. When someone makes me angry I deal with them while still angry. _____

2. I become impatient with people who do not express their thoughts and opinions clearly.

   _____

3. I can get to the solution of the problem without regard to underlying interests or motivations.

   _____

4. When I'm negotiating with someone I view them as an opponent. _____

5. I believe the words I choose in communication with another person convey most of my

   message. _____

6. When I listen carefully to what someone is saying to me I can predict what their conclusion

   will be. _____

7. When I'm not sure about what someone is saying to me, rather than ask questions, I'll wait to

   learn more. _____

8. When someone gives me instructions and asks, "do you understand," I say "yes" even if I'm

   not entirely sure. _____

9. Effective communication can be achieved simply by taking turns talking. _____

10. When I'm locked in an argument with someone I view them as an opponent, and I think in

    terms of win/lose. _____

For Questions 1-10
Add all scores and divide by 10 for the average total score. _____

1) Never   2) Not Often   3) Sometimes   4) Often   5) Always

11. When I initiate a discussion of something important to me and want to be sure it makes an

    impact, I invite the other person to explain their viewpoint before I present mine. _____

12. I ask for more information about why a particular demand is being made to explore for

    underlying interests and ask why a position is important. _____

13. I listen fully and affirm that I understand what the other person has said as a sign of respect

    to the speaker. _____

14. When I ask questions for clarification, they tend to be open ended and cannot be answered

    with a simple "yes" or "no" response. _____

15. The best way to get the listening I need is to make the other person feel listened to first.

    _____

16. In negotiations I try to direct the focus away from stated positions and explore for interests

    and common solutions. _____

17. I practice direct communication by using "I" statements, such as, " I think…," "I feel…," "I

    need…." _____

18. I look past a person's opinion of what solution is necessary to solve the

    problem to get to their needs and underlying interests. _____

19. When someone says something I'm not sure about I ask for clarification. __

20. I restate the essence of the speaker's message in my own words as a way of checking on the

    accuracy of what has been heard. _____

For Questions 11- 20
Add all scores and divide by 10 for an average total score. _____

Questions 1 -10 Evaluation:	Questions 11 -20 Evaluation:
1 - 2.5 -- effective communication skills	1-2.5 -- very poor communication
2.6 - 3.5 – needs improvement	2.6 - 3.8 – satisfactory
3.6 - 5 – destructive communication habits	3.9 - 5 – effective communication

Appendix C

Communication and Managing Conflict

When you become engaged in a conflict, there are two major concerns you have to take into account:

1. Achieving your personal goals – you are in conflict because you have a goal that conflicts with another person's goal. Your goal may be highly important to you, or it may be of little importance.
2. Keeping a good relationship with the other person – you may need to be able to interact effectively with the other person in the future. The relationship may be very important to you, or it may be of little importance.

How important your personal goals are to you and how important the relationship is to you effect how you act in a conflict. Given these two concerns, it is possible to identify five styles of managing conflict.

Please **pick one style** that best describes you and your interactions at the workplace.

_____The Shark (forcing) – Sharks try to overpower their opponent by forcing them to accept their solution to the conflict. Their goals are highly important to them, and relationships are of minor importance. They seek to achieve only their goals. They are not concerned with the needs of others. They do not care if others like them. A win gives sharks a sense of pride and achievement. They try to win by attacking, overpowering, overwhelming, and intimidating others.

_____The Teddy Bear (smoothing) – To Teddy Bears the relationship is of great importance while their own goals are of little importance. Teddy bears want to be accepted and liked by others. They think that conflict should be avoided, that it will damage a relationship. They give up their goals to preserve the relationship. Teddy Bears try to smooth over the conflict out of fear of harming the relationship.

Communication and Managing Conflict - continued

_____The Turtle (withdrawing) – Turtles withdraw into their shells to avoid conflicts. They give up on their personal goals and relationships. They stay away from the issues over which the conflict is taking place and from persons they are in conflict with. Turtles believe it is hopeless to try to resolve conflicts. They believe it is easier to withdraw from the conflict than to face it.

_____The Fox (compromising) – Foxes are moderately concerned with their own goals and their relationships with others. Foxes seek a compromise, a solution in which both sides gain something, a middle ground between the extremes. They are willing to sacrifice part of their goals and relationships in order to find agreement for the common good.

_____The Owl (confronting) – Owls highly value their own goals and relationships. They view conflicts as problems to be solved, and seek a solution to both their own goals and goals of the other person. Owls see conflicts as a means of improving relationships by reducing the tension between two persons. Owls are not satisfied until a solution is found and tension and negative feelings have been fully resolved.

Appendix D

Proverbs Define Communication and Interaction Styles

The proverbs listed below can be thought of as descriptions of workplace communication styles and interaction behaviors. Read each of the proverbs carefully. Using the following scale, indicate how typical each proverb is to your daily interactions with co-workers.

5 = Very typical of the way I act

4 = Frequently typical of the way I act

3 = Sometimes typical of the way I act

2 = Seldom typical of the way I act

1 = Never typical of the way I act

_____ 1. It is easier to refrain than to retreat from a quarrel.

_____ 2. Frankness, honesty, and truth will move mountains.

_____ 3. Soft words win hard hearts.

_____ 4. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.

_____ 5. Might overcome right.

_____ 6. Smooth words make smooth ways.

_____ 7. Truth lies in knowledge, not in majority opinion.

_____ 8. He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day.

_____ 9. Kill your enemies with kindness.

_____ 10. No person has the final answer but every person has a piece to contribute.

_____ 11. Stay away from people who disagree with you.

_____ 12. Kind words are worth much and cost little.

_____ 13. Tit for tat is fair play.

_____ 14. Avoid quarrelsome people, as they will only make your life miserable.

_____ 15. When both give in halfway, a fair settlement is achieved.

Appendix E

Do You Listen?

This is a simple assessment of student and/or co-worker motivation by teachers and support or service providers. Please make additional positive or negative comments/opinions to these questions on the bottom of this paper.

1.	Do you listen to your students?	Yes	No
2.	Do you find yourself comparing students with other students?	Yes	No
3.	Do you listen to your co-workers?	Yes	No
4.	Do you give co-workers permission to express their feelings?	Yes	No
5.	Do you take your co-workers seriously?	Yes	No
6.	Do you compliment your co-workers when they do a good job?	Yes	No
7.	Do you criticize co-workers?	Yes	No
8.	Do you allow co-workers to make choices, even poor choices?	Yes	No
9.	Do you tell your students that you care about them?	Yes	No
10.	Do you tell your co-workers that you care about them?	Yes	No
11.	Do you take your students seriously?	Yes	No
12.	Do you have high expectations of your co-workers?	Yes	No

Comments:

Appendix F

Research Participant Comments

Teachers

- (Effective Communication) #10 circled the word neutral.

- (Do You Listen?) #7 over several years I have learned how to make it constructive

- (Do You Listen?) #7 criticize is a strong word. I may disagree with co-workers, but I would not ever want to criticize. #8 sometimes I find that we all (myself included) need to make a poor choice in order to learn.

- (Communication and Managing Conflict) working on becoming an owl. (Do You Listen?) #6 needs to increase compliments. #7 needs to give more "constructive" criticism. #8 I am not a micro-manager (too much work!) so I watch and guide them. Often surprised.

Support Staff

- Nobody is perfect. There are faults on both sides. I do feel sorry for some subs that come in my classes. I tend to hang out w/them because they are better (nicer, positive, kind) people to the staff.

- I listen.

- According to my scores I need some improvement and/or it's a satisfactory level of communication. I believe that my co-workers and I have a great level of communication. Most of my answers "only" refer to the different sites I have been subbing at. Every time I sub, 99% of the time I feel that I don't get included, I'm not given any direction, no foundation to follow,

no effort to get to know me or to make me feel welcomed and valued. I'm just a shadow in a

classroom and when I am NEEDED, I'm approached & spoken in a simple manner, briefly

spoken to leaving me with many questions with what I should be & how I can assist. Some staff

feels that they do not need to explain or train a sub with the details on how to run "their"

classroom. The staff lacks initiative in establishing some common ground, even if it's a small

one with a new person (sub) in their classroom. Feels like they do not want to put in the time

and energy to make someone feel important. Even when I ask a question, I get a short response

and show little to no importance to what I need to know. In return I feel unwanted and useless,

to the point I'm starting to develop a philosophy that "if they don't care, why should I?" (I really

<u>do</u> care.)

   - I treat my co-workers as my family. I care about the students like they're my own kids and I

want to see them succeed.

   - I'd like to create my own animal… a bearfox. Didn't like this page. * (Proverbs Define). In

my own experience it would benefit everyone if the skills & knowledge of the "veteran" support

staff was appreciated & acknowledged.

   - I love people… young, old and in between. I look forward to each day and enjoy all of the

people that I meet and work with.

   - Nobody is perfect. Every day we learn, and we can learn from each other.

   - (Do You Listen) #2 not that I know of.

Administrators

   - Wow, this was good! I hope it sheds light on the many important facets of communication. I hope this info spreads far! (Do You Listen?) *Answered per when I was a teacher. #7 Constructive & done carefully. #8 depends upon what the choice is & how it will affect a student. Comments: Clarity about expectations seems to be paramount in creating a strong & positive work relationship.

   - I am currently not in a teaching role, but in a management role, with few interactions with students.