POSITIONALITY OF PARAEDUCATORS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Paraeducators play an important role in the classroom supporting students and certificated teachers. However, literature on the actual roles of paraeducators has revealed that paraeducators are rarely included in the teaching team (Patterson, 2006). Paraeducators are frequently asked to perform difficult or unpleasant jobs and may not be recognized as important professionals who support the educational system (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010; Lucero, 2010). Surveys and interviews have shown that paraeducators view themselves differently from how coworkers view them (Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, Aragon, Bernal, De Balderas, & Carroll, 2004; Patterson, 2006). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the positionality and lived experiences of K-5 paraeducators from an urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. This research focused on exploring the positionality, agentic, and systemic influences on paraeducators. Qualitative data were drawn from 12 participants, using demographic checklists, 21 interviews, and the researcher journal. First, a pilot study was conducted with three paraeducators; this flowed seamlessly into the expanded study. A researcher journal documented affective elements of interactive data collection and bracketed the researcher's potential biases. Data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding and constant comparison, viewed through a general lens and a critical theory lens. Key themes,

supported by the critical narrative data from the dialogs with paraeducators, are reported. Then, using the lens of critical theory, supported by educational and leadership perspectives, I discuss the potential impact of the conclusions on paraeducators' positionality and practice in the U.S. K-5 public school system, with the possibility of transformation. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA, http://aura.antioch.edu/ and OhioLINK ETD Center, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/etd.

Keywords: paraeducator, paraprofessional, agency, leadership without authority, critical pedagogy, instructional leadership, ethics and democracy

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The interviews I conducted for this book were the toughest I've ever done. It's not that people were emotional—they were at times—but rather it was often for the first-time people were giving voice to memories and feelings that they held tight. (Kotlowitz, 2019, p. 278)

I experienced similar feelings to Kotlowitz during my phenomenological research process.

Thank you to my loving family for supporting me through every phase of this research and my doctoral journey.

To my mother for sharing about your young, disrupted life with me—from being a refuge, to becoming an immigrant to the United States, to becoming a citizen. The lifelong stories that you told and shared taught me to listen closely, a necessary skill for becoming a successful phenomenological researcher who could recognize that memories and feelings are crucial components of experience.

To my dear friend and peer reviewer, Bronwyn G. Pughe, MFA, EdD, for sharing my excitement of this research and for our many insightful discussions.

To the paraeducator participants who shared their stories and who also—during the processes of transcript verification, follow-up interviews, and metacognitive interviews—taught me the power of consciousness raising through dialogue. The act of sharing stories contributes to agency.

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I have found the phenomenological research process to be well-grounded in my commitment to servant leadership. The phenomenological research process—at its most efficacious—is humane and compassionate.

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Chapter I: Introduction

> It was not so long ago that you knew what to expect if you were to look through the doorway into a general education classroom. You would see a group of students, all or most of whom spoke English and did not have disability labels. . . The other constant in each classroom was the teacher—a solitary adult charged with meeting the educational needs of all of the students in the classroom. That was then, this is now.
>
> In today's more inclusive schools, a glance into a general education classroom often presents a different image. The student population is more diverse. Students who historically had been educated in special education classes increasingly are being taught in general education classes . . . it is increasingly common to find that the teacher is no longer alone in the classroom . . . it has become increasingly common to find paraprofessionals assigned to support students with and without disabilities in general education classrooms. (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002, pp. 47–48)

During the last 40 years, the movement for inclusive education, whereby children with disabilities or those from multilingual backgrounds are brought into mainstream classrooms, has led to the emergence of a new professional—the paraeducator. A paraeducator is an individual who assists one or more teachers in a classroom (Butt & Lowe, 2012; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Jones, Ratcliff, Sheehan, & Hunt, 2012). Legally, paraeducators may assist with classroom management (Picket & Gerlach, 2003); the key word being *assist*. Unfortunately, paraeducator roles are ill-defined (Shyman, 2010), leading paraeducators to be marginalized and misused (Butt & Lowe, 2012; Lucero, 2010; Wilson, Stone, & Cardinal, 2013).

In the research literature, authors often use the terms *paraeducator, paraprofessional educator*, *paraprofessional*, *teaching assistant*, and *instructional aide* interchangeably. For this study, I elected to employ the term *paraeducator*, the newly endorsed term of the National Education Association (NEA, 2012–2015), to emphasize the paraeducator's significance in terms of student education. The NEA wrote that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) "[p]romotes respect for the profession and acknowledges the critical role it plays in education by

adopting the NEA-endorsed term ‘paraeducator’” (NEA, para. 2). Still it is important to ask paraeducators how they self-identify in their professional roles.

Marginalization

It has become common to see at least one of these paraeducators professionals working in most U.S. public school classrooms (Giangreco et al., 2002). A paraeducator, as defined by the National Education Association (NEA, 2002–2015), is a “school employee who work[s] alongside and under the supervision of a licensed or certificated educator to support and assist in providing instructional and other services to children, youth, and their families” (p. 2). The NEA (2002–2015) has asserted that paraeducators are well-respected members of the teaching team. This assertion contrasts markedly with the research literature on paraeducators, which has shown them to be the least-trained educators, serving the most vulnerable children (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010; Carter, O’Rourke, Sisco, & Pelsue, 2009; Giangreco & Broer, 2005), and not included as members of the teaching team (Conley, Gould, & Levine, 2010; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Lucero, 2010). Another assertion is that paraeducators are misused, often asked to perform bus duty (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012) and administrative tasks (Griffin-Shirley & Matlock, 2004), rather than being included in planning and decision-making (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008) around student needs and pedagogy. When viewed through the lens of critical theory (Bohman, 2015), paraeducators in the K-5 public educational system are typically undervalued and marginalized (Brooks et al., 2010; Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010). The voices, experiences, and positionality of paraeducators (Conway, Rawlings, & Wolfgram, 2014) often go unheard and are critically underexamined.

One example of the way paraeducators are undervalued is pay. Despite paraeducators adding obvious value to the schools and for the students, their salaries are not commensurate

with their responsibilities. For example, in the Tacoma School District (TSD) in Washington State, the median annual salary of paraeducators with an associate's (AA) degree was $25,675 or $17.83 per hour (TSD, 2015). No salary provision has been made for paraeducators with higher degrees (TSD, 2015). Moreover, "An employee [was] eligible for [a] service increment of $0.25 per hour after completion of twenty (20) years of service to the district as a ParaEducator" (TSD, 2015). In contrast, the median annual salary for a teacher with 12 years of experience is $69,151 or $48.02 per hour (TSD, 2015). Often, paraeducators have been fulfilling many of the same roles as teachers (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Giangreco et al., 2002) without commensurate pay. Additionally, it should be noted that paraeducators contribute to health insurance deductions at the same rate as other school employees (Tacoma Public Schools, 2015). This further lowers the paraeducator take-home pay (TPS, 2015a). To put this in perspective, the qualifying annual salary for a household of three (two parents and one child or one parent and two children) for free or reduced lunches is $36,131 (TPS, 2013); thus, paraeducators fall within the category of impoverished. Pay positions paraeducators as less valuable than other school personnel, e.g., teachers, interpreters, and specialists.

Yet, paraeducators are often responsible for supporting and educating children under the direct supervision of a certificated professional designated with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) and 504-diagnosed needs (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction [OSPI], 2016). That is to say that paraeducators have not been hired just to support certificated teachers commensurate to growing classroom sizes, but that they have unique responsibilities, such as teaching to small groups of students (Etscheidt, 2005), for which they may not be appropriately supervised (French, 2001; Mueller, 2002; Pickett & Gerlach, 2003) or are not appropriately compensated. Paraeducators should be asked why they have come into the profession and why

they stay. What are the risks and benefits of their work to themselves and to others? How are they positioned within the K-5 public school system?

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of paraeducators in a K-5 urban school district in the Pacific Northwest in order to gain a deeper understanding of their positionality in the K-5 public schools. This included the paraeducators' perceptions of how others saw them and their roles in the K-5 public schools. Positionality moves beyond fixed identity and encompasses sociocultural, structural, and relational strengths and barriers (Takacs, 2002), which all influence paraeducator efficacy.

The primary research question that guided this inquiry was: What are the lived experiences of paraeducators in a K-5, urban public school system in the Pacific Northwest? The subquestions were:

1. How do paraeducators understand and make sense of their experiences in terms of their dominant, central, or subordinate positioning in the K-5 public schools in the Pacific Northwest?
2. How do paraeducators in K-5 public schools in the Pacific Northwest describe situations that typically influence their positionality (i.e., where they are situated in the sociopolitical culture)?
3. How do structural and systemic aspects influence the perceived agency (i.e., the ability to act for themselves and on behalf of others) of paraeducators in K-5, public schools in one urban school district in the Pacific Northwest?

Significance of Study

This study is significant because it uncovered and critiqued a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the voiced experiences of paraeducators. From the findings and conclusions of this study, it may be possible that their professional experiences in the K-5 schools can be re-examined using their expressed knowledge to alter and to strengthen paraeducator experiences, and to extend more support and respect to them. According to OSPI (2015a), without the paraeducators' supportive presence and their performance of extra tasks—both within and beyond the scope of their position—the educational system would be in crisis. Paraeducators fill positions and duties that otherwise would be left empty due to the current teacher shortage in high-needs areas (poverty, English Language Learners, ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, etc.; OSPI, 2015a). Understanding how paraeducators make meaning of their experiences within the perceived educational crisis (Morton, 2017) adds to the literature on paraeducators and has the potential to add clarity to their positionality in the system.

In 2013, there were 10,582 instructional aides compared with 54,867 teachers in Washington State (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015), or one paraeducator for every five teachers. "Increasing numbers of English language learners, and the rising enrollment of students with disabilities and other special needs" (NEA, 2002–2015) contribute significantly to school districts' need for additional paraeducators in the classroom. Such factors have led to changes in paraeducator roles, from assisting certificated teachers to directly engaging pedagogy and instruction independently, for example, teaching (Chopra et al., 2004). Paraeducators are uniquely important to the school system; thus, it has been, and continues to be, important to listen to their critical experiences.

Rationale

The growing reliance on and the expanding responsibilities of paraeducators in the classroom have demonstrated the need for studies to capture the lived experiences of paraeducators, in their own voices, and from their own perspectives. The positionality of paraeducators has yet to be defined by the education field in general, and there is a need for paraeducator's voices articulating via their own narratives the conditions that contribute to their positionality. As stated by Jones et al. (2012), "There is a lack of documented evidence related to the working relationships existing between these paraeducators and the teachers working in the same classrooms" (p. 19). Previous research has helped to clarify some of the roles and responsibilities of the paraeducator (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001). Yet, Butt and Lowe (2012) discovered that even after focus groups, interventional trainings, and evaluations, teachers and paraeducators still differed widely on their views of the roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants. Documenting the lived experiences of paraeducators through narrative phenomenological study provided paraeducators the ability to articulate their experiences, perceptions, and positionality. That greater understanding of the experiences of the paraeducator provides the opportunity to promote educational reform and to contribute to positive outcomes for paraeducators in the classroom and beyond.

Positionality

Positionality, as defined by Takacs (2002), refers to "how we are positioned in relation to others—dominant/subordinate, marginal/center, empowered/powerless" (para. 3). This means that we (readers, researchers, teachers, paraeducators, etc.) do not have one fixed identity, but rather many, which are contingent upon context and intersectionality. For example, in the dominant U.S. culture, I, as the primary investigator for this study, have a stable identity as a

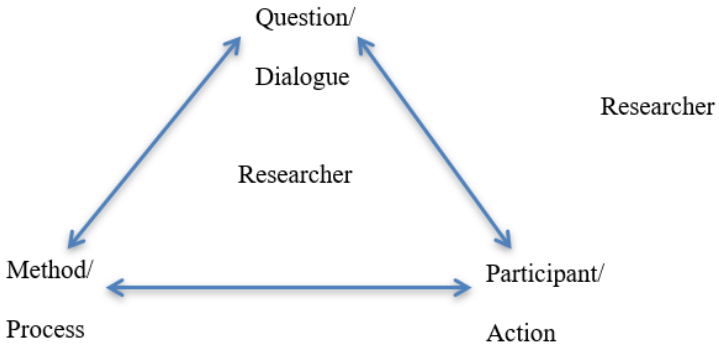
cisgendered woman; this position is defined in relation to men, LGBTQ individuals, and children. As a white woman, I am in a position of privilege within U.S. society; as a Latvian woman, I am positioned as a minority member of society. As a teacher, I am positioned as a highly-qualified, certificated teaching professional (No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2001); as a female teacher, I am positioned by others as being in an appropriate profession for a woman, and I am therefore positioned by others as having an easy job because of, for instance, the misunderstanding by outsiders to the profession of having summers off. The relational aspects of identity are dialectical (Freire, 1970/2000) rather than dualistic. Our concepts of self in relation to others may change with our senses of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and developmental life stage (Erikson, 1950). Maher and Tetreault (2001) defined positionality "not in terms of fixed identities [in the classroom], but by their location with-in shifting networks of relationships, which can be analyzed and changed" (Takacs, 2002, para. 3). Therefore, as the researcher, I learned from the paraeducators in this narrative phenomenological study, and they have also gained knowledge through dialogic exchanges with me, making sense of their lived experiences. Their own voiced perceptions of themselves in relation to others were analyzed and/or changed. This is a natural outcome of a phenomenological study (Maggs-Rapport, 2000), and I noted it and worked to document any negative consequences of the new knowledge regarding paraeducators conceptions of self and experience.

Positionality within a work environment, such as a school district, refers to one's relationships with colleagues and the space within an employee organization, in essence a continuum from a hierarchical to a more flattened structure (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Additionally, one's perspective of one's own capacity to perform tasks relates to positionality. Figure 1.1 shows the researcher in relation to the research process. The researcher guides the

overall research process, while allowing the participants autonomy and choice of action. The participants engaged in dialog with me, while I bracketed my own personal responses. I needed to be continually aware of her insider/outsider position with regard to the participants. The phenomenological study method provided the participants with a voice and the opportunity for meaning making, which increased self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and maintained for them their self-definitions of positionality (Takacs, 2002). A complete discussion of researcher roles is covered in Chapter III. Still, it was important to see that I maintained a bit of self-editing during this narrative phenomenological study process.

Figure 1.1.

The Researcher in Relation to the Research Process



Note: The triangle demonstrates the interactive dynamic process of engaging in research and awareness of one's authentic self and positionality.

Focusing research on a U.S. public school district (an institution) and its key stakeholders, especially paraeducators, dovetails with the lens of critical theory. Critical theorists have suggested that the norms of the institution and its hegemonic structure drive interpersonal relationships and behaviors (Carr, 2005; Sementelli, 2005). Bohman and Rehg (2014) suggested that schools are institutions with embedded structures and norms, especially around positionality

and discourse. Critical theory, then, is useful in reflecting upon the truth embedded in educational institutional norms imposed upon its workers.

Study Limitations

This narrative phenomenological study of paraeducators was limited to a subset of paraeducators who teach in grades K-5 in an urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. The conclusions of the study are specific to that group of paraeducators. The experiences of paraeducators in other school districts, in other geographic regions, may be different. Likely, within the context of the U.S. public education, there will be transferability (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). among the conclusions for this group of participant paraeducators, just as the existing paraeducator literature is relevant to this study. Furthermore, the findings in this study are contextualized by time and policy, both of which situate the lived experience of the participants. Changes in pertinent legislation, such as the dissolution of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) and the introduction of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), influence the lived experiences of paraeducators and their critical narratives.

Researcher experience and underlying biases did not affect study outcomes, and steps were taken to reduce and remove bias. In addition to being the researcher, I am credentialed as a teacher in K-8 in Washington State and have endorsements in Special Education P-12, in Reading K-8, and in Early Childhood Education P-3. I also hold a Professional Certification (Pro-Cert) and Principal/Administrator certification in K-12. These credentials and the 20 years of experience in the public schools influenced me, as the researcher, to study the lived experiences of paraeducators and have positioned me, as the researcher, within the systems, which influence the lived experiences and positionality of paraeducators. Thus, I was mindful to examine biases and worked to minimize them. My awareness of positionality provided for

intentional, conscientious scholarship.

Outline of Succeeding Chapters

Chapter II provides the theoretical framework of critical theory, the lens and its tenets, which are interdisciplinary in nature. Critical theory is a valuable tool that is used to assess the literature and data in this study from a social justice perspective, emphasizing critical dialog around the positionality of paraeducators. The theoretical framework is followed by an overview and analysis of the related professional literature in regard to paraeducators. Themes that emerged during the review of the research literature included: *positionality, leadership without authority, least formal power, least voice, marginalization, little agency, role conflict/ambiguity and personal power*, *relational roles and personal power*, and *organizational structures and systems influencing paraeducators*.

Chapter III presents the methods utilized for this study, based on the gap in the literature, which identified on the lack of voiced experiences of paraeducators. This study was constructed as a phenomenological study in two phases—a pilot study and an expanded study. First, phenomenology as a way of thinking and as a methodology are presented, including the role of the researcher (i.e., the phenomenologist, who "tries to uncover concealed meaning in the phenomenon, embedded in the words of the [participants'] narrative[s]" (Maggs-Rapport, 2000, p. 220). Specific methods of site and participant selection, data collection, and data analysis follow, demonstrating how these methods allowed me to collect the lived experiences and stories of the participants in their own voices in order to seek the structure and meaning of the phenomenon from the interviewee data and other data sources (Creswell, 1998/2013). Finally, rigor of the study and limitations are presented.

Chapter IV presents the qualitative results of the individual interviews, written comments, and my journal triangulated with each other, as well as emergent themes developed through constant comparison and coding, showing how the findings are supported by the thick (quantity) and rich (quality) descriptions provided by interviewees. Although my journal was a reflective field tool in which I contested my own interpretations and biases (Berg & Lune, 2012), there was still potential between the two data sources for researcher bias. I engaged a qualified debriefer to spot check coding and themes drawn from the data in the interview transcripts. The peer debriefer served as a challenger to inferences and findings drawn from the data as described in Chapter IV and V (Creswell, 2013), such that I had the opportunity to consider other interpretations, outcomes, and implications of the phenomenological data.

How the lived experiences of paraeducators fit with the extant literature of Chapter II are discussed in Chapter V, along with the implications for practice, leadership and change, and potential areas for future research. Limitations and how they were addressed in the study or could be addressed through future research and practice are also presented.

Finally, in Chapter VI, the implications for leadership and change are discussed.

Chapter II: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This chapter has two major sections: (a) the theoretical framework of critical theory, including organizational structures and systems influencing paraeducators, and the tenets of critical theory; and (b) a review of the current literature regarding the positionality of paraeducators in their work environment.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Theory

A brief discussion of critical theory is appropriate here to set the stage for reviewing the literature. Critical theory focuses on analyzing the sociocultural, political, and economic structures (Bohman, 2015), which empower or disempower individuals and groups in relation to one another, especially within hierarchical and hegemonic organizations (Bohman, 2015). The U.S. public school system is one such organization. Critical theorists have suggested that the norms of the institution and its hegemonic structure drive interpersonal relationships and behaviors (Carr, 2005; Sementelli, 2005) such as oppression or inclusion. Bohman and Rehg (2014) suggested that schools are institutions with embedded structures and norms, especially around positionality and discourse. Critical theory, then, is useful in reflecting upon the truth embedded in educational institutional norms imposed upon its workers, including paraeducators. In the public school system, the norm is that leadership is driven from the top-down, especially instructional leadership, which focuses on content and pedagogy (Brooks et al., 2010). The hierarchical structure assists principals and supervising teachers with performance assessment (teaching and learning) of paraeducators. While situated within a democracy, U.S. public school systems do not always behave like a democracy, wherein each person should have a voice. As is evidenced within the research and policy literature, paraeducators reside at the bottom of the

hierarchy and have little or no voice with which to counteract the system's inherent authoritative and imbalanced structures (Brooks et al., 2010; Lucero, 2010; Mueller, 2002; Patterson, 2006).

Critical theory focuses on power relationships among individuals and groups within systems. Power relationships are common in K-12 public schools (Conway et al., 2014), as well as within norms of inclusion and exclusion (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000). Habermas (as cited in Bohman, 2015) advocated the use of critical theory in analyzing institutions, which are:

> arenas for internal politics and political agents with their own agendas, resources, and strategies. As arenas . . . they house . . . a setting for the ongoing interplay of divergent interests and agendas. And arenas' rules and parameters shape the [often hegemonic] game to be played, the players . . ., and the [competing] interests [among them]. (p. 246)

Organizational structures and systems influencing paraeducators. Critical theory suggests that paraeducators' self-perceptions are influenced by the hierarchy of the educational system (Carr, 2005) and preconceptions of how the role of educator is defined (Kurth & Keegan, 2014). Kellner (2003) argued that transformation to an authentically democratic educational system requires the use of critical theory. Dewey (1916/2001, 1959) promoted the idea of having a strong relationship between democracy and the educational experience. Both democracy and the educational experience are socially relevant and should be practiced to give students and paraeducators, among others, voice. Paulo Freire's (1970/2000) concepts of a dialogic and democratic education are grounded in his belief that education, especially critical thinking and voice, can free the oppressed and provide a message of hope. Education then, becomes socially relevant, honoring the knowledge and skill that each person brings to the community. The needs of the community, and the ability to empower the community through dialog, result in assessment and identification of the current needs.

When an individual or a group engages in reflection, they may ask questions around the critical knowledge that arises. What prompted the idea? Where did the construct come from? What is the context of the realization? What relationships does it reveal? A critical theory analysis allows an individual or a group to voice their experiences around the structures revealed. Carr (2005) stated that critical theory "rejects the self-evident nature of reality and acknowledges the various ways in which reality is socially constructed and distorted" (p. 470). Reflective assessment, as a process, changes how one looks at core knowledge. It allows one to think about the knowledge one possesses and how it changes based on one's analysis of that knowledge, including experiential knowledge. For example, for paraeducators, core knowledge may be about content and experience, while administrators and others may view the paraeducators' knowledge through a hierarchical lens, such as years of experience, what degrees paraeducators possess, professional development certificates, and past performance evaluations.

The goal of critical theory is "the emancipation of human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (Carr, 2005, p. 472). Circumstances may include global elements, such as world wars and power shifts. My grandparents, as an example, were educators in Latvia. During World War II, Soviet rule forced them to become refugees. Circumstances may involve subtler social injustices, such as low pay for work even though there is the expectation, as in the case of paraprofessional educators, that they have responsibility for key pedagogical decisions for which they may or may not be trained (Giangreco et al., 2011). Horkheimer (as cited in Carr, 2005) said that "The focus of critical theory is simply not to mirror 'reality' as it is, which is what traditionally theory seeks to do, but change it" (p. 219). Thus, the dominant culture's version of reality no longer matches the lived experiences of the oppressed. By giving voice to their own

experiences, the oppressed change their knowledge of their own reality. Then, paraeducators have the opportunity—however challenging it may be—to then work to change their own reality.

Hegemony. Horkheimer (1975) argued that critical theory explained the social injustice of hegemony, whereby those in control maintain power and knowledge. He wrote that, "the structures of . . . production . . . emerge from the mode of production practiced in particular forms of society" (p. 197), which are the result of social mechanisms and structures. So, as paraeducators teach and support students, their professional practices emerge from the U.S. societal expectations and structures that adults in the classroom will be, functionally, teachers. Carr (2005) confirmed that, rather than a pre-ordained sensibility (knowledge and interpretation) of those in power, that knowledge and experience should be grounded in the hegemonic phenomena experienced by those less empowered by socioeconomic structures, which requires critical reflection and dialog. I have, in this study, provided to paraeducators the room for critical reflection and dialog around naming their own experiences. Horkheimer (1975) went on to write that:

> Critical thinking . . . is motivated today by the effort . . . to transcend the tension between the individual's purposefulness, spontaneity, and rationality, and those work-process relationships on which society is built. Critical thought has a concept of man [*sic*] as in conflict with himself [*sic*] until this opposition is removed. (p. 210)

The "individual's purposefulness, spontaneity, and rationality" (Horkheimer, 1975, p. 210) are their critically examined lived experiences. "Those work-process relationships on which society is built" (Horkheimer, 1975, p. 210) constitute the hegemonic (or oppressive structures) delineated by those in power. Horkheimer also contextualized critical thought within the time in which it occurs.

Freire (1970/2000) suggested that critical dialog is the key to learning together and teaching, especially among those oppressed under hegemonic structures. Freire (1970/2000) added that the particularities of language must be considered when learning together or teaching. Freire (1970/2000) wrote, "Here is one of the tasks of democratic popular education, of a pedagogy of hope; that of enabling the popular classes to develop *their* language" (p. 39), meaning that the language of democracy is not reflected in the language of those in power; instead, the language of those in power maintains their power by explaining history and experience through their lenses only. A democratic language contrasts with the language and voice of the colonizers; a democratic language encompasses many voices, which explain the sociocultural dialectics. A democratic language speaks in the voices of the oppressed, such as those at the bottom of hierarchal power structures, such as paraeducators.

Dewey (2001) suggested that schools, as a part of civil society, must constantly be reconstructed and that a civil society is democratic. Dewey said that we must constantly examine our "norms and adjust our norms for everyone to make a democratic society vs. a hegemonic society" (as qtd. in Anderson, 2014/2016, p. 19). In the district studied, current instructional leadership has been leaning towards variations on STEAM D (science, math, engineering, arts, democracy) and critical dialog (Freire, 1970/2000). However, the critical dialog of educational leaders often does not include the paraeducators. Macedo (2000) reflected upon Freire's critical pedagogy, reminding readers of Freire's democratic proposals of "problem-posing [and -solving] education" (p. 12), in which dialog and voice are key. Freire (1970/2000) wrote that in democratic education:

> men and women develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation. (p. 12)

Thus, through critical dialog, paraeducators may gain voice and power, with the ability to see, name, and influence transformation.

While the hegemonic power structure within which paraeducators work may not be transformed, they have gained a self-view of increased agency (Bandura, 2008), which allows them to become (if not already) leaders without formal authority (see Lucero, 2010). Leaders influence others to follow their examples and to engage with them in transforming education to become "a practice of freedom" as Freire proposed. At a higher level of educational reform, however, with the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, there are now dicta to include paraeducators on committees, in decision-making, and to provide for their professional development, which address leadership and pedagogy. As the literature revealed for paraeducators, inclusion does not necessarily provide voice to them. Inclusion, in a hegemonic system, may simply be a seat at the table, or worse, a name on a committee list without making the structural adjustments needed to allow paraeducators to attend the meetings. Without voice, paraeducators must often teach and behave as leaders without authority. They become invisible educators (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006). Invisible educators may be the paraeducators who give students voice.

Critical theory: Tenets for analysis. Post-modern scholars have primarily agreed that critical theory incorporates the norms of being self-critical, explanatory, practical, and normative (Bohman, 2015; Carr, 2005; Sementelli, 2005).

Self-critical. As a tenet of analysis, the critical theorist must be self-critical, which is

characterized by self-reflection and self-analysis. In critical theory, the theorists propose that experience is one way to get at truth (Bohman, 2015). Truth is subjective and contextualized by culture, society, and history. Critical theory seeks to maintain historical truths within its own context of time (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). In being self-critical, the critical theorist looks at the data and the context provided by the individual and society and cautions against over- generalization (Bohman, 2015). Critical theory questions the validity of truths superimposed on others by those in power in different sociocultural and historical contexts (Bohman, 2015; Carr, 2005).

Explanatory. Explanatory, the second tenet, involves the capacity of the theorist (who, in phenomenology, may also be a participant) to develop a theory that reveals the underlying reasons for the experiences. Kellner (2003) stated, "A critical theory signifies a way of seeing and conceptualizing, a constructing of categories, making connections, mapping, and engaging in the practice of theory-construction, and relating theory to practice" (p. 8). His description is apt for a review of the literature and a narrative phenomenological study wherein the participants name and analyze their own experiences in order to understand and make meaning from them, what Freire (1970/2000) and hooks (2003) have referred to as critical dialog. The researcher then seeks to find the essence of the phenomenon shared by the participants. Thus, critical theory provides a pathway to understanding positionality within educational practice.

Practical. To be practical, the third tenet, means to be evaluative of the structures within which the experiences occurred. Theorists, such as hooks (1994) and Bandura (1989/2001), have "stressed the importance of giving agency and voice to the oppressed groups and individuals who traditionally have been marginalized in educational practice and social life" (Kellner, 2003, p. 7). In a practical manner, critical theory supports the process of constructing knowledge through the

interpretation of intellectual, emotional, and lived experiences (Valle, Connor, Broderick, Bejoian, & Baglieri, 2011). Critical theorists, using the dialogical approach of Freire (1970/2000), have sought to explain post-colonial phenomena. hooks (2003) emphasized agency as a way to remove social barriers and tensions. Freire's pedagogical theory (1970/2000, 1998) has the potential to create a new vision of society within a democratic framework, wherein people engage in critical dialog around their experiences and take agency.

Normative. According to critical theory, a set of values or norms are needed to critique a social group, even one's own social group. To be normative, the fourth tenet, is to be evaluative of the positioning of one's own social group by another group (Bohman, 1996, as cited in Carr, 2005). Bohman (1996, as cited in Carr, 2005) argued: "[Critical theory] must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify actors to change it, and provide clear norms for criticism and practical goals for the future" (p. 472). Normative criticism can lead to social change, new norms, or new rules; thus, change is enacted after critical inquiry—*praxis*—as denoted by Freire (1998). Other critical theories—such as critical race theory, (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), critical feminist theory (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Tong & Williams, 1998/2009), and critical queer theory (Butler, 1990; Case, 1991; Foucault, 1978/1990; Sedgewick, 1994, 2001) address normative criticism for societal groups who make up the diverse population of paraeducators. While paraeducators have been predominately women (Genzuk, 1997), with administrators being predominately male, positionality with regard to normative evaluation should be determined by paraeducators as individuals and localized groups.

State of the Research Regarding Positionality of Paraeducators

This literature review is presented through the lens of critical theory and discusses themes found in the literature surrounding paraeducators. Critical themes include: the positionality of

paraeducators and the factors which influence in their positionality; the paradox of paraeducators holding leadership positions, which are devoid of authority (least formal power); the role conflict and misuse of paraeducators roles; and the aspects of these relational roles to positively affect those whom they serve.

An ongoing review of the literature was conducted, from July 2014 to present, using multiple databases including ERIC, PsycInfo, ProQuest Education, ABI/INFORM, ProQuest Social Science, and ProQuest Psychology, as well as the search engine, Google Scholar. Key article reference lists were perused to locate additional studies and authors. The websites of authors and their affiliated institutions were also searched. Additionally, *Education Week* was searched for policy documents on the history and renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, the ESSA of 2015, and new changes made by the Trump administration. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) website was searched for reports and links to the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) and the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). School district websites were searched for pertinent policy recommendations and mandates. Among the key words used were particular authors' names and the terms *paraprofessional*, *paraprofessional educator*, *paraeducator, role, challenges*, *perceptions*, *critical pedagogy*, and *educational leadership*. Critical theory and its tenets provided a lens through which the literature on paraeducators could be viewed and analyzed, especially around the positionality of paraeducators. The author also used questions such as, "Who has the power?" and "What does the power look like?" to guide her analysis of the literature.

The literature revealed that the key stakeholders influencing the school setting and the positionality of paraeducators to be teachers (Ashbaker & Morgan 2012; Butt & Lowe, 2012; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006), principals and administrators (Brooks et al., 2010: Ghere, York-Barr, 2007), policymakers, legislators, judges (NEA, 2012-2016; Etscheidt, 2005), parents/guardians, and community members (Chopra et al., 2004; Lucero, 2010). Often the interests and power of the key stakeholders competed with the needs of the paraeducators (Bohman, 2015), resulting in power imbalances (Freire, 1970/2000) and perpetuating the hegemonic structure (Horkheimer, 1993) of schools.

The literature around paraeducators suggested that they have the least formal power in the K-5 public schools (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011), the least voice in the educational institution (Conway et al., 2014), and little agency (Bandura, 1997/2009). These factors have resulted in isolation and marginalization (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Lucero, 2010), misuse and over use (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010), role conflict (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Minondo, Meyer & Xin, 2001; Wilson et al., 2013), resorting to leadership without authority (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012), and structural inequities (Brown & Devecchi, 2013; Lucero, 2010), including a lack of attention to their training, professional development, and other needs (Brown & Devecchi, 2013; Butt & Lowe, 2012; Conley et al., 2010).

Positionality. Positionality refers to an individual's place within a system or institution and the individual's view of their place within that system or institution (Glazer & Peurach, 2015). General factors that influence a person's positionality include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, education, religion, socioeconomic status, and ability/disability. Takacs (2002) stated that teachers, including paraeducators and students, have multiple positionalities, which may influence an institution's practices and attitudes. For instance, Ashbaker and Morgan

(2012), in their review of the international literature, found that paraeducators are often situated in teacher's classrooms while providing one-on-one services for a student. They also provide clerical support for the teachers. Ashbaker and Morgan (2012) asserted that teachers must take a supervisory role in order to meet the needs of the paraeducators. In his auto-ethnographic study, Wolfgram worked as a paraeducator while hiding the fact that he held teacher certification (Conway et al., 2014). He found that colleagues and administrators treated him as *less than* and misused his expertise (Conway et al., 2014).

Self-reflection and dialogue informed Wolfgram's critique of his own work situation (Conway et al., 2014), a method supported in critical theory by Freire's (1970/2000) *conscientization*, for example, consciousness-raising and dialectical thinking. Conscientization allows for the use of dialogue to discern complex meanings. Metacognitive thinking provides access to and inquiry about the sources of knowledge, which influence positionality (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011).

Leadership without authority/least formal power. Leadership is the ability to influence others to work towards a common goal (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) maintained that leadership often comes with authority, i.e., the right and responsibility to act in such a way as to get the job done. Authority puts one in charge and on the line. For instance, a principal is hired into a leadership role (usually instructional leadership, and in times of reform—transformational leadership (Northouse, 2010), and given authority by the hiring district to make and implement decisions from budgetary to overseeing staff and students. Principal leadership carries with it great responsibility; if a principal is not given the authority and resources to act, it can be difficult to meet his/her responsibilities.

In contrast, paraeducators are not hired into leadership positions with formal authority. Yet, they are leading children and being put in positions of being responsible for students' physical, social, and emotional safety as well as learning outcomes. Bilingual paraeducators have been well-situated to connect with parents who were not fluent in English (Rueda & Monzo, 2002) and were able to function as advocates for the children (Rueda & Monzo, 2002). The paraeducators in Rueda and Monzo's (2002) study were used by the school as default counselors and translators, without compensation or acknowledgement. They were given responsibility but no power (authority). When the paraeducators shifted to advocating for the children and parents, they were acting as leaders—without authority from the schools, but with authority from the parents. A paraeducator might not have a title that reflects his/her importance; however, he/she can exercise leadership.

Historically, paraeducators were introduced into the school system to provide more time for teachers to plan for instruction. Paraeducators performed clerical services and supervised students in settings such as the lunchroom and playground (French & Pickett, 1997). Paraeducators' roles transformed to more of an instructional role with the introduction of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975. IDEA (1975), a civil rights act, which ensured that students with disabilities had access to general education classrooms and instruction, thereby increased paraeducators' classroom roles to include one-on-one services for behavioral and academic support as well as small group support (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, IES, 2007). Now, there are presumably even more paraeducators, though the NCES no longer reports an exact number. Additionally, in Washington State, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Washington State Report Cards 2009–2010 through 2016–2017, do not report the number of paraeducators currently working in the schools, thus diminishing their

importance and positionality within the schools by omission. The need for paraeducators is implied by the following statistics which include students enrolled as special education, bilingual, foster, 504, migrant, and free-and-reduced lunch recipients by race and ethnicity. The number of students in each category indicates the need for paraeducators. For instance, from the 2009–2010 school year to the 2016–2017 school year, the Hispanic population rose from 16.1% to 22.8% (OSPI, 2017). In terms of numbers, this shows an increase from 166,518 to 251,334—almost 90,000 students, many of whom were bilingual. During the same period, students enrolled in special education increased from 8.1% to 13.8% (OPSI, 2017), again indicating the need for increased paraeducator services.

"[The] increasing number of English language learners, and the rising enrollment of students with disabilities and other special needs" (NEA, 2002–2015) has suggested why school districts need additional paraeducators in the classroom. Such factors have led to changes in paraeducator roles, from assisting certificated teachers to directly engaging pedagogy and instruction independently (i.e., teaching; Chopra et al., 2004). Ironically, recent news articles have suggested that paraeducators should become teachers, and that they are an untapped resource to fill the teacher shortage in Washington State (OSPI, 2015), for instance. This assumption not only denigrates their profession as a whole, but also makes assumptions that paraeducators are not valuable in their current professions and that most paraeducators should want to become certificated teachers rather than certificated paraprofessionals (Genzuk, 1997). Additionally, Eaker, Keating, and Rhoades (2008) suggested that support staff, including paraeducators, make overlooked or unacknowledged contributions to professional learning communities (PLCs) in their roles. That is, paraprofessionals and other support staff should be valued for the positions and duties, which they perform for the students and for the schools.

Given the dates of the citations provided here (e.g., 1995, 1997, 2010–2017, 2015), it seems clear that the assumptions around paraeducators wanting to become a part of the certificated teacher workforce are in error, as the conversation in the professional literature has ensued for over 20 years. It may be that paraeducators enjoy and find value in their own professions and professional roles.

Bandura (1997) posited an inverse relationship between dissatisfaction and perceived efficacy (i.e., dissatisfaction decreases as self-efficacy increases). In order for paraeducators to feel they can adequately do their jobs and feel fulfilled in doing them, they may need to work in a more stable environment (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2012), be given access to information, and have a voice in the system (NEA, 2017a). Freire (1970/2000) observed that when an individual engages in dialogue within a community, the exchange of information (NEA, 2017b) and knowledge may reduce role conflict or role ambiguity, a workplace problem well-documented for paraeducators by Giangreco et al. (2010). Key to giving paraeducators more authority is to acknowledge their leadership and positionality through increased communication, (i.e., giving them voice). Communication increases shared authority through action. Drawing on the work of Dewey (1975), structural inequities (or old norms that do not change) suppress effective communication. Moral insights come from the demands of others, especially for increased agency and capacity (practical and reflexive), which leads to the potential for initiation and change, thereby increasing the potential for paraeducators' leadership—with or without authority. Positionality is strongly influenced by morals and norms.

Paraeducators have the least formal power of the school team, as reflected in the location of their position on the organizational chart (Mueller, 2002). This low power position might also

reflect on paraeducators' perceptions of themselves. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) defined *power* as the degree to which one has influence over others. In their 3-year ethnographic study, Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006) studied 28 paraeducators who had been identified as "competent and effective educators who were enrolled in a teacher preparation program" (p. 66). Photo voice and open-ended interviews were used by the researchers to collect the data on the "world of paraeducators working with language minority students" (p. 67). While somewhat privileged by being recognized by supervisors for being competent, all participants continued to work and needed to work while attending higher education. Thus, they were not privileged in terms of socioeconomic status (SES). Fourteen "were bilingual in Spanish, Ukrainian, Estonian, Serbo-Croatian, Portuguese, and German"—languages which may be associated in the United States (U. S.) with immigration and/or illegal immigration (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006, p. 66), and which are also less valued by many in the dominant society. Additionally, 10 participants were identified as immigrants. Despite seeming privileged as college students, in their job worlds, the paraeducators described, (a) "overwhelming number[s] of roles and job duties; (b) inadequate classroom conditions; [and] (c) marginalization"—themes identified by Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006, p. 69), which positioned the paraeducators' as having a lack of formal power.

Similarly, Riggs and Mueller (2001), in their mixed methods study, identified aspects related to formal power (as extrapolated by this author) through surveys (n = 758), interviews (n = 23), and time-on-task logs (n = 20). Related to their positions at the bottom of the hierarchy, Riggs and Mueller documented that the paraeducators studied felt that they had inadequate support from administrators, a lack of communication time with the teaching team, and they perceived general disrespect for paraprofessional work as a profession. These aspects reduced paraeducators formal power.

Some paraeducators felt that they were asked to do menial duties, beneath their skill levels (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Patterson, 2006: Rueda & Monzo, 2002). For instance, Rueda and Monzo (2002) in their qualitative study, using interviews and observations, found that paraeducators often spent hours making photocopies for teachers. This finding was corroborated by respondents in Patterson's (2006) study, which noted that clerical work was an expected part of paraeducators' jobs. The paraeducators indicated their dissatisfaction with having to photocopy and perform other clerical tasks (Patterson, 2006; Rueda & Monzo, 2002). The paraeducators felt that they had value beyond serving as administrative assistants and desired greater inclusion in achieving educational objectives (Patterson, 2006; Rueda & Monzo, 2002), by being included as members of the educational team (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Patterson 2006). Paraeducators wanted to be positioned by others as valued. Paraeducators' formal power was limited by others being able to tell them what to do, i.e., the supervisors and others above the paraeducators in the hierarchy used directive leadership to command the environment.

According to Young (2000), powerlessness includes "not . . . participating in any decision-making progress" (p. 37), which is confirmed by paraeducator data in the studies presented. Young (2000) continued, "… fundamental injustices associated with powerlessness are [the] inhibition to develop one's capacities, lack of decision-making power, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of lower status" (p. 37). An auto-ethnographic study of a newly certificated teacher in the high school/middle school system, Wolfgram applied for what he and the school expected to be a .7 FTE teaching position with the opportunity to earn extra stipend money through conducting and directing extracurricular music activities (Conway et al., 2014). He was instead hired as a paraprofessional "because the district wanted to save money" (Conway et al., 2014, p. 85). The Human Resources Department described its solution to "the [music

teacher] staffing issue" as "creative" (p. 85). As a new graduate, Wolfgram had no formal authority to contest the position title and salary changes. Through critical reflection over several interviews, Wolfgram was able to name his lack of authority:

> There are things I'm beginning to realize that I won't be able to develop until I have my own program. There are aspects of my musicianship that I won't be able to develop until I am the guiding light for this concert cycle and that sometimes frustrates me. (Conway et al., 2014, p. 86)

Wolfgram realized that he needed the formal authority bestowed by salary and position to serve students well, to be the "guiding light" and a leader. Being in a position subordinate to his mentor, Wolfgram understood that student outcomes could suffer. Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) wrote that some paraeducators were also persons who were certificated teachers and for various reasons, they accepted positions as paraeducators. Wolfgram chose only to exercise his responsibilities as a paraeducator and to not take on any leadership role. Through Heifetz's (2002) lens, this story teaches us that exercising responsibility without authority involves going beyond personal gains and that leadership cannot be disconnected from purpose. The risks are worth taking because there is an objective that one believes in and cares deeply about (Heifetz, 2002).

In contrast, Lucero (2010) was able to document the experience of Dora (a pseudonym), a paraeducator who was able to use cultural capital and linguistic funds of knowledge, as well as the influence of the community and parents, to create a small measure of power and leadership outside the school day. Using a case study, Lucero (2010) documented how Dora was marginalized. Dora was an immigrant, a woman of color, an English Language Learner (ELL), and a teacher who had earned her credentials outside the U.S., thus rendering her credentials as

not recognized in the United States. Lucero (2010) also showed that Dora was able to draw on the cultural capital of parents and community and their informal power in the schools to create a "supplemental bi-literacy program . . . for Spanish speaking kindergarteners" (p. 127). She was not paid for her work but was allowed to continue. Weiss (1994) wrote, "it is her (the paraeducator's) personal involvement that legitimizes the school system and makes it answerable, as well as accessible, to community concerns" (as qtd. in Lucero, 2010, p. 129). Dora documented that her program had no dedicated materials or space provided by the school and that teachers and principals in the school did not observe her program or provide feedback; therefore, they really did not know what she did. The power of parent and community participation and the fact that the dual language program aligned with the principal's goals gave Dora enough informal power--combined with her ability to exercise leadership without formal authority--in order to meet her ethical responsibilities to students, parents, and community. Additionally, Lucero (2010) suggested that her invisibility through marginalization ironically allowed her to develop her program as she pleased. While Lucero terms this action as *constructive marginalization*, in fact, it does not solve the problems of acting with agency to increase capacity within the zone of least formal power (see Figure 2.1). The label of marginalization, despite the adjective, is still derogatory. Dora was able to separate herself from her role (Heifetz, 1994). She personalized the issues in order to be the person to initiate the change and that became the conversation rather than the issue of teaching bi-lingual students effectively.

To reiterate, leadership is the ability to influence others to work towards a common goal (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Heifetz (1994) defined leadership as a "practice with or without authority" that mobilizes people to make progress, in order to thrive in a changing and

challenging world (p. 15). Authority is the right and responsibility to act in such a way as to get the job done or to make changes. Authority is both formal and informal and holds an element of power. Authority is contextualized within a culture and its values (Heifetz, 1994). Dora was given authority by her community and tacitly, through silence and a *we-don't-acknowledge-you* attitude by the principal. Though treated as invisible, Dora was able to exercise her leadership with her bilingual program for students, parents, and community members.

Paraeducators often find themselves tackling tough challenges without formal authority. Rueda and Monzo (2002) found that bilingual paraeducators were well situated to connect with parents who were not fluent in English and were able to function as advocates for the children. One might not have a high rank; however, a paraeducator can exercise leadership. When he/she chooses to step into a position of responsibility, he/she begins to generate capacity, voice, and agency.

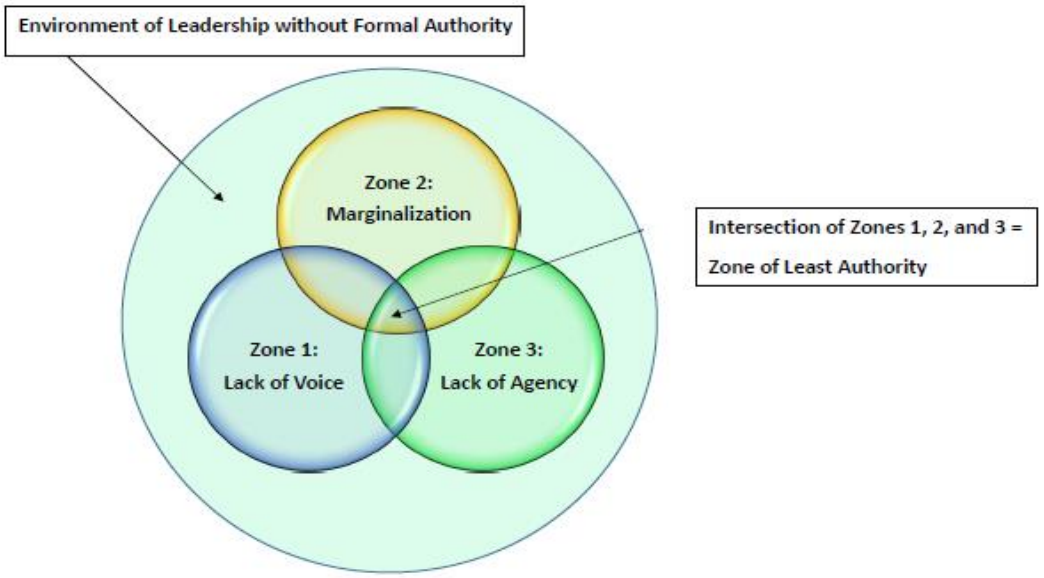
Through the examples of Conway et al. (2014) and Lucero (2010), we have seen examples of leadership without authority/least formal power as enacted or not by paraeducators and their colleagues in the U.S. public school system. In the areas of potential for leadership without authority, i.e., the potential for paraeducators to act as leaders, least formal power was identified as a hurdle they needed to overcome. Least formal power for paraeducators included several subthemes revealed by the literature—*lack of voice*, *marginalization,* and *lack of agency*. Figure 2.1 below shows the relationship of these themes within the efficacious environment of working towards *leadership without authority*, a more positive positionality than relegating oneself—or being relegated to a positionality of no efficacy and no authority.

Dora took leadership, though she was given no authority from the school; she drew her informal authority from the community by meeting the community's needs. On the other hand,

Wolfgram (Conway et al., 2014) was demoralized and assumed he would have to wait for the bestowal of formal authority before he could function as a leader to influence student outcomes; he equated power to act with formal authority while accepting the impediments to leadership without authority and resided in a position of least authority/least power. Each subtheme (*lack of voice*, *marginalization*, and *lack of agency*) is represented by a circle in the Venn diagram. Each facet intersects with the others nuancing the complexity of least formal authority, found at the center of the diagram below. Professionally, Wolfgram (Conway et al., 2014) worked in the intersection of the impediments to leading and to making change for students, while Dora took advantage of her own work in the zone of least formal authority—gaining voice, position, and agency from the community—in order to lead without authority from the school. Their stories and positionality within a system of responsibilities are best represented by the environmentally situated Venn diagram rather than at opposite ends of a linear continuum, as paraeducators may shift in and out of the zones represented in the figure.

Figure 2.1

Exercising Leadership Without Formal Authority



Note. Venn diagram by Flynn (2017). Zones 1, 2, & 3 indicate impediments to Leadership Without Authority. Their intersections depict the zone of least authority/least power. Lack of voice, marginalization, and lack of agency interfere with an individual growing within the more desirable environment of leadership without authority.

Least voice. Within paraeducators' least formal power, is the lack of voice. Giangreco, Edelman, and Broer (2001) addressed the lack of paraeducators' voices in their qualitative study that included semi-structured interviews, school visits, and individual interviews with 103 school staff including, "teachers, paraprofessionals, special educators, and administrators" (p. 485). The authors reported that teachers felt informal daily communication among teachers and paraeducators was sufficient to hear paraeducators' voices. However, paraeducators reported "we more or less end up watching the class while the [recognized teaching] team meets" (p. 492) and that their voices were not heard due to the lack of inclusion of team meetings. According to Fisher and Pleasants (2012), paraeducators resented not being given access to important

information. One paraeducator reported, "[We are] expected to do all or most of the education of the student with no or little feedback from the teacher" (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012, p. 292). A lack of voice contributed to a feeling that "paraeducators are not respected when it comes to opinions and concerns" (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012, p. 292). Fisher and Pleasants (2012) concluded that lack of appreciation was the major cause of paraeducator resentment. Often the lines of accountability and responsibility were confused, further contributing to lack of voice. Voice has been directly linked to respect (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012). Support staff play a role in professional learning communities (PLCs). Eaker et al. (2008) identified three cultural shifts that occur when a school begins to function as a PLC. First, there is a shift from a focus on teaching to an intense focus on learning. Secondly, a shift from cultural isolation to a culture of collaboration occurs. And lastly, a shift from a focus on intentions to a focus on results takes place (Eaker et al., 2008). Members of PLCs give themselves permission to experiment to get better in their professional performances.

Marginalization. Marginalization is a key component of the paraeducator residing in the zone of least formal power. "Marginalization . . . denies a section of the society equal access to productive resources and avenues for the realization of their productive human potential and opportunities for their full capacity utilization" ("Marginalization and the Role of Civil Society", n.d.). Dewey espoused that, "the social domains which influence a human's capacity are schools and civil society power structure and participation in the decision-making processes leading to their subordination to and dependence on the economically and politically dominant groups of society" ("Marginalization and the Role of Civil Society", n.d.). In a U.S. public school system, these economically and politically dominant groups include the principals, who "are the primary gatekeepers to educational reform" (Brooks, Jean-Marie, Normore, & Hodgins, 2007, as cited in

Brooks et al., 2010, p. 147) and teachers. In a school system, paraeducators find themselves marginalized environmentally, politically, and socially from their associates. For instance, Brooks et al. (2010) found from their work on the Alonzo project that "ESL teachers and paraeducators are often marginalized from other teachers and excluded from systemic discussions regarding their students" (p. 147). They suggested that paraeducators are marginalized because the students with whom the paraeducators work with are also marginalized (Brooks et al., 2010). Ernst-Slavit and Wenger's (2006) study revealed that bilingual paraeducators are further marginalized. Most paraeducators in their study agreed that they were expected to do what certificated teachers did, plus perform a range of specialized tasks in translation, counseling, and language testing, thus becoming "hidden teachers" (p. 78). Using the lens of critical theory, this misuse of paraeducators as *hidden teachers* maintains their position as *less than* in the hegemonic system, denying them both pay and status for what they really do. It also denies them the authority to act within designated responsibilities, as the responsibilities are not clearly articulated and the paraeducators are not given the authority to act as teachers—hence, they remain hidden. Marginalization promotes responsibility to make teaching decisions without authority because of the multiple roles in which the paraeducators function, with no formal authority or voice. Thus, some are forced to step out on their own to find agency.

Lack of agency. Paraeducators overall experience a lack of agency (Downing et al., 2000; Giangreco, Broer, & Suter, 2011; Monzo & Rueda, 2002; Lucero, 2010; Shyman, 2010). *Agency* is the ability of a person to use his/her actions to influence one's own functioning and outcomes (see Bandura, e.g., 1977). Bandura (2009) wrote, "Through cognitive self-guidance, humans can visualize futures that act on the present; construct, evaluate, modify alternative

courses of action to gain valued outcomes; and override environmental influences" (p. 8). Bandura proposed four properties of human agency: *intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness,* and *self-reflection* (p. 8). Bandura suggested that human agency can be enacted personally, on behalf of another person, or collectively. Agency is also directly related to power. A person with less power, such as a paraeducator, has less agency. He/she must continuously battle upstream barriers in order to act with agency. This is why groups may use collective agency, as with Dora and her community, to increase their power. Downing et al. (2000) interviewed 16 paraeducators, who worked with K-12 students with moderate to severe disabilities. The interviews revealed themes of wide-ranging supports for the students by paraeducators, including: "providing behavioral support; monitoring students; teaching; adapting and modifying curricula, materials, and activities; supporting personal care; facilitating interactions with peers; and completing clerical tasks" (pp. 174–175). These findings seem to suggest a subtle distinction between self-efficacy and agency. The paraeducators were expected to perform these duties repeatedly, implying that they did the duties competently and with self-efficacy. In contrast, the duties were assigned to the paraeducators, indicating low personal agency.

In his quantitative study of 100 paraeducators, Shyman (2010) found that emotional exhaustion of paraeducators was significantly correlated with the independent variables of "*supervisor support*, *quantitative demand*, *cognitive demand*, and *role conflict*" (Table 3, p. 836). He also found that emotional exhaustion was negatively correlated with a sense of self-efficacy ($p < .01$; Shyman, 2010). He concluded, "that emotional demand is predictive of stress" (p. 837), which could be caused by taking responsibility for special education students' success or failure (Shyman, 2010). Finally, Shyman found that role conflict, emotional demand, quantitative

demand, and (reduced) sense of self-efficacy together were predictive for emotional exhaustion ($F = 19.393$, $p < .01$), and that role conflict, emotional demand, quantitative demand, sense of self-efficacy at any level, and supervisor support at the moderate-to-no levels combined, were also predictive of emotional exhaustion ($F = 11.930$, $p < .05$). Thus, occupational stress expressed as emotional exhaustion may reduce personal, proxy, and community agency, thereby reducing power.

Dahl (2009) theorized that people often position themselves, or are positioned by others, as *victims* or *agents*. Both terms suggest that these people have brought the victimization upon themselves or have survived being victimized by taking an agentic stance, paradoxically being responsible in both cases. However, a victim may also suffer for reasons unrelated to his or her own agency (Dahl, 2009), which supports Shyman's (2010) findings.

Monzo and Rueda (2003) documented the experiences of one Mexican immigrant paraeducator using the concept of *funds of knowledge.* Funds of knowledge usually focus on students. Monzo and Rueda (2003) suggested to also look at the teachers' and paraeducators' funds of knowledge. Together, these diverse funds of knowledge can be drawn upon positively in school environments. Teachers then become sociocultural agents in social networks that provide context—teachers and paraeducators—for we must be able to speak to each other in terms of teaching and culture. Paraeducators often live in the communities that they work in (Monzo & Rueda, 2003), providing the opportunity for agency.

***Environment of leadership without formal authority*.** It is important to emphasize that paraeducators can tap into their own leadership skills and develop them despite their lacking formal authority within the hegemonic school system. They must be able see past the lack of

voice, the marginalization, and the lack of agency to their own potential to act. They can gain power from the community, as Dora did, or remain immobilized, as Wolfgram did.

Role conflict/ambiguity and personal power. An individual's role, whether voluntary or mandated by an organization, is central to identity. Social groups have different normative roles. These roles can be a source of oppression in instances where social inequalities exist; however, this situation can be a point of social change when the roles and the tasks associated with them can be redefined (Bolman & Deal, 2008). One aspect of an individual's role is role obligation. *Role obligation* was defined by Sementelli (2005) as having two basic components. The first is a *contractual obligation,* which is tied closely to Hegel's idea of *Sittlichkeit,* i.e., the ethics and conventions of life (*norms* in critical theory). This type of obligation requires an overt agreement or formal documentation of the institutional role. The overt is often defined by both a contract and a job description; this typically comes with conforming to institutional norms and ethics. The second involves *non-contractual obligations* or taking on roles that are not a function of an overt or formal agreement. This obligation can be described as personal ethics. The result, as Sementelli (2005) observed, is that "lives are lived through institutions, making them integral for understanding and coping with lived experiences discussed by contemporary critical theorists" (pp. 562–563). Contractual obligations and non-contractual obligations can be conflictual for paraeducators.

Shyman (2010) found that, as a result of moving from classroom to classroom, paraeducators experienced role conflict due to a disjointed sense of place and lack of permanency. This led to a diminished sense of self-efficacy and an increase in occupational stress. Shyman (2010) stated that it was unreasonable to expect paraeducators to produce positive

outcomes for students while serving in highly stressful and malleable environments. Shyman (2010) recommended that educational leaders consider and identify stressors at an organizational/systemic level and work to eradicate these elements, which he found decreased psychological well-being. One source of heightened practitioner stress was the emotional demand of working with and investing in relationships with students with disabilities (Shyman, 2010) in an environment that did not support continuity of those relationships (Hyde & LaPrad, 2015). As a result, work satisfaction was undermined by stress. Paraeducators developed negative self-worth over time as a result of various messages and types of mistreatment such as low pay, lack of training, or not receiving positive feedback. Conley et al. (2010) reported that paraeducators working in a resource class might work "under the close supervision and direction" of the special educator "who is present in the classroom" (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer & Doyle, 2001 p. 47 as cited in Conley et al., 2010, p. 319), and, by contrast, inclusion paraeducators working in a general education setting might experience less supervision. Previous research has helped clarify some of the roles and responsibilities of the paraeducators (Downing et al., 2000; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999, Patterson, 2006; Ratcliff, Jones, Vaden, Sheehan, & Hunt, 2011). Role definition is primary to the success of the paraeducators (French, 2001). When paraeducators roles are clearly defined, they can be effective in supporting children with disabilities (French 1998, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Patterson, 2006). Lack of consistency may result in role ambiguity.

Conditions feel oppressive when a person lacks efficacy and feels dissatisfied (Freire, 1970/2000). The tenets of critical theory suggest that administrators, teachers, and other members of the educational team should engage in conversation with paraeducators and refrain

from stereotyping or ignoring them. Dialogue must precede action for praxis to be implemented by any key stakeholder (Freire, 1970/2000). Self-knowledge, self-reflection, interaction, and communication are required to reduce role conflict (Bohman, Rehg, & Habermas, 2014).

Carr (2005) proposed that educational organizations, small and large, revisit, re-engage, and re-discover critical theory in order to reduce hegemony and to expand the roles of paraprofessional educators. Dorn, Kanikeberg, Burke, and Mendoza (2013) wrote, "Paraeducators are an integral part of the teaching team" (p. 1), and to that end should be allowed to demonstrate their skills in instructional support activities centered around reading, writing, and mathematics— working closely with the teachers (Dorn et al., 2013). Chopra et al. (2004) found that paraeducators felt they were assigned tasks that were outside their formal roles. Patterson's (2006) qualitative study, consisting of semi-structured phone interviews, found that paraeducators were often put in charge of bus duties or changing bulletin boards and were not included in meetings and other professional activities. Paraeducators also have reported being regularly assigned to address behavioral problems in the classroom (Patterson, 2006). For instance, S. Dreyer Leon discussed past incidences of paraeducators being required to use seclusion rooms to cope with student behavioral problems (personal communication, October 2017). Seclusion rooms are "the involuntary confinement of a student alone in a room or area from which the student is physically prevented from leaving" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p.10). Patterson (2006) noted that paraeducators expressed frustration that they had no input in the decisions that led to such assignments. Due to role conflict, delegated responsibilities, and situated knowledge, paraeducators are often expected to make independent decisions around student health, safety, and learning even though they have no positional authority to do so (Butt & Lowe, 2012; Lucero, 2010; Wilson et al., 2013). Paraeducators are

expected to be under the supervision of qualified individuals who have designated authority to make such decisions (IDEA, 1997,2004; Picket & Gerlach, 2003). Yet, the feedback and communication loops among the teaching team remain open.

Self-perception and expertise. A paraeducator's self-perception can be impacted by the amount of professional training he/she has received. A paraeducator's willingness and ability to earn credentials can be limited by his/her socioeconomic status (Sementelli, 2005). Interestingly, Carter et al. (2009) found that years of experience, rather than [formal, higher educational] training, increased paraeducators' levels of knowledge. Patterson (2006) found that a majority of paraeducators indicated that most of their knowledge was gained during the workday, especially behavior management strategies. Carter et al. (2009) concluded that training did not substitute for years of experience and knowledge.

According to Giangreco and Broer (2005), paraeducators working with special needs students had obtained the lowest average formal education and training and received the lowest pay. Because there is a dearth of data about the performance of special needs students under the supervision of paraeducators versus certificated teachers, Giangreco and Broer (2005) recommended that schools match a student's needs to an educator's respective skills, training, and certification rather than job title. For instance, Giangreco and Broer have documented that paraeducators have much on the job experience; the skills they have gained through work and professional development may be well above the assumptions of skill behind the title "paraeducator." Dewey (1959) would say that matching needs to skills is cooperative and shared. Freire's (1970/2000) cycle of problem-solving builds individual and community capacity by honoring the knowledge and skill that each person brings. Furthermore, schools should consider "alternatives to extensive reliance on paraeducators, such as implementing coteaching models

[and] reallocating resources to pursue cost-neutral exchange of paraeducator positions for special educator positions" (Giangreco & Broer, 2005, p. 24). In critical theory, however, there is no cost-neutral exchange; a different form of oppression emerges when paraeducators' jobs are eliminated. Thus, it is imperative that paraeducators be given voice (Freire, 1970/2000; Kellner, 2003) and agency (Bandura, 1997; hooks, 1994; Kellner, 2003) as the system is reconstructed. The transformation of the system may help to reduce role conflict, role ambiguity, and increase personal power. These elements can change paraeducator's self-perceptions and other' perceptions around expertise.

Job satisfaction. Bandura (1997) posited an inverse relationship between dissatisfaction and perceived efficacy (i.e., dissatisfaction decreases as self-efficacy increases). In order for paraeducators to feel they can adequately do their job and feel fulfilled in doing it, they need to work in a stable environment, be given access to information, and have a voice in the system (Shyman, 2010). Freire (1970/2000) observed that when an individual engages in dialogue within a community, the exchange of information and knowledge reduces role conflict. Communication increases shared authority through action. Drawing on the work of Dewey, structural inequities or old norms that do not change and moral insights that come from the demands of others suppress effective educational practices, especially increased agency and capacity—both practical and reflexive—which may lead to the potential for initiation and change.

Knowles (posthumously with Holton & Swanson, 1998) contextualized adult responses to outside influences in his discussion of andragogy, which he developed into his theory of adult learning. According to Knowles, there are six basic principles of andragogy, which include: (a) *the need to know*, (b) *self-concept*, (c) *experience*, (d) *readiness to learn*, (e) *orientation to learn*,

and (f) *motivation to learn*. These principles also suggest *stages of change* (Lewin, 1951). Knowles emphasized that adults are self-directed and expect to take responsibility for decisions. Paraeducators are both self-directed and responsible. Yet they are not treated as life-long learners or experts, which can lessen job satisfaction.

Kegan and Lahey (2009) asserted that adult development and learning are characterized by periods of growth in mental complexity and may be interrupted by plateaus. Kegan and Lahey defined the three plateaus as adult meaning systems—*the socialized mind*, *self-authoring mind*, and *self-transforming mind*. The socialized adult mind references the norm. If one does not fit within the norm, one might find oneself feeling inadequate and uncomfortable or undeserving in some way. The next adult meaning system is self-authoring, during which mental complexity is increased and one engages in critical self-reflection and dialogue. One can reference opinions including ones' own within a larger system than one's personal value set. Lastly, during the self-transforming mind plateau, one can make meaning on a metacognitive level and not feel its affects or be consumed by it, such as when in the socialized mind. Information flows through these meaning systems as a process. Kegan and Lahey wrote that adults tend to be in one of these three mindsets, with the majority of people operating out of the socialized mind when it comes to mental complexity levels. Paraeducators may feel conflicted if forced by the school community to remain in the socialized, norm-driven mind.

Understanding and accounting for adult learning theory and mental complexity recognizes that the paraeducator participants will all be in different stages of mental complexity at any one time, which respects them adult learners. Being situated in a particular stage may not necessarily change their positionality; however, it may influence how the paraeducator participants think about their positionality.

Relational roles and personal power. Chopra et al. (2004) noted that the research literature has ignored the relational roles of paraeducators. *Relational roles* are how paraeducators connect and build relationships with students, parents, and teachers within and outside of the schools. They found that paraeducators served as community liaisons or connectors between parents, communities, and schools, as well as connectors between the students and the curriculum (Chopra et al., 2004). Rueda and Monzo (2002) found that bilingual paraeducators were well situated to connect with parents who were not fluent in English and were able to function as advocates for the children. These relational roles positioned paraeducators as leaders in the eyes of the families and community. The paraeducators were, in fact, *leading in place* (the school). However, the institution may still have controlled the relationship that the paraeducators had with the internal key stakeholders (Wergin, 2007) through its hegemonic structure.

Sometimes paraeducators served as peacemakers among students. Downing et al. (2000) referred to paraeducators as *behavioral interventionists*. In their qualitative introductory study of 16 paraeducators using in-person and phone interviews, the paraeducators reported a wide range of activities that characterized their roles including "[p]roviding [b]ehavioral [s]upport," "monitoring [s]tudents," (p. 174) and "[f]acilitating [i]nteractions with [peers]" (p.175) Behavioral support stood out to paraeducators as requiring a high level of responsibility, as did informing parents about behaviors and progress (Downing et al., 2000). Some of the paraeducators thought their roles, as behavioral interventionists and parent liaisons, should be shared across the teaching team, while others felt that they should be the parent liaisons since they observed and intervened in inappropriate behaviors, which exacerbated role ambiguity across the small set of interviewees from four states. The paraeducators reported a perceived lack

of orientation and training at job onset, which may have increased the discrepancies among them around role clarification and tasks with high levels of responsibility over time.

Paraeducators who work with and provide support for students with disabilities have been identified in the literature as having the roles of student testers, assessors, and designers of learning activities, including, as Giangreco et al. (2001) stated, instructional "adaptation and modification and . . . [communicating] with families" (p. 55). There is little consensus whether these roles are appropriate (Griffin-Shirley & Matlock, 2004) and whether paraeducators should be viewed as assistants to the students or assistants to the teacher (Giangreco et al., 2011). In a study by Fisher and Pleasants (2012), over 25% of the paraeducator respondents thought lesson planning and adapting lessons were inappropriate functions for their role. Fisher and Pleasants' (2012) findings raised the question: Should paraeducators be considered members of the teaching team? ESSA (2015) suggested that they are key members of the teaching team. Acknowledging relational roles and personal power is needed for paraeducators to express leadership in place, with or without formal authority.

Policy Influences on Paraeducators

The treatment and roles of paraeducators are shaped by a variety of legislation, regulations, and guidelines at the federal, state, and district levels. Laws regulate many aspects of public education and their influence in direct and indirect ways. Federal funding, for example, may affect how many paraeducators a school district can afford to hire, while a state's definition of a paraeducator can impact duties performed in a school setting.

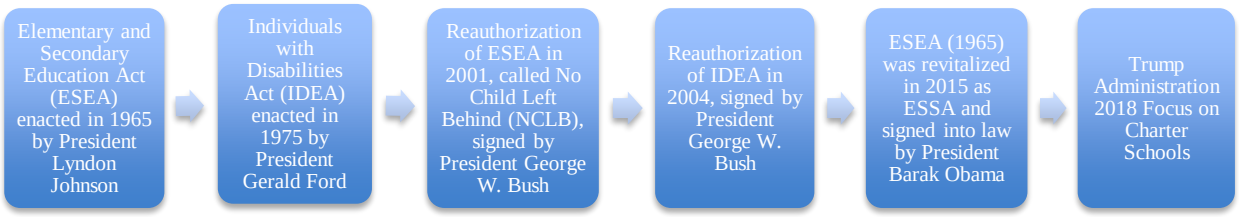
Federal policies. Several federal laws, most notably the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1975/2004), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965), No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), Title 1 of the NCLB, and the Every Student Succeeds Act

(ESSA, 2015) impact the role and positionality of the paraeducator. NCLB (2001) and ESSA (2015) are reauthorizations of ESEA (1965). Under President Trump with the Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, there is less focus on the paraeducator and more focus on the structure of Charter Schools.

The ESEA was enacted in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson to help school districts with funding for low-income students and special education (see Figure 2.2). Thirty-six years later, NCLB (2001) authorized federal funds for programs to support K-12 schooling but linked funding to aggregate student performance on standardized tests. NCLB shifted the focus away from individual students to whole-school performance outcomes; thus, a school with a large population of low income or special education students might be denied funding for paraeducator services as a result of low-test scores. NCLB (2001) also determined instructional modes, such as whether to use pull-out services or inclusive classrooms, thereby affecting resource allocation within a school (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco et al., 2001). For instance, funds might be redirected from paraeducators to other instructional services. Recent research has questioned the value of some services by focusing on whether one-on-one services are beneficial for low income or special education students (Carter et al., 2009). Finally, in some instances, NCLB (2001) removed local decision-making and put it in the hands of the federal government.

Figure 2.2

Federal Policy Timeline



Compiled from: Robelen (2005) and USDE (2020)

Between ESEA (1965) and NCLB (2001), the IDEA (1975) was enacted through ongoing civil rights legislation. The purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, originally enacted in 1975, was to ensure that children with disabilities would have the same opportunities as other children for a free and appropriate education U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). One outcome of IDEA was that schools needed to hire extra staff, often in the form of paraeducators, to provide additional services for these students in the least restrictive environment (Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco et al., 2001; IDEA, 1975/2004; Patterson, 2006). Current research has raised questions about the appropriateness of these services based upon paraeducator training (Giangreco & Broer, 2005), potential misuse of paraeducators as clerical workers (Carter et al., 2009), and whether or not the services have actually changed the outcomes for students with disabilities (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Legal cases around the reauthorization of IDEA (2004) have questioned whether paraeducators were needed to provide Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in a least restrictive environment (Etscheidt, 2005). While most of the court decisions studied by Etscheidt (2005) said that paraeducators roles had to be specified in the IEPs, conflict was documented between parents and school districts, with parents desiring paraeducator services and school districts often wanting to save money (Etscheidt, 2005).

Etscheidt (2005) conducted a case law review of administrative and judicial decisions concerning the rising number of paraeducators serving students with disabilities and found that Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) established the need for paraeducator services. Under IDEA (1997), the paraeducator services had to be of benefit to the students served. Benefits included a least restrictive environment and more than minimal academic, behavioral, social, or other benefits. Most court decisions on cases brought by parents against school districts centered around IEPs and whether or not paraeducators were providing meaningful educational benefits or

if they were detrimental socially, resulting in increased prejudice against students with disabilities by their peers and increasing the student's dependence on paraeducators. Additionally, issues of needs, selection, responsibilities, preparation, and supervision of paraeducators were revealed. Etscheidt (2005) found that paraeducator supervision lacks guidance from administrators in leading and supporting teachers regarding supervision. Overall, lack of concrete knowledge of paraeducators' roles can put schools at risk for legal action.

More recently, in the case of *Endrew F.* v. *Douglas County School District* (2017), the U.S. Supreme Court used *Rowley* (1982) to determine what adequate and appropriate progress looks like for a child in a fully integrated setting. Adequate progress is measured through regular assessment towards individualized goals. The Court stated that as long as the child is making progress, receiving passing marks, adequate to progressing from one grade level to the next, that FAPE was being met under IDEA (1995/2004). Additionally, the U.S. Supreme Court stated there is a range of definitions of adequate and substantial progress within FAPE, dependent upon the individual child and his/her needs, but that progress had to exceed a *de minimus* standard. Under the case of *Endrew*, the school district said there was an appropriate IEP in place. The parents stated that their child was not making progress over a period of time and had stalled academically and functionally. They removed their child and placed him in a residential private school for children with autism in which he began to make progress. The Court stated that it was not going to define adequate progress due to it being different for each child. Because *Endrew* was making progress towards his IEP goals in the new school, the IEP at the previous school was deemed inadequate in comparison. The Court ruled that the district had to pay for the private schooling.

It is unclear how this ruling will impact paraeducators who provide services to students with disabilities in the K-12 system. It is likely that IEPs may come under more scrutiny to ensure that they provide a suite of services, that they must differ from year-to-year demonstrating progress through new goals, and that ongoing communication with parents will be more strictly enforced. It is also possible that within the general classroom, more supervision by teachers of paraeducators will be required, calling into question the current lack of collaboration as evidenced in Picket and Gerlach (2003) and Conley et al. (2010). The case ruling of *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017) does not seem likely to change Giangreco and Broer's (2005) research finding that indicated that the neediest students have been being served by the least qualified personnel.

In 2015, ESSA was revitalized to help underserved populations of students receive high quality education. The term *underserved students* included "students with disabilities, students who [were] still learning English, students from particular racial groups or ethnicities, students who [lived] in poverty, [and] students coming from a particular school" (ESSA, 2015; NCLB Title 1; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The reauthorization in 2015 of ESSA placed an emphasis on early childhood education, more support for teachers (Title II), increased funding for schools, and an emphasis on helping underserved students. It will take time to assess how the reauthorization affects paraeducators, especially under the currently elected administration, and whether or not ESSA influences paraeducators' positionality and its facets (e.g., authority, voice, capacity, and leadership) in practice. Any given social group or organization has the potential for power inequalities and oppression to exist. Whether critiqued at a national, state, district, school, or classroom level, the U.S. educational system is a social system affected by issues of power. Those who make public policy wield power over the school district, principals have power over

teachers, and teachers exert power over paraeducators. These multiple levels of jurisdiction make it difficult to dissect and dialogue about inequalities (Sementelli, 2005). Without discussions around educational inequities, it may be difficult under ESSA (2015) to provide high quality education, even across states.

Washington State policies. The State of Washington's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) issued details on the duties of paraeducators (see Table 2.1). However, OSPI has not changed its policy on paraeducators since 2001. The approved duties of paraeducators (OSPI, 2015) gives a high-level view of how paraeducators are to be utilized (e.g., "assist with classroom management"), but the broadness of listed tasks leaves the paraeducators vulnerable to being viewed and/or used by school staff to complete mundane, menial, or demeaning tasks (Giangreco et al., 2001), such as, copying, cleaning up after students and staff, monitoring lunch, and bus duty. Lacking in these details are what paraeducators are allowed to do (OSPI, 2015), as well as how they are to be viewed by administrators (Giangreco et al., 2001). The table depicts the Washington State duties of paraeducators, which, per ESSA (2015), include tutoring. Behind the list of duties is the assumption that tutoring is not teaching (see Table 2.1, A), which further marginalizes students and paraeducators as it separates them from the classroom. Moreover, paraeducators duties include acting as translators (see Table 2.1, F) thus re-emphasizing the hegemonic history of unequal pay. When translating, paraeducators are still paid as paraeducators—not at the higher rate of those who only translate.

Table 2.1

WA State Duties of Paraeducators

Section 1119 (g) DUTIES OF PARAEDUCATORS
(A) to provide one-on-one tutoring for eligible students, if the tutoring is scheduled at a time when a student would not otherwise receive instruction from a teacher;
(B) to assist with classroom management, such as organizing instructional and other materials;
(C) to provide assistance in a computer laboratory;
(D) to conduct parental involvement activities;
(E) to provide support in a library or media center;
(F) to act as a translator; or
(G) to provide instructional services to students under the direct supervision of a teacher.

Note. Section 1119 (g) of Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) retrieved from Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) (2015, July). *Title 1, Part A: Guide to Paraprofessional Educator Requirements.* Olympia, WA: OSPI.

There are additional pieces of legislation affecting paraeducators working in Washington. For example, Initiative 728, known as the K-12 2000 Student Achievement Act, affects state revenues to school districts (Dorn, Kanikeberg, & Lewis, 2011). Initiative 728 was designed to reduce class size, extend learning programs, increase teacher training, and construct new facilities; all were to be funded by state budget reserves, property taxes, and lottery revenues (Washington Secretary of State, 2013 August). It should be noted that Washington State Schools, among others, still rely most heavily on bonds and levies for construction projects.

District policies. There are additional guidelines at the district level that affect paraeducators. Different school districts may have different rules and regulations that dictate the role of paraeducators; thus, some school districts may use paraeducators as substitute teachers in the absence of the lead teacher (P. Piercy, personal communication, 2015). Morton (2017) documented using paraeducators as a possible cost-saving measure during the current teacher shortage. However, as paraeducators they are not compensated (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012), nor can they act as certificated teachers (Jones et al., 2012). However, in Western Washington for instance, paraeducators are protected by a union contract, which guides the school district in its policies regarding paraeducators (Board of Directors No. 10 & Tacoma Federation of Paraeducators Local 461, 2013–2017).

Chapter Summary

In summary, critical theory provides ways of organizing knowledge and assigning roles to that knowledge as one engages in reflection or self-criticism. The four tenets of critical theory —self-critical, explanatory, practical, and normative—interact with each other and provide insight into the concepts of knowledge, social justice, leadership, and education. Critical theory is socially and historically contextualized. It explains the current reality (Carr, 2005; Freire, 1970/2000; Horkheimer, 1975; Sementelli, 2005) of those involved in the dialogue. Critical theory is a valuable lens with which to look at the positionality of paraeducators as educators. The key gap identified in the literature was the dearth of voiced experiences of paraeducators.

This study contributes to the literature in multiple ways. Although there is considerable evidence supporting others' perceptions and studies regarding paraeducators, there is conflicting evidence regarding roles, role conflict, policy influences on paraeducators, and ethics. There is little evidence supporting paraeducators' own perceptions through their own voices on their

positionality and ability to exercise leadership without authority within the themes of the current literature.

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the research approach and specific methods for the research study, in order to address the gap identified in the literature—i.e., a dearth of paraeducators' voiced experiences regarding their own positionality in- K-5 U.S. public schools.

Purpose of Study and Phenomenological Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of paraeducators in the K-5 public school system in the Pacific Northwest, in order to gain a deeper understanding of their positioning of themselves and by others, in the paraeducators' own voices. This narrative phenomenological study is both descriptive and analytical in nature. It is descriptive because it focuses on diverse and thick descriptions by paraeducators in some K-5 public schools in the Pacific Northwest, seeking the essence of their experiences. In addition, it is analytical because I "work[ed] reflexively with the data to identify patterns and themes across the experience[s]" (Langdridge, 2008, p. 1132) of the participants, as narrated by them during interviews.

The primary research question that guided this inquiry was: What are the lived experiences of paraeducators in a K-5, urban public school system in the Pacific Northwest? The subquestions were:

1. How do paraeducators understand and make sense of their experiences in terms of their dominant, central, or subordinate positioning in the K-5 public schools in the Pacific Northwest?
2. How do paraeducators in K-5 public schools in the Pacific Northwest describe situations that typically influence their positionality (i.e., where they are situated in the sociopolitical culture)?

3. How do structural and systemic aspects influence the perceived agency (i.e., the ability to act for themselves and on behalf of others) of paraeducators in K-5, public schools in one urban school district in the Pacific Northwest?

These questions necessitated collecting paraeducators' personal experiences through dialogic and written responses.

The research questions required a qualitative approach as they explored the meaning the participants gave to a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In order to conduct an inquiry into the positionality via individual lived experiences of paraeducators, qualitative methods were most appropriate. Qualitative research focuses on personal experiences and perspectives of the participants (Harwell, 2011; McMillan & Wergin, 2006), from which they make knowledge (Husserl, 1962). A qualitative approach allowed me to apply the philosophical precepts of phenomenology—*essence, intentionality of consciousness*, *epoche,* and *deep description* (Creswell, 1998). This allowed me to seek the underlying meaning of the experience (*essence*), to reflect on the external descriptions given by the participants (*intentionality of consciousness*), to reduce and confront possibilities for researcher bias (*epoche*), and to utilize both intuition and pattern analysis to derive information from the data (*deep description*; Creswell, 1998).

Narrative phenomenological research (Langdridge, 2008) was the most appropriate qualitative approach and method because it allowed me to collect the lived experiences of the participants in their own voices (Creswell, 2013); it brought forth deep descriptions and critical reflections from the participants (Smith, 2013); and it allowed me to seek the meanings and structures which underlay the participants' voiced experiences.

Rationale for Phenomenology

The use of phenomenology required looking at the philosophical precepts of phenomenology, the research methods of phenomenology, and the role of the phenomenological researcher.

Phenomenology as a Way of Thinking and as a Research Method

The key gap identified in the literature was the dearth of voiced experiences of paraeducators. Most of the researchers, as reported in the literature review, used surveys (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012), observations (Jones et al., 2012), or document analysis (Kurth & Keegan, 2014) to study paraprofessionals; however, none of these methods captured the lived experiences of paraeducators in their own voices. As well, a phenomenological study, using the lens of critical theory, was needed to explore the complexity of the lived experiences and positionality of paraeducators, because critical theory could capture the hegemonic structures that were imbedded in their lived experiences and positionalities, as described in Chapter II. Briefly, the lens of critical theory allowed for critical analysis of the data towards the structural meanings of positionality for paraeducators. Through this lens, a discussion regarding power and politics was enabled. Langdridge (2008) stated that "the politically inflected nature of all experience must be critically interrogated across axes of power" (p. 1136). The axes of power in the various systems include cultures within the various communities, or more tangible powers such as federal, state, and/or school policies. The participants and the researcher "can and do attest to power and politics as *lived*" (Langdridge, 2008, p. 1136). It was expected that participants would naturally relate stories about their experiences, as well as personal critiques of their experiences. Critical theory allowed me to group participant's rich and thick descriptions under critical theory's four

tenets of *self-critical*, *explanatory*, *practical*, and *normative*, allowing me to ask questions about what the participants related, such as:

1. Who has the power?
2. Is there power difference?
3. Is there structural oppression?
4. Is their cultural oppression?
5. How do I see the power issues emerge?

Critical theory and phenomenology aided me in determining the structures and norms of the phenomenon being studied. “Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experience[d] . . . by an individual [and acknowledges that his/her experience] is somewhat unique” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 12). That is to say that experiences voiced and meaning making about those experiences were necessarily contextualized at a moment in time.

Additionally, Husserl (as cited in Smith, 2013) proposed that consciously acknowledging experienced phenomena is intentional. I provided an opportunity for participants to be intentional. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) wrote that acknowledging experienced phenomena is both mindful and critical because it acknowledges that only the participants, and not the researcher, can truly be in the moment of their daily lives, and only they can subsequently reflect upon and make meaning of these experiences for themselves, in order to take action or not. Thus, the researcher in phenomenology is the scribed editor, using the participants’ own words to explicate their experiences and the impact of those experiences. As well, the researcher employs a general lens and the chosen lens through which to organize that data.

Philosophical Precepts of Phenomenology

It is important to examine the philosophical precepts of phenomenology further, which include: *essence, intentionality of consciousness*, *epoche,* and *deep description*. Each tenet has a specific action by which the researcher is guided.

Essence is the core meaning that the researcher seeks from the transcripts of the interviewees' narratives. The researcher seeks the underlying meaning of the experience through immersion in the data (Husserl, as paraphrased from Creswell, 1998).

Intentionality of Consciousness means that based on memory, image, and meaning, the participants' descriptions of their experiences have both external descriptions and reflect internal consciousness. *Intentionality of consciousness* parallels Freire's (1970/2000) *conscientization,* which means that through dialogue a participant brings to light—internally from subconsciousness to consciousness and externally by the act of speech—meaning and knowledge about the experiences described, which are then shared with the researcher. *Intentionality of consciousness* also reflects Dewey's contextualist epistemology (Anderson, 2014), in other words, the participants know how they know through critical reflection upon their experiences within the hegemonic structures of the K-5 public school system. Intentionality of consciousness also means that the researcher reflects on the external descriptions given by the participants (Creswell, 1998).

Epoche is an attitude in phenomenological research whereby the researcher suspends judgment upon the reality of what the participant is relating and takes their comprehensive description as is (Linsenmayer, 2011); *bracketing* is the action the researcher takes to suspend judgment and overlays of his/her own experience onto the participant's voiced experience.

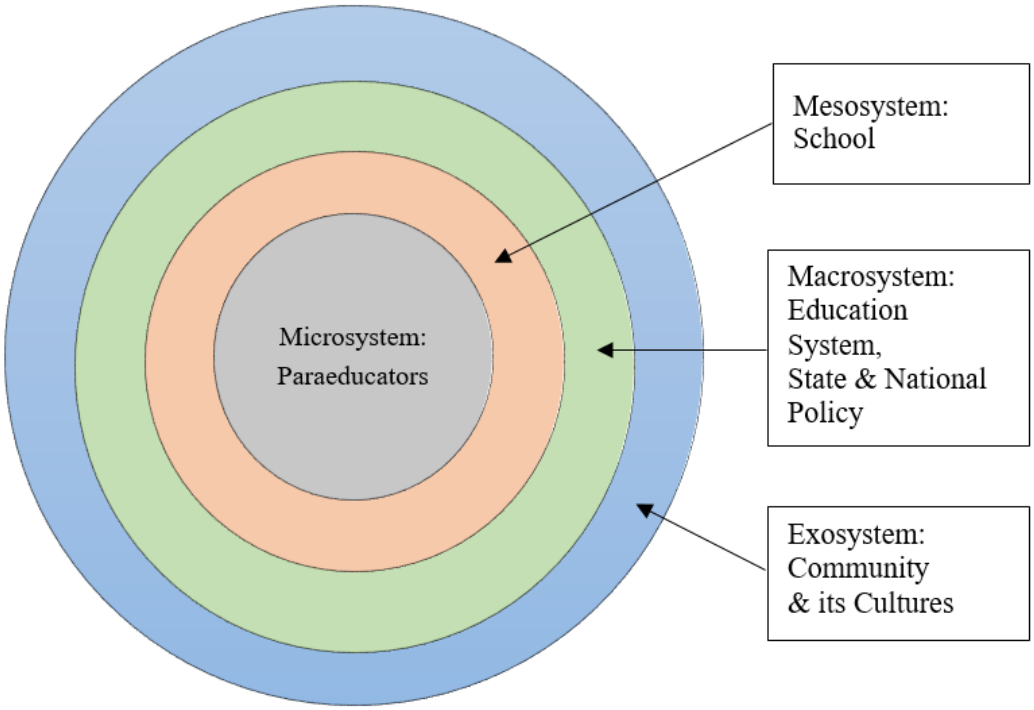
Then, in accordance with the precept of deep description, the researcher uses his/her

intuition, imagination, and observation to find structural patterns within and across the voiced experiences of the participants, "as they flow from the data" (McMillan & Wergin, 2006, p. 11) to describe the phenomenon. The phenomenological researcher is "primarily concerned with questions around the nature of . . . subjective experience" and pays close attention to "the specific ways in which individuals consciously reflect on and experience their *lifeworld*" (Langdridge, 2008, p. 1128). The goal of this interpretation via thematic analysis is for the researcher to "identify patterns and themes across the experience" (Langdridge, 2008, p. 1132).

The phenomenological approach allowed me to evaluate the landscape of the paraeducators' work life and thereby, I was able to derive how the phenomenon was uniquely experienced by each participant (see Groenewald, 2004). Inquiring of paraeducators about their lived experience required that I addressed four concentric systems in which paraeducators functioned: the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, see Figure 3.1). First, the paraeducator—as an individual is—at the center of the micro-system, a person of biological, psycho-social, intellectual, and spiritual knowledge and experience. The second layer, the meso-system, represents the school system, which influences the meaning making of paraeducators, and which resides within the exo- or community system (the third layer). Finally, the educational system, as governed by state and national policy, represents the fourth layer—the macrosystem (see Figure 3.1). The exo- and macro-systems also influence how paraeducators understand and make sense of their lived experiences around positionality. That is, paraeducators' placement and status within these systems informs their experiences and positionality. Thus, using the phenomenological approach, the goal of which is to obtain the truest lived experience of the participants, was the most appropriate approach for this research study.

Figure 3.1.

Systems Which Influence How Paraeducators Are Perceived



Note. Application of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, as discussed by Pacquette and Ryan (2001), in the paraeducator context.

Phenomenology as a Research Approach and Method

This research design used phenomenology as a way of thinking about the research and as method; it used critical theory as a social justice framework for understanding and interpreting the data; and it used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Pacquette & Ryan, 2001) to locate the participants and their experiences. Moutakas (as cited in Creswell, 1998) stated that the purpose of phenomenology is:

> to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions,

> general or universal meanings are derived, in other words, the essences of the experience. (p. 53–54)

This indicates that I, as the researcher, should seek the structure and meaning of the phenomenon from the interviewee data. Maggs-Rapport (2000) suggested that phenomenology is interpretive, meaning the phenomenologist "tries to uncover concealed meaning in the phenomenon, embedded in the words of the [participants'] narrative[s]" (p. 220). While phenomenological research is not generalizable across populations, the individual and collective voices gathered through phenomenological research may provide insights into the reality and range of the essence and structures behind contemporary paraeducators' lived experiences. Phenomenological research and interviews can ask open-ended questions such as *why* or *how* (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). This technique avoids formulating a response *for* the participant and allows the researcher to elicit a purer response (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). A phenomenological research approach, using critical theory as a lens, is *self-critical*, acknowledging that the truth of what paraeducators relate as contextualized by their reflection upon the influences of their own senses of culture, society, and history (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972; Sementelli, 2005), which will vary by individual participant. Phenomenology seeks to document the "essence of experience as perceived by those studied" (McMillan & Wergin, 2006, p. 95); thus, it is *explanatory*. Phenomenology, conjoined with the lens of critical theory, is *practical* in that it gives voice and agency, in this case to the oppressed group or individual paraeducators (Carr, 2005; hooks, 1994; Kellner, 2003). A research approach using the lens of critical theory allows the researcher to identify the *norms* within which paraeducators function at a moment-in-time, in order to evaluate meaning and to assess their own voiced senses of agency and to mobilize potential action and change.

Role of the Phenomenological Researcher

Creswell (2013) paraphrased Merleau-Ponty (1956) and directed phenomenological researchers to temporarily suspend their own knowledge and past experience to understand the lived experiences of others at a deeper level. One way to do this, as suggested by Bentz and Shapiro (1998), is to "write phenomenological descriptions of [the researcher's own experiences] of phenomena" (p. 98). In this case, I wrote phenomenological descriptions of experiences with being a paraeducator and experiences with positionality, first-hand and by others. In this way, I was able to locate the essence of "the fundamental structures underlying [the] experience" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 98) of internally and externally imposed positionality on the paraeducator, which is usually done imaginatively (Husserl, as cited in Creswell, 1998). I reviewed the personal phenomenological descriptions and called out the key thoughts, emotions, or physical reactions brought about by the memories. The cause of the reactions was then identified to determine whether a person, position, or policy triggered the response, and the outcome noted as a possible source for bias. While collecting data, I temporarily set aside personal knowledge and experience about the phenomenon under investigation in order to treat interviewed participants with empathy (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998) and as experts.

The process requiring suspension of judgment in order to focus on the participants' experiences is called *bracketing* (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing does not mean that the researcher is without beliefs, emotions, perceptions, and experiences, but that the phenomenological research process is about the participants and the researcher's "willingness to engage in [the] dissection of and reflection on the nature of consciousness and meaning" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 102), using each participant's own words. Secondly, the researcher temporarily sets

aside personal knowledge and experience about the phenomena under investigation in order to collect "rich and descriptive data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 331). Thirdly, the phenomenological researcher must continuously self-reflect on how the bracketed material may influence his/her interpretations of the data provided (Berg & Lune, 2012). Fourth, the researcher must be mindful of how their own positionality, ontology, and epistemology may influence interpretation of the data. For instance, my own positionality included being a white female, holding a position above paraeducators when viewed through the lens of the K-5 public school system's hierarchy. For this study, using critical theory and its tenets—*self–critical*, *explanatory*, *practical*, and *normative*, I necessarily interrogated my own assumptions behind personal knowledge, and reflected upon and set aside my personal version of reality in order for the world of the lived experiences of each participant to fully emerge. This is made more explicit in the data analysis section.

Phenomenological research, due to the role of the researcher, aligned well with critical theory because it is self-critical, seeking subjective contextualized "truth" in society and in history (Smith, 2013). As a phenomenological researcher, I sought the meaning and structures underlying the participants' voiced experiences.

Summary of Rationale

The application of phenomenology and critical theory in this study facilitated going beyond an itemization of issues encountered by paraeducators to deep descriptions of and the opportunity for critical self-reflections upon their own experiences (see Smith, 2013). Phenomenology as a way of thinking, phenomenology as a research method, and the role of the researcher as phenomenologist allowed me to remain focused on the participants' voices and descriptions, as the paraeducators were the knowledge-holders and meaning-makers about their

own lived experiences. As researcher, I made meaning through the organization of themes and structures around the phenomenon of positionality using the data directly provided by and confirmed by the participants. Critical theory's intrinsic transformative elements allow for the potential for positive change, as recursive inquiry into the ideological and practical issues that paraeducators have encountered may lay the groundwork for policy reform or modified policy implementation, thus creating a future context for leading change around positionality of K-5 paraeducators by paraeducators.

Research Process and Methods

The detailed processes by which participants were recruited and selected are described here. Human subjects considerations and confidentiality around participant risk are also discussed. The research environment, data collection processes, and data analysis are described. Finally, issues of trustworthiness, rigor, quality, consistency, and study limitations are discussed.

The research methods and processes took place in two stages. First, I conducted a pilot study with three participants in order to explore the issues to be addressed in the larger study; to reveal researcher biases, assumptions or expectations; and to preview the methodological and analytical processes. Then, I continued on to seamlessly complete the larger phenomenological study with more participants in order to achieve data saturation, including deep and rich descriptions by the participants in their own voices. Procedures for the pilot study and the continued study were consistent with each other (See Figure 3.2), meaning that the pilot moved seamlessly into the full dissertation study (Note: Chapter IV presents the findings of the whole study (pilot and expansion).

Participants. Participants were recruited from an urban school district in the Pacific Northwest, where all paraprofessionals are certificated by law (e.g., WAC 392-172A-02090). I

recruited 12 participants from across the school district, three of whom participated in a pilot study. The purpose of the pilot study, which then blended seamlessly into the full study, was to preview some of the themes across participants' experiences in the full study. The number of participant paraeducators (12) was selected to allow for saturation of data (when themes recur through coding and constant comparison [Creswell, 2013]) and to account for possible attrition. Rudestam and Newton (2007) suggested that 10 or fewer participants are appropriate for most phenomenological studies. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested that participant numbers be determined by data saturation and that interviews are an appropriate method to achieve data saturation. I chose to use Rudestam and Newton's (2007) number as a guideline for number of interviewees and data saturation as the criterion for the number of interviews. Follow-up with participants and participant validation of their transcripts allowed for additional opportunities to assess and achieve saturation.

All participants were paraeducators from the K-5 public schools. The criteria for participation selected for active paraeducators without regard to age, gender, or ethnicity. Initially, an invitational email describing the study, its purpose, and confidentiality was sent to potential participants with the permission of the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) of a K-5 urban school district in the Pacific Northwest and of my university. Participants were selected from the paraeducators who responded to the invitational email, according to the following inclusion criteria:

1. Currently working in the local, urban K-5 public school system, so that the experiences they described were both current and reflective;
2. employed for a minimum of one year so that they had been in the school system long enough to be inducted;

3. available to participate;
4. not currently working under the direct supervision of the researcher; and
5. not evaluated on their job performances by the researcher.

Inclusion criteria were consistent across the pilot study and the transition into the expansion of the full study.

Exclusion criteria were:

1. Paraeducators who were not currently working in the local, urban K-5 public school system;
2. paraeducators who had less than one year of professional experience;
3. paraeducators who were unavailable;
4. paraeducators who did not speak English, as the interviews will be conducted in English; however, paraeducators could have been bi-or multilingual;
5. participants currently working under the direct supervision of the researcher; and
6. participants evaluated on their job performances by the researcher.

Exclusion criteria were consistent across the pilot study and the transition into the expansion of the full study.

I, as the researcher, selected paraeducators as a group of individuals to study based upon personal experience and interests. My positionality as researcher is one of holding the title of teacher, a position above paraeducators (when viewed through the lens of critical theory and the K-5 public school hierarchy). The personal observations of how paraeducators have been utilized and viewed by others in the profession positively influenced the necessity for this study. As supported by the gap in the literature, I chose to focus on paraeducators practicing in an urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. Additionally, the pool of paraeducators is larger in an

urban district than in a rural district (OSPI, 2016). I sought and received permission from the appropriate administrator in the school district to send an invitational email to paraeducators (see Appendix A). Upon receipt of the email, the participants self-selected by contacting me by email, phone, or face-to-face. If fewer than five invitees had accepted the email invitation to participate, I would have invited other known paraeducators within the K-5 public schools of the Pacific Northwest urban school district to participate. Then, a verbal invitation was made and if the invitation to participate was accepted, I emailed the official invitation to the invitee. In order to account for potential attrition, I kept a list of interested participants, whom I could contact for interviews.

Some potential participants initially expressed interest in being interviewed, but also expressed fear about being identified as "whistle-blowers" by their employers; they feared retribution for participation. Further conversation regarding confidentiality and the research process during recruitment allayed the fears of some invitees. Others chose not to participate. While beyond the scope of this study, an examination of the work climate on participants' willingness to participate in research is noted and deserves further exploration. Fear prohibits the voice of paraeducators in sharing their experiences around positionality, yet speaks loudly against continued imposed silence as a norm.

Selection criteria for the open, in-depth individual interviewees, as described above, included the availability and willingness of the participants (McMillin & Wergin, 2006). I trusted that through the interview process the interviewee would provide descriptive depth and narrative richness to the data collected (Rudestam & Newton, 2007; Smith, 2013). Deep or thick description goes beyond the collection of facts from the participants and into the layered experiences of the participants, including structures and meanings (Geertz, 1973). Interviews

lasted for up to two hours, with the potential for follow-up. A central requirement of a phenomenological interview is to "[rely] on participants to discuss the meaning of their experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 173). Based on the emergent themes, a small number of participants were selected for follow-up and metacognitive interviews to allow for further participant critical reflection and greater depth of data (see Bevan, 2014). Second interviews were based on participant interview data (see Appendix D). Third interviews were based on meta-level questions around the participants' changes in awareness and action regarding positionality through the experience of taking part in this phenomenological study (see Appendix D).

Human subjects considerations. Ensuring voluntary participation was necessary for ethical research. I, therefore, stated explicitly the approach to respondents. I conscientiously maintained an approach towards potential participants, which respected their agency. I made it clear to paraeducators that their participation was their choice, and that, while I was desirous of hearing them, their stories and voices were being sought without preconceived expectation as to what they would relate. As such, I confirmed each participant's full understanding of what the study entailed and their un-coerced agreement to participate. An Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B) was provided to participants and was signed prior to participation. Prior to the secondary interviews, participants re-consented. The consent form was developed in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures. It described the study's purpose and expectations of participation, itemized benefits/costs of participation, and provided participants an opportunity to question me personally, through provided contact information. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time. To address the minimal risk to the participants, each participant was provided with Employee Assistance Program contact information, to which they

could self-refer (see Appendix B). Additionally, at the time of consent/non-consent, participants were also given Dr. Lisa Kreeger's, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change, contact information.

Confidentiality. Prior to respondent participation, I informed participants that all data would be de-identified and kept in locked or password-protected files. Pseudonyms would be used in lieu of actual, identifiable names in the dissertation and any ensuing publications. I would not discuss the research among the participants, their peers, or coworkers, and that understanding was made explicit when soliciting participation and reiterated prior to paraeducators' participation. Location would only be described generally, as an urban school district in the Pacific Northwest.

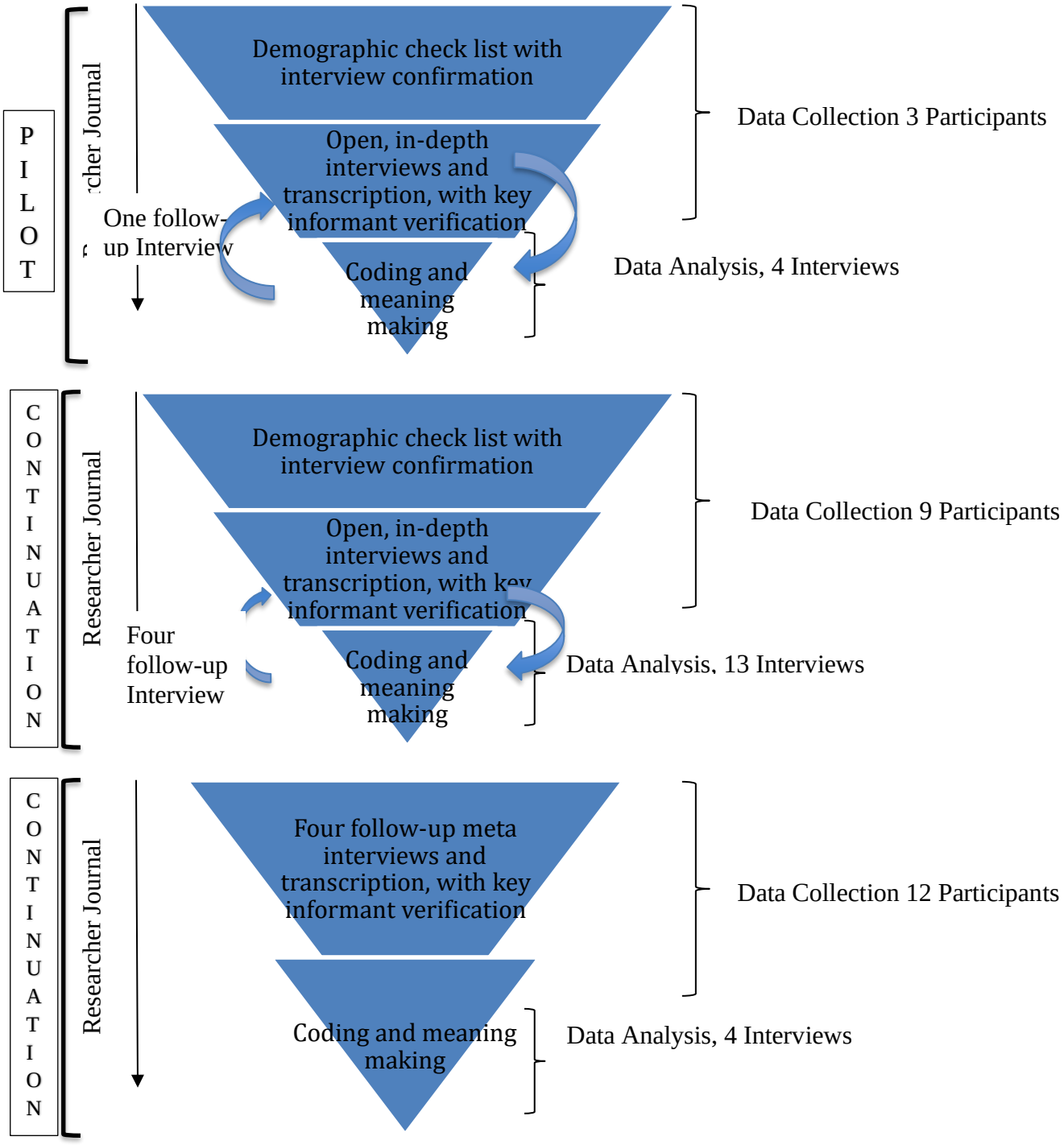
The final product (de-identified to protect confidentiality) will be shared with the school district as required by its own Institutional Review Board (IRB). I will also present my research to my committee and at conferences. Following the American Psychological Association (APA) Guidelines (6th ed., 2010), confidentiality ethically binds researchers. The APA also requires that new knowledge must be shared for the benefit of others.

Data collection and analysis. Data were collected using the demographic checklist, 21 interviews, and the researcher journal. For both the pilot study and full dissertation study, the first set of data was collected from a demographic checklist completed by the participating paraeducators. The second set of data was from open-ended, in-depth individual interviews that allowed for deep, rich data narratives of experience and reflection (Berg & Lune, 2012; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). I kept a journal of personal observations, field notes, potential biases, and ideas inspired throughout the data collection and analysis processes as suggested by Creswell (2013; see Appendix I). The open-ended interviews were recorded using an audio recording

device, and the interviews were transcribed, verified by each participant, and then coded (Boyatzis, 1998; Rudestam & Newton, 2007), using the lenses of general impressions, critical theory, and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory, so as not to miss codes. As well, constant comparison (Glaser & Straus, 1967/1999) provided for immersion within and across the data. After coding of the initial interviews, secondary interviews were sought to follow-up on themes and ideas derived from initial interviews, as depicted in Figure 3.2. The third set of data was from the researcher journal, including bracketing and critical reflection.

Figure 3.2

Data Collection and Analysis Process Over 21 Interviews



Note. Figure designed by Flynn (2018). Interview counts include initial interviews, follow-up interviews, and metainterviews for a total of 21 interviews over 12 participants.

Demographic checklist with interview confirmation. For both the pilot study and the expanded study, up to two weeks prior to the interview, I emailed to the participants the description and purpose of the study, the informed consent documents, and the demographic checklist (see Appendices B & C). To maintain transparency and to build a trusting relationship with participants, all of the research questions were provided up front. I also confirmed the time and place of the interview. One to two days prior to the interview, I reconfirmed the logistics with the participant via email or phone call.

The data from the demographic checklist were entered into a graphic organizer (see Table 4.1 in Chapter IV). Then I could easily track how many participants were men or woman, for example, and add the descriptive data into the participant descriptions for both the pilot and expanded studies. Positions, responsibilities, and decade ranges were used to describe years of experience.

Individual interviews. Individual interviews aim to collect data and require an interviewer to be non-judgmental. In the one-on-one interview, the participant must be confident that the interviewer will not challenge or argue with their statements (Berg & Lune, 2012). In gathering data for the phenomenological study, the researcher must maintain mindfulness and respectful acknowledgement that the paraeducator is the expert on his/her own experiences (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Interviews support the use of critical theory as a lens for data analysis because they allow the researcher to collect data through dialogue (Freire, 1970/2000) and in the voices of the participants (Creswell, 1998).

Interview data were collected through a total of 21 interviews with 12 participants. Data were collected from face-to-face open-ended interviews with three participants during the pilot

phase of the study. Also, during the pilot phase of the study, data were collected from one follow-up interview based on the content of the open-ended interview transcript of R. M. During the expanded phase of the study, data were collected from open-ended interviews with nine participants using the exact same interview questions as with the pilot participants. Also, during the expanded phase of the study, data were collected from four follow-up interviews and four metainterviews based on the content of the open-ended interview transcripts (see Appendix D for interview time-line and for follow-up and metacognitive interview questions).

Data analysis: Thematic coding. For both the pilot and expanded study, first, I listened to each interview in its entirety and read each transcript to get a sense of the moment-in-time stories and comments related by the paraeducator participants. Data were then analyzed and discussed with a peer reviewer, through a general lens—to include codes and themes other than those sensitized through a critical lens—using the tenets of critical theory, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and Dewey and Freire's critical pedagogies. Additional lenses of power were considered in in-depth conversations about the data between myself and the peer reviewer.

These analytical processes aligned with the precepts of phenomenology: *essence*, *intentionality of consciousness*, *epoche*, and *deep description*.

Critical theory is often applied in the social sciences, such as education and the humanities (Bohman, 2015). It is interdisciplinary in nature (Bohman, 2015; Mezirow, 1981) and focuses on power relationships among individuals and groups within systems. It emphasizes self-reflection (Carr, 2005; Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1981) with an overlay of sociocultural critique (Horkheimer, 1993). Critical theory is socially and historically contextualized. It explains the current reality (Carr, 2005; Freire, 1970/2000; Horkheimer, 1976;

Sementelli, 2005) of those involved in the dialogue. Critical theory offers ways of looking at the world that account for political and power relationships. As Kellner (2003) stated, "A critical theory signifies a way of seeing and conceptualizing, a constructing of categories, making connections, mapping, and engaging in the practice of theory-construction, and relating theory to practice" (p. 8). Therefore, critical theory provided a lens through which I could analyze knowledge, move to metacognition, and apply the knowledge and theory to positionality and practice. This lens complemented the phenomenological method approach and allowed the data to be fully understood and utilized.

Creswell (1998) described the chronological steps for analyzing and reporting phenomenological data (p. 191). To ensure quality of data analysis and reporting, I included and followed Creswell's (1998) general steps:

1. The researcher reads all interview transcripts for a global understanding;
2. The researcher identifies and extracts significant experiences and responses from each interview transcript;
3. The researcher derives essential meanings from the extracted experiences and responses and organizes them thematically;
4. The researcher reports the findings by theme, using narrative and deep description.

Each step is sequential, and I expand upon them as follows. According to Creswell (1998), after interviewing, and while the interviewees are verifying their own transcripts, the researcher reads all of the transcripts for an overarching understanding of the content and structure of the voiced experiences. Next, the researcher chooses salient quotes and descriptions of the experiences from the individual transcripts. Then, the researcher seeks individual and shared meanings, as well as structures, from the transcripts to organize the reporting of her

findings. Finally, the researcher thematically reports findings about the phenomenon of paraeducator positionality in the K-5; urban public schools and shares the derived knowledge with a broader audience.

More specifically, the data generated in the individual interviews were transcribed by www.rev.com (a reputable and confidential transcription firm out of San Francisco). I, as researcher, then read the transcripts and my researcher journal, as well as listened to the recordings of the individual interviews. Manual coding, using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1999), was ongoing, congruent with data collection and transcription. I also requested participants to review their own transcripts to confirm the data; participants may have chosen to make additions or modifications. I contacted some participants for clarification. Verifying transcripts with participants and seeking clarification allowed me to more accurately identify and extract significant experiences and responses from each interview transcript (see Creswell, 1998). Upon completion of the data collection, I reviewed the complete data set. Reviewing the transcripts, journal, and recordings reminded me of the tone, content, and environment of the interviews and provided a holistic view of the data and the potential for data triangulation. This process of immersion in the data exemplified my due diligence as the researcher in being open to codes and themes, and was supplemented by frequent meetings between myself and the peer reviewer to discuss not only different perspectives of data analysis and essence-findings, but also nuances of agreed-upon thematic code meaning.

Coding is an inductive process by which data are organized and analyzed (Berg & Lune, 2012; Boyatzis, 1998; Creswell, 2013; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Creswell (2013) noted that while inductive, the thematic coding process is also systematic. The coding process allows the researcher to organize the data and its meanings at the metacognitive, structural levels as well as

at the detail level. As a phenomenological researcher, I engaged a peer debriefer to selectively check coding and with whom I debriefed the emergent themes and inferences. Creswell (2013) suggested that an audit trail be kept regarding debriefing sessions (see also Lincoln & Guba, 1985; audit trail is outlined as a timeline in Appendix I). Creswell (2013) also suggested that the peer debriefer should challenge the researcher's inferences and interpretations—asking questions and providing alternative explanations of the data for the researcher's consideration—which was done. From essence of the interviews, I moved forward to report thematically individual and relational data using narrative and deep description (Creswell, 1998).

Research site. The research site was the school district from which participants were recruited. It was important to hold the interviews separate from the school district research site in order to reduce interruptions, to maintain confidentiality of the participants, and to reduce any political or emotional overlays, which participants might have felt within the K-5 public school setting. Participants were offered the choice between two neutral settings: a conference room at a nearby library or via phone. Phone interviews allowed the participants to choose a place in which they felt comfortable, such as their homes. Providing the participants with different locations allowed them to choose what was most convenient and comfortable for them.

On the day of the interview, the interviewer (me) arrived early to set up the audio recording device (a backup device was to be available). When the participant arrived, the interviewer greeted the paraeducator and ensured that he/she felt comfortable and verified permission to record the proceedings before the recording device was turned on. The interviewer reviewed the purpose of the research, confidentiality, and the structure of the interview. After informed consent by the participant was granted, the interviewer collected the demographic

checklist data from the interviewee. Then the interview began. Interview prompt questions included or resembled the following:

1. Tell me, what is your life like as a paraeducator?
2. What do you find most meaningful for you in your workday?
3. How does being a paraeducator influence how you define yourself?
4. How do you define yourself?
5. How do you believe your position as a paraeducator influences how others view you? —how others treat you? Do you feel included?
6. What else influences how others treat you?
7. Where and with whom do you feel a sense of professional community at work?
8. Do you feel like part of a team? When and how?
9. What is a typical day in your life as a paraeducator?
10. What governmental policies impact your role as a paraeducator? What would you change about those policies if you could?
11. Do you have any influence over how policies are implemented in your school?

These questions reflected the overall content of the interview. Participants could choose to not answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time. At the conclusion of the interview, I, as requested from each interviewee the opportunity to call, email, or meet with follow-up questions as needed. Additionally, I, as researcher, confirmed the participant's receptiveness to reviewing their responses via the transcribed recordings.

Researcher journal. After each interview, I made a journal entry of my impressions of the content, environment, tone, and themes in my researcher journal. I hand wrote the journal

entries. For data collection, journaling facilitated memories of the events and bracketing (Creswell, 2013) of my own opinions and experiences.

As researcher, I reviewed my own bracketing and interview responses in the research journal. When reviewing the data from the interviews, I assessed whether a theme related to the potential biases was stemming from the bias or from the data. Bracketing conversations were held regularly with the peer reviewer regarding content, substance, nuance, and need. For instance, me and the peer debriefer often talked about when I, as researcher, potentially superimposed my own experience as a paraeducator and within the data. It was important for me to verbalize memories so that I could set them aside. Then, I was able to focus on what the data was telling me, with the peer reviewer suggesting possible alternatives.

Quality of Method

In any research, the researcher needs to be mindful of trustworthiness, rigor, quality, and consistency. Trustworthiness is a key concept in conducting a phenomenological study. For a study to be *trustworthy*, it must be rigorous in its data collection and data analysis. *Rigor* in qualitative research is determined by participant selection and data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) reported that "data saturation is reached . . . when the ability to obtain new information has been attained (Guest et al., 2006), and when further coding is no longer feasible (Guest et al., 2006)" (p. 1). Interviewing 12 paraeducators and coding each interview transcript resulted in saturation of information, as observed by me, the researcher through repetition of like data and themes, and through peer review. In order to reach saturation through coding, I noted codes, categories, and themes as they began to replicate themselves in the data, especially in terms of essential meaning. In-depth examples are provided in Chapter IV. For saturation, Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested thinking about the data in terms of *rich*

(quality) and *thick* (quantity). Chang (2008) quantified thick data as recurring data, aligned with saturation. In their study of field methods regarding saturation, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) suggested keeping a *cumulative audit trail* as coding and constant comparison of interview transcripts are completed (see Appendices F, G, & H). For instance, to assess data saturation, I kept an audit trail, detailing which codes appeared in which transcripts; variability among transcripts were noted. Additionally, Guest et al. suggested keeping a codebook so that variations in codes and themes can be tracked, including any changes to definitions of codes. These two tracking mechanisms provide evidence as to when data saturation is reached, that is "when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue [phenomenon of paraeducators positionality] under investigation" (Mason, 2010, para. 2). In their study of HIV among their population of women, Guest et al. found that they had saturation upon completing 12 interviews and that themes were revealed after six interviews (i.e., they had enough congruent data from the coded interview transcripts to be able to reliably answer their research questions). Their population was fairly homogeneous, as was the population in this study, which increased the potential for saturation with fewer interviews. Trustworthiness was also enhanced through member checking of individual interview transcripts. Consistency adds to the trustworthiness of the data, and, in this study, consistency was obtained by asking the same questions of each participant during the interviews, which also added to the trustworthiness of data. To add to the trustworthiness of a phenomenological study, the researcher must also approach the participants with a desire to hear their experiences with empathy (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998); that is, the researcher must be authentic in creating the relationship (Block, 1987). The researcher must encourage the conversation while acknowledging the power imbalance between the researcher and participants (Creswell, 2013). The power imbalance in this phenomenological study will be

ameliorated by the informed consent, voluntary participation processes, and member checking of interview transcripts. As well, during the conversations, I was attuned to the truthfulness of the speakers and their reciprocal engagement with me, as researcher, in the research process (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Berg & Lune, 2012). Reciprocity increases the quality of the data collection process and of the data themselves.

Bentz and Shapiro (1998) suggested that the phenomenological researcher must acknowledge his/her insider status both to self and to the participants. For example, as educators in this study, I and the paraeducators belong to the same community and may share norms and values, as members of the K-5 community (Bednall, 2006; Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). My researcher bracketing in the journal helped to acknowledge assumptions about the researched community, while still being an insider (see Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Thus, I acknowledged my insider status and engaged in bracketing. Validity was also increased by the trust built between the researcher and participants.

Triangulation of the data—interview transcripts, the researcher journal, along with the peer debriefer, supported the trustworthiness of the data reviews and conversations. "Triangulation is the way in which one explores different levels and perspectives of the same phenomenon" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 4), tests the consistency of the data, and adds complexity (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Triangulation is a "validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). Additionally, triangulation of data during data analysis allows for one more way for the researcher to discern and address her own biases. Because researcher interpretation during data analysis and the researcher journal may have been subject to the same biases or subjectivities, I also engaged a peer debriefer to spot check coding

and themes, as well as code definitions drawn from the data in the interview transcripts. "Investigator triangulation involves the participation of two or more researchers in the same study to provide multiple observations and conclusions" (Carter, Bryant-Lukosious, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Additionally, the peer debriefer and I tested my inferences and findings drawn from the data during our face-to-face meetings (see Appendix I) for dates. The trustworthiness of the data was strengthened through the scrutiny of the data by informants (Shenton, 2004), as the informants verified their transcripts. Validity supports reliability in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). The summary of the checklist data added to the aggregate description of the participants as a group, creating context (Rowley, 2002).

Data analysis and write-up of the findings also provided rigor, quality, and transferability. Plano-Clark and Creswell (2010) suggested that enough detail and depth of data must be collected by the researcher to "write in vivid detail," organizing the ideas using "themes and subthemes," and by presenting "multiple perspectives" supported by accurate quotes, dialogue, and descriptions from participants (p. 288). I completed multiple matrices, for example, in order to get at the nuances and vivid detail of the multiple perspectives of the participants (see Appendices F, G, & H). It was quite exciting to dive deep into the data regarding the stories and positionality of each individual participant.

Additionally, the data must be sufficient for the researcher to make "analogies [or] metaphors," to locate tensions among the responses, and to include researcher "interpretations" (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 289). McMillan and Wergin (2006) said that findings should be "presented as they flow from the data, rather than in predetermined categories" (p. 11). Golafshani (2003) stated that "precision, (Winter, 2000), credibility, and transferability (Hoepf, 1997) provide the lenses of evaluating the findings of a qualitative research [study]" (p. 600).

Precision is the accuracy with which the data reflect the statements of the interviewees and support the themes and categories derived by the researcher. In this study, I strove and succeeded in accurately reflecting the data in my findings.

Credibility is the researcher's attention to producing a cogently argued written document, which locates the findings within the extant literature (Golafshani, 2003) and in the implications, in this case, for positionality of paraeducators (Berg & Lune, 2012). Having engaged in a phenomenological study for her master's degree, I was well situated to proceed with the advanced Ph.D. research. As well, since the researched engaged initial interviewees in a pilot study, which led seamlessly into the full study. I positioned myself to produce the outcomes and implications relevant to the positionality of paraeducators. Confidence and creditability are evidenced in the quality of the data and its accurate reporting.

While qualitative studies are not generalizable across populations and environments, confidence and rigor may provide avenues for transferability of findings and conclusions for readers. The rigor, as shown through data saturation, provided trustworthiness (Fusch & Ness, 2015); quality and credibility came from me allowing the participants to confirm their responses, by analyzing the data for recurring themes, and by engaging an outside peer debriefer.

Quality of Research Summary

In summary, I had specific responsibilities for ensuring the quality of method by reviewing data collection, analysis, and findings (Creswell, 1998). Table 3.1 describes my responsibilities as the researcher. The first three questions provided a self-check for reflection and content around my influence on the participants, accuracy of transcription and retelling the experiences of the participants, and other possibilities of meaning in the analysis. The fourth question forced me to make certain that there was evidence in the transcripts to support his/her

derived structural patterns. The fifth question asked me to consider whether the structures of experience and meaning may have held true in like situations. Additionally, the use of a peer debriefer to check for congruence or alternative explanations further supported the guidelines expressed in questions three through five.

Table 3.1

Researcher Responsibilities for Reviewing Data Collection, Analysis, and Findings in Phenomenological Research

Number	Reflective Question
1.	"Did the interviewer influence the contents of the subjects' descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the subjects' actual experience?"
2.	"Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?"
3.	"In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives?"
4.	"Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcripts and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?"
5.	"Is the structural description situation specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations?"

Note. C. Moustakas, as quoted in J. W. Creswell (1998), *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (p. 208).

The peer reviewer and I also engaged in questions about the data, such as who has the power and why, which led to further engagement with the data around hegemony and critical theory.

Limitations of Method

In phenomenology, depth of description of the lived experiences of the participants is sought (Smith, 2013). However, the results of a phenomenological study are not generalizable across populations, even when saturation has been reached in data collection through interviews. Yet, the repetition of themes and analogous experiences can add to the understanding of the structures of the phenomenon under study, and the findings might thus be transferable to similar populations.

The trustworthiness of the research findings are time-specific. In individual interviews, since the selected participants and interviews were dependent upon participant availability, there was potential for biased data. However, this limitation was overcome by using phenomenology because most of the data are the participants' own words, descriptions, knowledge, and meaning makings.

Moreover, there was still some potential for researcher bias. The positionality of the researcher (a white educated female, employed by the school district, and subject to other various factors affecting perspective) could never fully be dismissed as an aspect of the research method execution and process of analysis; the subjectivity of this research is embraced. Because of my background, it may have influenced what and how much paraeducators shared. This limitation was minimized by researcher bracketing (Creswell, 2013) and the engagement of a peer debriefer.

Chapter Summary

Chapter III provided an overview of the research approach and methods for the research in order to address the gap in the literature. The literature gap identified a lack of voiced experiences of paraeducators. Most researchers have used surveys (e.g., Fisher & Pleasants,

2012), observations (e.g., Jones et al., 2012), or document analysis (e.g., Kurth & Keegan, 2014). The specifics for this narrative phenomenological study, using demographic surveys, individual interviews, transcript validation, field journal, and researcher bracketing with triangulation established a strong fit for exploring paraeducator positionality within the context of critical theory, and was supported by educational theory and ideas around leadership and power in the K-5 public school system. Additionally, through the philosophical precepts of phenomenology and narrative phenomenological methods, the rigor of the study, the role of the researcher, and the careful attention to the consciously–reflected *lifeworlds* of study participants (Langdridge, 2008) have been clearly established. Moreover, specific steps to maintain human subjects' protection, including voluntariness, confidentiality, and IRB approval were detailed. A series of questions I used to enhance the quality of the research output was included, and finally, limitations were addressed.

Chapter IV presents a narrative of the data analysis process, which includes codes, themes, the findings of the process, and supporting data. Codes and themes may evolve during the processes of coding, constant comparison, the use of an audit trail, and a peer debriefer. Thus, the narrative of their development is important to provide transparency to the reader. The stories of the paraeducator participants and how they experience their positionalities come to life in Chapter IV: Findings, as they are used to answer the research questions.

Chapter IV: Findings

Chapter IV has three purposes: (a) to briefly present the narrative of my experiences with the paraeducators and their data, as a follow-up to Chapter I, which situated me in the phenomenological research process in order to fill a methodological gap in the current literature; (b) to describe the participants and their backgrounds as a group and as individuals; and (c) to explore the narrative data from the participants, as they shared their deep and rich lived experiences, in terms of answering the research questions.

The primary research question that guided this inquiry was: What are the lived experiences of paraeducators in a K-5, urban public school system in the Pacific Northwest? The subquestions were:

1. How do paraeducators understand and make sense of their experiences in terms of their dominant, central, or subordinate positioning in the K-5 public schools in the Pacific Northwest?
2. How do paraeducators in K-5 public schools in the Pacific Northwest describe situations that typically influence their positionality (i.e., where they are situated in the sociopolitical culture)?
3. How do structural and systemic aspects influence the perceived agency (i.e., the ability to act for themselves and on behalf of others) of paraeducators in K-5, public schools in one urban school district in the Pacific Northwest?

Findings regarding the lived experiences of paraeducators in a K-5, urban public school district in the Pacific Northwest were drawn from the data produced by the demographic checklist, which was also used to verify that each participant met the inclusion criteria and to begin each interview by positioning the interviewee as the expert on themselves. Findings were

also drawn from the data in the interview recordings, transcripts, and researcher journal; as well as from follow-up interview narratives; and from meta interview narratives. The researcher journal also provided reflective data resulting in findings on my experience in this study as a phenomenologist.

Researcher's Experience as a Phenomenologist

Phenomenology allowed me, the researcher, to collect the lived experiences of the participants in their own voices (see Creswell, 2013). I found that paraeducators experienced varying degrees of prejudice against them in the K-5 public school hierarchy, evidenced by specific words that paraeducators used in their narratives which brought to consciousness their experiences (see Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Husserl, 1962). Despite prejudice and negative positioning in terms of the hierarchical structure, the participants identified value in their own work, along a continuum, especially regarding relationships with others in their urban school community.

During the interview process, I had a recurring and unexpected experience. With each interviewee, the conversation began as formal and stilted. As a group, the interviewees were willing participants, but they had varying levels of anxiety and fear, as evidenced by hand- tapping and -wringing, staring down at the table, hesitations, nervous tone, closed facial expressions, and questioning if they were doing this [interview] "right." As our conversations progressed, I observed a relaxation in the participants' facial expressions and tone. They seemed, as a group, more willing to talk over the hour or more, expressing that they also felt heard. In fact, many became excited and wished to have more time to express their views, stories, and voices. I gave them this time through verification of their own transcripts and through follow-up interviews with participants by e-mail. Participants were selected by availability and desire for

follow-up. No participants who expressed interest in follow-up interviews were denied. Rather, they self-selected. I used e-mail primarily for follow-up. Metacognitive interviews were hand-written or typed by the participants.

As a phenomenological researcher, I learned that participants needed room to talk, and that once the conversation was opened, that transcript validation and follow-up interviews allowed further voice to the participants and clarification for me. I implemented both throughout the study. As well, I learned that the process of the research is as important to the participants as to the researcher. Thus, in the ongoing study, I added tertiary metacognitive interviews, which addressed some participants' experiences and reflections on being participants in a phenomenological research study on paraeducator positionality.

Overall, the themes within the narratives of the participants were, through the general: lens, about relationships and their effects on paraeducator positionality; the need for full membership in the teaching culture through active voice; and how inclusion/exclusion are culturally dependent, especially in the professional culture. The critical theory lens allowed me to identify norms that the paraeducators experienced, as described in their narratives, which included: Norm1: Paraeducators expect and seek job satisfaction; Norm 2: Paraeducators experience low status; Norm 3: Paraeducators experience institutional/systemic inattention to basic job needs; Norm 4: Paraeducator safety needs are often ignored; Norm 5: Invisibility: Paraeducators are to be not seen and not heard**;** and Norm 6: Paraeducators experience continuous anticipatory stress.

Participant Descriptions

Twelve K-5 paraeducators from one urban school district in the Pacific Northwest participated in this study, *Positionality of Paraeducators*: *A Phenomenological Study of*

Paraeducators in a Public School District in the Pacific Northwest. The paraeducators came from five different schools across the district and from a variety of programs. All were voluntary participants, who completed the informed consent process. Five participants also participated in follow-up interviews, four of whom went on to complete meta interviews about their experiences in participating in a phenomenological study around their positionality.

Participants as a group: Demographic checklist. All 12 participants met the inclusion criteria for this study. No potential volunteer participant was excluded based on the exclusion criteria. At each stage of interviewing, participants were verbally reconsented. To expedite the research process, participant paraeducators were also selected based upon availability. The Demographic Checklist gathered short-answer data through which the participants self-identified age range by decade, gender, race/ethnicity, years as a paraeducator/years in current position, position originally hired for, current type of paraeducator program or position in which they practiced, whether or not they remained in the position for which they were initially hired, grades currently serving, whether they had ever been displaced and when, and their personal goals as professionals (see Table 4.1). Participants had the option to decline to answer any question.

Age range by decade. As a group, the participant paraeducators self-identified as being in their 30s through their 60s.

Gender. Eleven of the participants identified as female and one as male. No participants self-identified as other than male or female.

Race/ethnicity. The group primarily self-identified as White/Caucasian, Caucasian/White, or simply White. One participant chose to self-identify by country of

Table 4.1

Description of Participants in the Sample

Table 4.1

Data from Demographic Checklist

Participant	Age by Decade	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Years as a Paraeducator/ Years in current position	Position originally Hired for	Current Position	Grades Served	Displaced
1.	30s	Female	White/Caucasian	1-5 years/1-5 years		1-on-1/ health		N
2.	50s	Female	White/Caucasian	20-29 years/ 20-29 years	Developmental Classroom			N
3.	60s	Female	White/Caucasian	30-49 years/ 30-49 years	Assistant to a professional	Assistant to a professional		N
4.	50s	Female	Caucasian/White	20-29 years	Developmental	Developmental	K-2	N
5.	40s	Female	White	12/8 years	Food Services	Speech Pathology	K-2	Y: 2008 & 2010
6.	30s	Female	White	4.5/4 years	1:1 Paraeducator, Resource Room, SPED	1:1 pareducator, SPED	K-2	N
7.	Declined*	Female	Cambodian	30-49 years	ELL/Bilingual Reading Math Nurse's room Bus Monitor	ELL/Bilingual, Nurse's room, ASL, Bus Monitor	Declined	N
8.	50s	Female	Hispanic	20-29 years	General Education Classroom, Resource Room, Title 1: Reading and Math, ELL/Bilingual/ Bus Monitor	1 year: [I am working in the area that I was hired for]: General Education classroom and Resource Room,	K-5	N
9.	20s	Male	White	6-10 years	General Education Classroom	1:1; Resource Room; SPED	K-5	N
10.	40s	Female	Caucasian/White	10-19 years	1:1 paraeducator	1:1 paraeducator: Autism, developmental; orthopedic	K-5	N
11.	30s	Female	White	>1 year	1:1 paraeducator	1:1 paraeducator; TLC	K-2	N
12.	40s	Female	Caucasian	1-5 years	1:1 paraeducator	1:1 paraeducator	4-5	Y

Note: The demographic checklist collected specific data; IRB confidentiality considerations precluded revealing identifying data. Decades and generalities are used to protect participant identity. **Declined* means the participant chose not to answer a question.

origin, which I generalized to *Southeast Asian* in order to maintain confidentiality. One participant self-identified by the general term, *Hispanic*, which I let stand as it was not an identifier that would breach confidentiality; keeping the identifier respected the identity and agency of the participant paraeducator.

Years as a paraeducator. The group had served as paraeducators from 1 to 49 years. All but one participant had also served in their current positions for the same amount of time.

Type of paraeducator program or position in which participants practiced. Most of the paraeducator participants reported that they continued to serve in the positions for which they

were originally hired. They described their positions as 1:1 health, developmental classroom, assistant to a professional, 1:1 paraeducator SPED, ELL/bilingual, reading, math, Nurse's room, ASL, bus monitor, general education classroom, resource room, autism, orthopedic, and Total Learning Classroom (TLC). Most had a list of comprehensive descriptors, demonstrating that as a group, they understood the complexity and variety of their jobs, for example; "stressful," "rewarding," "talking to kids," "has things running," "teach," "teaching us," "read braille," "interpret," and "constant adaptation." All used professional terms and acronyms such as IEP, SPED, substituting, micromanaging, differentiation, and seizure disorder.

Remaining in the position for which initially hired. Overwhelmingly, the group had remained in the positions for which they were initially hired.

Grades currently serving. As a group, the participants self-identified as predominantly serving grades K-5, as well as more specifically grades K-2 or 3-5.

Displacement and when. Only one in the group had experienced displacement.

Goals as professionals. Goals among the group were varied, but all related to teaching. Some paraeducators had goals that were specific to maintaining their current positions: "1:1 paraeducator." Others wanted to enhance their knowledge within their current positions: "to continue learning and growing in the way I work with staff in my class and with the children and families we serve;" and "to teach my student independence. Learn how to better de-escalate [a] student that is upset. I also want to learn more about the visually-impaired and how to help them gain independence." Some of the group were looking to become certificated teachers: "To eventually become a certified special education teacher;" "My goal is to continue my education to one day become a certificated teacher;" and "Further career in education by getting certification." Still others in the group declined to state a goal.

Participant Descriptions as Individuals: Interviews, Transcripts, and Researcher Journal

In this section, I provide brief biographies of the individual paraeducator participants, specific to their lived experiences in a specific time and place, using data from the interviews, transcripts, and my researcher's journal. The participants are presented in the order interviewed.

R. M. is a 30+ year-old, White female with less than five years of experience as a paraeducator. She self-describes as a mother, wife, and homemaker. She glows with enthusiasm when speaking about her job as a one-on-one health paraeducator. She values collaborative relationships and wants to be useful in her job. She described her experience as a paraeducator as all on-the-job training. She values the time through which she has built unity with her one-on-one health student.

C. K. is a 40+-year-old, White female paraeducator, who has served 13 years as a classroom paraeducator for a self-contained special education classroom, grades 1–5. She describes her interactions with her students as "student first." She is passionate about her job as a paraeducator, and she believes that her caring and approachable nature make the learning experience easier for her students. She looks to her lead teacher as a role model and as a leader. She expects the administration and other school staff to be inclusive in all aspects of the daily operations of the school.

R. B. describes herself as a Caucasian with many years of being a paraeducator. She declined to provide her age. She positions herself as an assistant to a certificated health professional and described how she focuses on life skills in her work, such as communication, listening, and social justice. She is involved in the Union at a district level and has worked at the state level regarding paraeducator training.

J. J. is a 40+-year-old, White female paraeducator with approximately 20 years of experience. She positions herself as a caretaker, who is passionate about the special education students with whom she works. She suggested that the demands are high for both the certificated teacher and for the paraeducator in special education (SPED) classrooms. She shared that while she has experienced longevity in her SPED classroom, that the certificated teachers have cycled in and out, providing little continuity among them for the paraeducator's benefit.

S. N. is a 50+- year-old White female paraeducator with a decade of experience. She values having communication with the certificated teacher with whom she works and suggests that having shared interactions helps to create a cohesive team to help students achieve their IEP goals. She also values the meaningful relationships that she has with other paraeducators, which she describes as feeling like family members. She has recently begun to pursue a personal dream of becoming a certificated special education teacher while continuing to work as a paraeducator. She is both excited and terrified at the same time.

R. F. is a 30+-year-old, White female paraeducator who has a visual impairment. She describes herself as legally blind[1] and has been a paraeducator for almost five years. She is charged with passion as she describes working as a one-on-one paraeducator for a legally blind student. She shared about being student-focused, and her comments often centered on the additional time required to create adaptive educational supports for her student. She contends that there is little communication between herself and the certificated teacher. However, it is

[1] While the detail of being legally blind may inadvertently identify this participant, she reviewed and verified her interview transcript, choosing to retain the detail as important to her.

most important to her that she feels heard by the teacher. She connects most with other paraeducators.

H. M. is a 60+-year-old, Southeast Asian female, bi-lingual paraeducator with 30 years of experience. She expressed that her position as a paraeducator for the bi-lingual program is misused and that she may be pulled from her regularly scheduled duties to fill in for absentee hourly staff. For example, she is often used as a translator, for which she is not paid as a translator but at the lower wage of a paraeducator[2]. She has also been assigned to fill in as a crossing guard without proper training regarding duties, communication with parents, or standard operating procedures. She contends that most every minute in her daily schedule is accounted for and that the only time for planning is after school, on her own time. She conveyed the importance of developing relationships with her students.

K. H. is a 60+-year-old, Hispanic female paraeducator with over 25 years of experience. She describes herself as wearing many different hats in order to work in the school system with students, parents, teachers, and administrators. She said, "I don't think it [being a paraeducator] necessarily defines me; I think . . . who I am defines my role as a paraeducator." She values education and professional development and shared about how it [professional development] has been influential to her communication and being understood. Her enthusiasm shined as she described the importance of teaming with her teacher and how teaming has contributed to working with her students successfully.

M. F. is a White male in his mid-twenties, who brings almost a decade of experience to paraeducation. He believes that within the school where he works, there is a strong ethical belief

[2] Translators are paid at the rate of $23.63/hour, while paraeducators' average wage is $15.86/hour.

that both teachers and paraeducators are educators. In contrast, he also shared that upon first meeting certificated staff, he felt like he was viewed as having limited abilities. He attributed that perception to the hierarchical power structure. He feels that he has experienced two opposing systems in his role as a paraeducator—one which was very inclusive and the other in which is he has been treated as an afterthought.

V. T. is a middle-aged White, female paraeducator with 12 years of experience. She contends that being a paraeducator plays to her strengths, which include being able to "contribute and participate in students meeting milestones." She enjoys the process of celebrating student growth with the students, families, teachers, and principals. She said that she does not hold formal educational degrees, which she perceives as a negative that makes her feel isolated. She contends that formal degrees may be important but are not part of one's identity or criteria for being successful at one's job. She values helping students develop a plan to talk to adults or help them with sign language to communicate what they are feeling. She described this part of her job as a "translator," who gives children ways to communicate; then, she acts as a go-between the children and the other adult.

B. P. is a 30+-year-old, White paraeducator who is new to the position. She defines herself as a Christian, a mother, and as a paraeducator. She uses the skills that she has developed during a previous career to help her to self-advocate and to ask questions. She suggests that there is an unspoken assumption that paraeducators should "know [what to do in all situations]." She positions herself as knowing that she doesn't know everything and that her questions are grounded in her wanting to understand and learn, in order to support the certificated teachers and their students. She describes a personal awareness of how her words, language, and actions can be used to serve as a model for the students with whom she works with. She interprets what they

want to communicate through observation, and she has worked towards being a consistent role model for her students and others in her new work environment.

A. J. is a 40+-year-old, White female with fewer than five years of experience. She is proud to call herself a paraeducator. Until a few years ago, she was unaware that a paraeducator position existed. She shared that being a paraeducator defines her. She described that her acceptance from certificated staff has been conditional. The feelings she has experienced range from being unwanted and not included to feeling accepted and feeling like a part of the team. She values her recent connection to the Union president and shared that she was able to express her concerns and opinions to the paraeducator Union president during a meeting. She also expressed that she feels a bond with other paraeducators through the connection to the union.

Findings: Using a General Lens

As a phenomenological researcher, I found that I had to back away from my critical theory framework so as to not miss other codes and themes, which might be revealed from a more general perspective.

Relationships. The most prominent general theme evolving from the data was the importance of *relationships*. Paraeducators positioned themselves and defined themselves in terms of their relationships with others and their attitudes about those relationships.

The theme of relationships, as revealed by the data, included: relationships to self, relationships with personal family, work family, relationships with students, relations with parents, relationships with other paraeducators (peers), relationships with other classified staff, relationships with administrators, and relationships dictated by systemic rules. Relationship experiences led to findings on inclusion/exclusion and findings regarding participant paraeducator communication needs especially around inclusion as full members of the teaching

team (see Appendix F).

As I interviewed the paraeducator participants, they revealed that their relationships with colleagues became more problematic as hierarchical systems and power came into play, including relationships with other classified staff, with certificated staff, and with administrators.

Relationship to self. The first relationship I found was paraeducator's relationship to self, with themselves as people and as paraeducators. The paraeducator's description of these relationships to self often took the form of self- definition, such as, "I am an x," such as "I am a teacher," "I am a Christian," "I am a servant leader," "I am an advocate," "I am a professional," or "I am an educator." In other words, I define myself to myself by my role and by my values. Two other forms of self-definition/relationship-to-self took the form of function —"out-of-the-box thinker" and actions that included "wearing many hats."

J. J. stated, "I would define myself as a caretaker," meaning she takes care of others. Her comment is notable in that she does not describe herself as a *caregiver,* in contrast with H. M., who said, "I provide what they need, and they are my children, too. I love them, care about them, too." In this paraeducator's mind, there seems to be a distinction between caretaker and caregiver.

S. N. stated that, "I am a teacher." "I feel that is an important part about me." She then explained her developmental growth as an adult in relationship to herself: "I don't say, 'I'm a mother of four anymore.' I say, 'I'm a teacher. I work in a special education classroom.'" So, her definition of *self as teacher* was in contrast to her definition of *self as mother*. S. N.'s language is reflective of U.S. dominant cultural mores, in that S. N. seems to find acknowledging more value in being a teacher in a SPED classroom than as a mother of four, at this present stage in her life.

Findings in relationship of paraeducators to and with self can be summarized as nominal, functional, and changeable.

Impact of being a paraeducator on self and family. R. F. shared the aspect of working as a paraeducator during the day and how it affects her family relationships and home life at night:

> It's kind of sad to say, my family gets neglected because I am so tired all the time. So, I'm not able to play with my kids as much. My house looks terrible, and I'm always tired. I'm moody, and so family life suffers . . . I didn't know I was going to cry [She was actually crying].

Sad, overwhelmed, and her job subsuming her family life, she summarized her feelings about not being able to switch off the exhaustion in order to meet the needs of her family. For R. F., the mother is still the housekeeper and the leader of all family activities. She expected herself to remain cheerful through all of it.

Relationships with "work family." The idea of a "work family" took secondary status to nuclear families. S. N. described her unique work culture as "we're like a family" and shared:

> Here we have two different programs, the older developmental delay program and ours. And, I definitely feel like when the two of our groups get together you just feel like you're family. Everybody loves you and you know [what each other is experiencing on the job].

In her follow-up interview, S. N. shared her definitions of family:

> People with a common goal and concern for each other. I know that family is also about biology and love as well. I definitely have varying definitions of family, Mostly, I consider people who care about similar things and me as I do. I will always choose

> personal family needs over professional needs. I do feel concerned for my team that is left to deal without me, but it doesn't stop me from choosing my personal family.

S. N. prioritizes her immediate family over work family, however, she honors both.

For V. T., work family is a culture that provides support and flexibility. This is created through-out the workday as paraeducators, teachers, specialists, and principal help each other, and sometimes go beyond the regular scope of work for the benefit of the student. She is able to grow and learn within her role and team:

> I feel like that in my own school because the teachers and specialists that I have worked with for many years have seen me as a para being able to wear many hats at many different opportunities—that I have been to really be all in my community, and that's how the teachers are at [my school]—we're all in together. The most important thing is that we're a family, not just as educators but with our kids, with the parents, that we're a family.

Findings on family at work is described as people having a common goal, concern for each other, and a culture that provides support. Findings on the impact of being a paraeducator on self and family can be described as sad, overwhelmed, and job subsuming family life.

Relationships with students. The second most prominent relationship, which supported paraeducators' feelings of self-esteem regarding their day-to-day work, was around their *relationships with the students* they taught and cared for on a daily basis. The paraeducator participants used phrases such as *trust*, *relationship building*, and *they are my children.*

H. M. reflected on how she provides what her students need. She describes love and care as important aspects of relationship building with the students she works with, "They are my

children, too, you know. When at work, they are my children. I provide what they need, and they are my children. I love them and care about them".

R. M. reflected upon the development of trust in the relationship with her one-on-one student:

> It feels like after a year or so with her, I'm finally getting to the point where I am able to really do my job well with her because she's trusting more outside her home than she has before. So, it's been kind of a struggle, but I feel like we're finally getting there.

She stated that she has been with her student for over a year. The first barrier to the relationship was the new environment, a situational concern. Now, "she's trusting more outside her home" R. M. acknowledged that, "it's been . . . a struggle," but worth the effort. She said, "I think we're finally getting there [to trust]." R. M. got down to specifics when she shared a story of caregiving for her student:

> My student needed a nap. She got to lie down and take a nap. She was on four different medications at the beginning of the year, and her body was still trying to get used to all of [them]. When are we going to give them to her so that it doesn't affect her schooling? It was kind of a mess. So, she went in to take a nap. She was able to sleep for about an hour and woke up alert. We went to lunch. Everything was great for the rest of the day.

Notice how she also gives her student agency in her language, "She went in to take a nap" and then returns to the first-person plural, "We went to lunch."

For both, H. M. and R. M., the needs of the students seemed to direct the relationship regarding trust and connectedness with their service roles. However, the tone was quite distanced. Both used the first-person pronouns "I" and "we," but the content of their experiences is more about "them"—the students.

Relationships with students' parents/caregivers. For participant paraeducators, relationships with students are deeply connected to relationships with parents and/or caregivers, but when paraeducators are positioned as less valuable than teachers and not as professionals, their lack of inclusion on the teaching team disrupts potential valuable communication with parents and/or caregivers. For instance, micro-aggressions against paraeducators affects the relationships with the student and the students' parents/caregivers. R. F. shared:

> I don't know if this is a rule or not, but if a student hurts somebody, the parent should be called. I think that should be a rule because my student has hurt me so many times, and her mom never knew about it. She doesn't know about it unless I fill out an incident report for something really bad. Then she might know, but other than that she doesn't know. She doesn't know what her daughter does at school, and I think that should be a policy or rule of some sort.

In R. F.'s narrative, there is paper work (incident reports) preventing communication with the parent. R. M. also implied that someone else, other than herself, should contact the parent. This positions her outside the parent/child/teacher relationship triad.

Like phone contact, IEP conferences are another opportunity to build relationships with a student's parent(s)/guardian(s), governed by federal law. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1999), the federal law governing special education, lists parents first on the list of required members of a student's IEP team. IEP meetings are held annually or when requested by a parent. IEP meetings are a time when invitees such as paraeducators, can share information and develop relationships especially with parents, along with their supervising teacher, through communication, which builds trust. J. J. shared and reflected about her past experience with IEP meetings:

> We used to be included in the IEP meeting, and what we had to say was of value, and we're not included in that anymore. Much of that is just I think financially . . . but we're the ones that are with them [our students] hands-on all-day long. More so than the teachers. The other side of that is the information that's shared by the other specialists or a parent is critical [to my being able to do my job].

J. J. recognized that not being able to attend a student's IEP with her supervising teacher, in this case, took away a significant opportunity to develop a relationship with parents. In both of these experiences, participant paraeducators encountered barriers to direct communication and teaming, which prevented developing relationships with parent/guardians.

Relationships with other paraeducators. Generally, the paraeducators desired professional relationships with other paraeducators; however, they expressed that they might not have the time to develop professional relationships or a sense of community on the job, due to the logistics of their placement.

A. J. shared about her professional relationships with other paraeducators during a teacher strike. The paraeducators used a team approach that brought about face-to-face communication, a sense of community, solidarity, unity, understanding, acceptance, and support for each other.

> I really feel a bond with my fellow paraeducators. [Now] we've got groups on Facebook and messaging, and we express our opinions to each other, and steps on how to change things, or concerns we may have. So, I really feel valued there, too. I think it began when the strike happened. It just brought a sense of community, and it brought a lot of solidarity and unity, and we started communicating more and expressing ourselves more

> to each other. I really appreciate this new way of communicating and the change that this brought on.

In this experience, A. J.'s relationships with other paraeducators were initiated by a teacher strike, which was centered on teachers, but included paraeducators. Facebook became a way for paraeducators to express their voices; however, there are also dangers as Facebook is not a private forum, and content is left open to different interpretations about what is said.

R. B. reflected on her relationship with other paraeducators and her advocacy role towards other paraeducators.

> I hear a lot of other paras saying, "I'm just a para." I keep thinking, "No, you're not *just* a para [emphasis added]. You're here to help that child learn, and your title doesn't make who you are. What that child takes from you makes you who you are."

Just is her key word here. R. B. objected to the self-deprecating tone of 'just a para' and to the word also being an out from responsibility. The phrase represents a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2008) which is self-limiting. Yet she asserted that, "What the child takes from you makes you who you are," harkening back to both self-identification, or the relationship with self, and the relationship with the student, which reflects a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008).

Relationships with other classified staff. On the organizational chart, and in practice, paraeducators are considered *classified staff.* Classified staff are employees who are non-certificated, who may work directly or non-directly with students (OSPI, 2018). Other classified staff include secretaries, cooks, custodians, and bus drivers. It is important to note that classified staff job responsibilities and unionization vary greatly.

C. K. defined her relationship with the office staff and talked about how she felt able to be open in her communication in the office with other classified staff. She said, "I feel it in the

office. Let's deal with what is. I feel . . . personally when people will be up front, say it like it is, that makes me very comfortable." C. K.'s feelings of comfortable communication with the office staff brought about a sense of trust and safety for her.

V. T. described her relationship with the secretary as centered around time keeping—going to meetings, taking some of their classes at the Professional Development Center (PDC) and not just have it [time-card responsibilities] only fall on the secretary. "We constantly make mistakes with punching in and out and what does this go under and how do I fill out this form." Her experience reflects both reliance and frustration in the relationship. The secretary is the knowledge-holder and power holder regarding time keeping and schedule variations; the paraeducator is reliant on the secretary, being disempowered to fix their own time entries.

Relationships with certificated staff. *Certificated staff* means that the employee must hold a certificate (or license) issued by the State Department of Education in order to be considered highly qualified (OSPI, 2018). Examples of certificated staff include teachers, speech and language pathologists, and nurses.

B. P. shared and highlighted the importance of communication with her teacher in order for her to clearly communicate to her that disruptions are not scheduled; however, the disruptions can require adaptability for the task at hand. Disruptions in the classroom usually center around students with emotional/behavioral needs acting out.

> My class has a lot of staffing issues coupled with a newer teacher, new curriculum, and some very different communication styles. The teacher has a very definite schedule and expresses that she feels her paras are insubordinate because there are a lot of constant disruptions.

B. P. felt she lacked effective communication with her certificated teacher, which appeared to act as a strong reminder of how important communication is—especially from teachers to give direction, to explain expectations and desired outcomes, and most importantly, to have an opportunity to share and exchange information regarding disruptions. B. P. implied that she was not being insubordinate when attending to the student.

In contrast, K. H. expressed an enduring value of her supervising teacher taking the time to plan together at the beginning of the day. K. H. described:

> With the teacher that I work with, we work very closely together, so I feel very comfortable and confident with him, as well as [other] classroom teachers that I work with [and] their students. I do feel part of the team and it starts in the classroom that I work in, with the classroom teacher. We communicate on a daily basis, as to how our day is going to look. So, it starts right off in the morning, we talk about what is going to happen for the day and what type of materials we'll be working with for the day, and if anything new arises, then we are aware of it before the day even begins. So that really helps, as well.

K. H.'s supervising teacher provided daily, morning planning time, which facilitated intentional lesson planning, thus creating a team relationship in the process.

Generally, the participants described positive and negative relationships with certificated staff centered on the expectations of teachers acting as leaders and role models and on-the-job trainers for paraeducators.

Relationships with administrators. Few paraeducators talked directly about, or even alluded to, relationships with district or building administrators.

R. F. shared about being bitten on her leg. She suggested to the certified teacher to call the parent. The teacher's response was, "Why? I don't want to hurt feelings." Not receiving support from the certificated teacher, R. F. took the steps to speak with the principal:

> When I did get bitten, I talked to the principal, and she did inform me that if I filed an incident report, then the teacher, by law, had to call the parent. So, I mean, I learn stuff but even she [the principal] told me to remind her. She [the principal] told me that I need to remind her to ask him [the teacher] if he [had] followed through with it [the phone call].

In her follow up interview, R. F. shared, "When I report it [student violence against her] to administration, I feel like it is necessary. It gives them insight into what goes on in the class, and how aggressive some of these kids can be." R. F.'s follow-up focused on seeking procedural support from an administrator and feeling that administrator was negatively distanced from the classroom and student behaviors.

Need for Full Professional Membership in Teaching Culture

In addition to relationships being a prominent theme when the data were viewed through a general lens, the paraeducators' need for full professional membership in the teaching culture through active voice was the second most prominent finding. Subthemes were: membership in the teaching team, in planning, and in IEP/504 meetings.

Teaching team. K. H. shared about how debriefing with her supervising teacher represented her teaching and membership in a teaching team, "I think just by having input, when it is asked of you, what your thoughts are about how you thought your [small] groups went . . ." K. H.'s narrative implies that she should be asked giving her an active voice. Time to debrief about teaching represents membership in the teaching culture. The underlying assumption is that

she was teaching and supporting student learning and growth when working with small groups of students.

M. F. shared his experience with teachers using paraeducators and said, “I’ve also seen how some teachers miss out in quite a large way because they don’t know how to effectively use paraeducators.” “Us[ing]” paraeducators shows the need for fuller membership in the teaching culture because even when teachers use paraeducators effectively, the paraeducators are still adjunct.

Regarding full membership in the teaching team C. K. said:

> I expect to be respected . . . so I will confront [the teacher and] ask, “what will make this better for you?” . . . “What do I do to make this work [for you, “when I bring my SPED child into general education”]?

C. K. was demanding full membership by being confrontational. She used her voice to demand that she had the resources to succeed in teaching her SPED student. She addressed the teacher as if they are both full members of the teaching team.

Planning. M. F. shared about planning time being unequally distributed across the teaching team:

> [In another culture I worked in], a teacher would have two afternoons a week, specifically dedicated to planning . . . The cover supervisor, who was technically between the paraeducator and the teacher position, they would step in.

Yet, M. F.’s example is still hierarchical.

> I don’t suppose that left more time for the paraeducators to plan, but it left more time for the teachers to plan for the paraeducators and for them to work out how that would be communicated.

Planning time is unequally implemented across the teaching culture. The teacher communicates to the paraeducator; generally, the paraeducator has no voice or input.

B. P. related what it was like to be a full member of the teaching culture, even within the hierarchical team. Her teacher spoke to her about planning and pedagogy. “She’s been really awesome about including me. She’s really great about talking about [what ‘I can do with my job’]’” and giving me the why behind stuff.” Having been included in planning for self and position highlights the professional needs of paraeducators.

IEP/504 meetings. R. F. shared how the need for membership of the teaching team is more than presence; it includes active voice at IEP/504 meetings:

> If there’s a behavior meeting, we should be included in that because if we’re going to be working closely with that student, we need to know what’s going on . . . but if we were there to hear it for ourselves the we would say, “Oh, we know what their [the teacher’s goals for the student] are.”

Here, the need to be a member of the teaching culture is only by presence, not through active voice. R. F. went on to relate how the teacher controls the information flow, which is contrary to full and respectful membership:

> If the teacher is there and doesn’t think that the behavior plan is going to be working, then that teacher’s not going to tell us what went on in the meeting because he’s not going to think its beneficial for us. In this event, the teacher’s attitude is patronizing toward the paraeducator. He determines what paraeducators need to know.

This paraeducator is not a member of the teaching culture; rather, the paraeducator’s need for inclusion through shared information is dismissed.

S. N. shared about the importance of presence, active voice, and information—sharing in IEP/504 meetings:

> I think one major way . . . if we were included in things like IEP meetings because then that would show . . . because there's lots of people in IEP meetings. There's a general education teacher, there's all sort of people like speech, occupational therapy, all those people in there. If we were able to be included and be able to have input in [the discussion], [For example, I could say], "I've worked with this child and cutting with scissors is really difficult. How could you help me to help them?"

Full membership in the teaching culture and attending IEP/504 meetings is necessary for information sharing to discuss team supports for teaching teams so that a child can advance in his/her goals.

Inclusion/Exclusion. The third general lens finding is paraeducator inclusion/exclusion. In the data from paraeducator interviews and follow-up interviews subthemes included: communication, language, collaborative training, collaborative classroom teaming, and more general teaming across the district. As the phenomenologist immersed in the data, I first present the inclusion/exclusion themes as discreet entities. I then move on to show the paradoxes inherent in inclusion/exclusion as a theme and how it reflects upon paraeducator positionality (see Appendix G).

***Inclusion*.** Generally, paraeducators sometimes experienced inclusion, though exclusion was more the norm (see Findings: Using a Critical Theory Lens). Still, examples of and ideas about inclusion are important to document. As demonstrated in Chapter VI, these ideas lead to data-driven potential reform in educational leadership and change. Exclusion themes also highlighted the finding of paraeducator needs for full membership on the teaching team.

Communication. Planned communication was important to paraeducators regarding effective service. For instance, R. M. described daily communication and planning with the certificated teacher with whom she works as characterized by, "When we start the day we will [meet and exchange information]." In contrast, participant paraeducators also expressed that the duty to communicate fell on them, rather than on the supervising teacher. For example, J. J. shared about the un-spoken expectation that it is the paraeducators' responsibility to ensure inclusion by including themselves. She said, you want to be heard. You have to have grace, too . . . I feel like I am so busy in my job actually that maybe I don't take the time to be proactive in being included." In J. J.'s example, the onus of being included in communication is on the person at the bottom rung of the hierarchy.

Language. Professional inclusion of paraeducators also rested upon using a shared professional language. S. N. described inclusion in terms clarity of language, "everybody is using the same language." B. P. found that, "we were all using just slightly different language, and so it was really cool once we saw that we had the consistency in language [that also benefited the student]." Repeatedly, the benchmark for paraeducator success was student progress.

Collaborative training. Shared training increased communication and collaboration among paraeducators and teachers/specialists. K. H. shared about the importance of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and the communication that they facilitate: "with the trainings that you're [the paras are] included in on . . . you're able to communicate with one another on the same [professional] level." Thus, separation by degrees or fancy initials are reduced, such that the students and all professional at all levels benefit.

Collaborative classroom teaching. C. K. shared that collaborative classroom teaming, like communication and sharing language, does not always happen automatically She said, "We [the paraeducators and the specialists] do inclusion [with the students and with each other]" R. B. described a classroom teaming experience:

Each classroom has a paraeducator. To be perfectly honest, I know who the teacher is and I know who the para is, but I bet you the ordinary person who walks in off the street wouldn't know because of the teams that are established.

These examples show the best of classroom teaming, i.e., the inability of an outsider to distinguish between professionals in the classroom. All are needed.

Collaborative teaming. Paraeducators are rarely included in collaborative teaming, strategizing, and implementation of ideas. Thus, it is important to note the contributions paraeducators can make. For instance, S. N. shared that when she suggested an idea regarding student safety, which was acted upon, "I was part of the team to help get the playground fenced in." S. N. was included in the team; still, she was not given credit or recognition for her conceptualization of the idea of a fenced playground.

Likewise, R. F. shared her frustration regarding IEP meetings, "We should be included in IEP meetings . . . we should be allowed to have our say at IEP meetings and to show our observations." In contrast, A. J. said, "it [collaborative teaming] makes me proud . . . to be a part of an education team." Paraeducators valued being able to collaborate on many levels.

Exclusion. Any finding of desiring professional inclusion naturally includes its counterpart exclusion. Exclusion data shared parallel themes with inclusion data.

Communication. J. J. described the effect of hidden barriers to critical information. She said, "Were not getting the whole picture. We're not getting all the information all [of] the time

[to do our jobs well].” Additionally, R. F. shared frustration that teachers are always invited to IEP meetings and that paraeducators are often not; teachers are considered the knowledge holders regarding students and can choose to share information or not. “The teacher is there [at the meeting] . . ., then that teacher’s not going to tell us what went on in the meeting because he’s not going to think it’s beneficial for us.”

Language. R. B. shared her observations about the lack of a common language and transparency in professional relationships and offered, “But I think openness, if people were more transparent as to what's happening, I think it would just be a better world for everybody, not just paras, for teachers, too.”

V. T. shared about exclusion of professional language that keeps her from receiving clear directions from her supervising teacher. She said:

> Plans were already supposed to be put into place and communicated to the para so the para can then put those into practice. I would have to say that, we aren't there yet in what we're trying to achieve.

While R. B. and V. T. shared their experiences in the professional arenas of the building and classroom, R. M. related how exclusion also happened in the staff room. In her experience, the language of exclusion was silence:

> There's been times where there will be staff, like in the staff room, and they're all chitchatting and a couple paraeducators, myself and somebody else, will walk into the room [and the teaching staff stops] talking, and there's that idea that because we're not certified staff, they can't continue their . . . that confidentiality doesn't extend to us, like we would just go off and talk to everybody about what they're talking about in the staff room.

Collaborative training. B. P. expressed the importance of collaborative training and said, "It would be really great to see teachers and paraeducators take [Right Response Training] together." Currently, paraeducators are required to attend Right Response Training—a proactive, person centered, approach for de-escalation of behaviors. The Right Response curriculum also suggests that all staff cocreate safety plans with their teaching teams.

Collaborative classroom teaching. C. K. described paraeducators exclusion as invisibility. She said, "When I don't feel included would be when [when a teacher] . . . just ignores me." R. B. described how the exclusionary behaviors of adults sometimes translate into the behaviors of the kids, "yesterday, two kids came downstairs . . . they go, "oh, not her again!" H. M. shared about lack of collaboration with a supervising teacher, "It's frustrating if the teacher doesn't help, you know."

Collaborative teaming. K. H. describes cliques and how groups think, ". . . other paraeducators certainly feel at home with other paraeducators. Other teachers feel at home with other teachers," M. F. reached the same conclusion, "in those kinds of occasions you do kind of feel almost ostracized." A. J. added: "I didn't feel included. I didn't feel wanted. I didn't feel a part of things. I felt isolated . . . I was really defeated."

How the Three Major Findings From the General Lens Reflect Paraeducator Positionality

Overall, relationships reflected on paraeducator positionality through experiences, membership, and feelings of inclusion and exclusion in their professional (especially buildings) communities. Relationships defined how paraeducators positioned themselves and how they saw themselves as positioned by others. The paraeducators' recognized their own need for full membership in the teaching culture with active, heard voices in order to be most efficacious in their work. In addition, inclusion/exclusion in their professional communities impacted

paraeducator motivation and feelings of worth. Inclusion was motivating. Exclusion was demotivating. As described earlier, most motivation to perform well, came from paraeducators' sense of self, from within. The paradox of professional motivation for and by individual paraeducators was in tension with the professional demotivation of exclusion, especially for recognizing the paraeducator as an expert on a child for a teaching team and within the school building. R. M. shared:

> We were often told that it didn't matter how many of us were in there [the classroom]; we didn't equal a certified instructor, you know? She [the teacher] would say, "Five or six paras don't equal a certified instructor." So that's the thing that I always come back to . . . She had to know how hard we were working, and we're teaching her classes and getting beat up literally every day: bit, kicked, stuff thrown at us. But she really believed that she could have done the job without anybody else in there [in her classroom].

R. M.'s description told a story of both verbal and physical oppression. Her story did not always coincide with the school's definition of paraeducator roles. Her experience also reflected unintended "lessons" from the teacher, such as, *paraeducators have no value*. The teacher made her derogatory comments about paraeducator value in front of the students, which encouraged devaluation, prejudice, and oppression against paraeducators.

Teacher perceptions and expectations can contribute positively to subsequent positioning and to inclusion when working with paraeducators to support student goals. M. F. shared: "I certainly believe that the teachers and educators that treat paraeducators as part of their overall plan are very inclusive about it." He then added:

> There are certainly those who treat paraeducators as very much separate and apart and almost as an afterthought. Well maybe not in a negative way, but almost certainly separate, but not as inclusive.

M. F. acknowledged the broader reality of paraeducators' presence and potential usefulness in the classroom as "an afterthought."

M. F. shared in greater detail in his follow-up interview regarding his inclusive experience as a paraeducator in another country.

> In [my home country], the classroom teacher would more fully utilize the paraeducator in regard to planning and feedback/analysis. Lesson Plans had to be available for any adult in the classroom with room for comments, and also posted by the entrance door for any visitors. Therefore, paraeducators were better included, felt valued, and more effectively employed. In short, there was a greater purpose for paraeducators, and a greater idea/intent for how to use them.

M. F. clearly articulated the cultural contrasts regarding paraeducators in his home country versus his urban school district in the U.S.A.'s Pacific Northwest.

Some paraeducators suggested that including students with special needs may result in better inclusion and recognition of paraeducators and their valuable roles and responsibilities. For instance, C. K. reflected on the relational experiences she had encountered. C. K. described that the cultural assumptions have long been that those students with severe disabilities will never really learn. Her description conveyed her thoughtfulness as she dissected her personal vision and purpose; she ultimately arrived at the assertion all students can learn:

> And I . . . again, that's like that exclusion, like I don't see you as able. I don't see you as capable to rising above where you are. I think that you have to have that long vision. You

> have to be able to see that my purpose . . . personally, my purpose here for this child is that this student can do this right now. They are someday going to be in the world. I want to know how much they can do. I want to know; can they ever learn to climb up something. *Get over the fear of this* [emphasis added to reflect speaker's tone]. To kind of come to recognize that their body . . . this is their hands. And their hands can grab this, and carry this weight, or do this, or whatever. And so, we [paraeducators] hold the bar high. We have great expectations for them to do. And we push to get that done.

C. K. strategically outlined how she and other paraeducators helped students face fears and challenges that affected their growth and learning outcomes. Including SPED students as learners is a much-needed paradigm shift. Additionally, including SPED students as part of the community, such as in student recognitions, could improve paraeducator visibility and inclusion by proximity.

Summary of Findings From the General Lens

Synthesizing, the data from the general lens revealed three major findings.

1. Paraeducator relationships impact and often describe their positionality. Relationships were important to participant paraeducators. Paraeducators positioned themselves through
2. self-definition, using primarily existential phrasing (I am . . .). Their self-awareness impacted their self-valuing and their relationships with their nuclear families. "Work family" took secondary status to nuclear family. For the participant paraeducators, the most important descriptors of their relationships with their students were *trust*, the process of *relationship building*, and an almost parental relationship to students, "they are my children." Participant paraeducators' with students were deeply connected to

relationships with parents and/or caregivers, but when paraeducators were positioned as less valuable than teachers and not as professionals, their lack of inclusion on the teaching team disrupted potential valuable communication with parents and/or caregivers. Relationships with other paraeducators tended to be location- and time- dependent. That is, when working in a shared space, such as a room,

3. inter-paraeducator bonds were easier to form than were when isolated in a general education classroom or as a 1:1 paraeducator. Also, relationships with other classified staff were cordial and often developed from needing to help each other. Substantive relationships with administrators rarely existed due to the hierarchy. Paraeducators are positioned at the bottom of the organization.
4. Paraeducators recognized their professional need for full membership in the teaching culture through presence and active voice. Specifically, participant paraeducators noted the need to belong in the teaching team, in planning, and IEP/504meetings.The participant paraeducators positioned themselves as non-certificated teachers and guides who needed information to serve key stakeholders, especially students and parents/guardians, well. According to paraeducators, inclusion required the attributes of timely communication, shared professional language, collaborative training, collaborative classroom teaching, and collaborative teaming. Exclusion, which resulted in dismissive positionality of paraeducators by others was marked by an absence of timely communication, shared professional language, a lack of collaborative teaming. Paraeducators identified three areas vital to changing their positionality – inclusion in the teaching team, inclusion in planning, and inclusion in IEP/504 meetings with parents and school staff.

5. Paraeducator inclusion/exclusion is culturally dependent—on the building and district cultures, as well as on dominant U. S. values. Instances of inclusion reflected positive positionality of paraeducators by themselves and others. Inclusion was motivating for paraeducators. Exclusion reflected negative positioning of paraeducators by others. Exclusion was demotivating for paraeducators. Paraeducators ultimately felt responsible for their own inclusion. Cultural barriers to inclusion included such factors as attitudes and perceptions around formal education, abilities/disabilities, and placement in the schools of classrooms and other resources.

In the next section, I present a brief review of the tenets of critical theory and the findings through the critical theory lens as norms experienced by the participant K-5 paraeducators.

Findings: Using a Critical Theory Lens

As I moved through the interviews and immersed myself in the data, it was fascinating for me to see and to hear how the paraeducator participants' content and tone fit easily into the tenets of critical theory: self-critical, explanatory, practical, and normative. A brief review of the substance of these four tenets follows.

Self-critical. As discussed in Chapter II, in critical theory, to be self-critical means to be self-reflective and to analyze one's own experiences (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972) in the context in which they were experienced, sociopolitically, culturally, and historically.

For Freire (1970/2000), critical theory's *self-critical* was akin to consciousness-raising (see also hooks, 1994). Participants examined their experiences as they voiced them and sometimes came to understand that what they felt about their experiences was influenced by their positionality as paraeducators.

Explanatory. In critical theory, *explanatory* is an epistemological process, making

meaning about why things are the way they are (Kellner, 2003). Explanatory responses included very personal descriptions of why things are the way they are for the paraeducators and their students. The paraeducators made discoveries about the meaning of their experiences as paraeducators in tandem with their remembering and describing specific events or feelings and their contexts. They learned from themselves. Their levels of meaning-making, in terms of being explanatory, became more politically aware and power-nuanced.

Practical. In critical theory, *practical* implies the ability to apply self-criticism and explanation to solving everyday and systemic dilemmas (Kellner, 2003). The paraeducator participants expressed new knowledge—constructing the new knowledge from the self-critical and explanatory tenets as they voiced their intellectually and emotionally lived experiences. As a result, they gained agency and sometimes described changes they wanted to see happen, which is the essence of the practical tenet of critical theory.

Normative. In critical theory, *normative* means identifying the norms in practice and suggesting new norms needed and ways to implement the new norms (Bohman, 1996, as cited in Carr, 2005). As the participant paraeducators provided their narratives, it was my job as the researcher to synthesize from their coded data the shared norms (themes and subthemes) that they were experiencing in this urban Pacific Northwest school district. The participant's experiences spoke to specific identified norms which follow. The participants actually identified some of the structural and systemic norms in place regarding their other-defined positionality. The participant paraeducators gave voice to common practices in the building and teaching culture.

Normative also means, for the participants, developing their own norms and language for being self-critical. Thus, while identifying externally-constructed and imposed norms in the K-5

urban public school system, paraeducators were also finding meaning in their language—their language around their experiences, not the language of the hegemony. This new language has the potential to lead to new norms, self-identified by the paraeducator participants, as to what is less prejudiced—from their perspectives—in terms of paraeducator positionality (See Chapter VI).

Using a Critical Theory Lens: Findings About Norms Experienced by Paraeducators

As a phenomenological researcher, I also could not ignore my theoretical framework. critical theory, as a lens, made clear the hegemonic norms experienced and narrated by the participant paraeducators across the data. The norms identified represent some of the facts about paraeducators regarding positionality and some of the hurdles they must surmount in order to experience different positionalities (see Appendix H).

Each participant identified norms during their interviews, which included: (a) paraeducators expect and seek job satisfaction; (b) paraeducators experience low status; (c) paraeducators experience institutional/systemic inattention to basic job needs; (d) paraeducator safety needs are often ignored; (e) invisibility: paraeducators are to be not seen and not heard; and (f) paraeducators experience continuous anticipatory stress.

Norm 1: Paraeducators expect and seek job satisfaction. From the participants' narratives, it is clear they expect and purposefully seek to find job satisfaction. The paraeducators described expecting and finding job satisfaction through trust and relationship-building with their students, and through feeling like they were doing something for the greater good, contributing to something bigger than themselves. Collective data from the participants identified expecting and seeking job satisfaction as a thematic norm. The sub themes of Norm 1 included: *expectations*, *self-efficacy, enjoying challenge and change*, *feeling needed/useful,* and *serving the greater good.*

Expectations. R. M. stated that as part of her job satisfaction that she expected to feel part of a classroom team when she said, “I hope to feel that way [ironically, included] every time I go to a new classroom.” C. K. did not know what to expect, saying, “It’s [being a paraeducator is] very rewarding. I was very surprised.” R. B. said, “I can’t see me being unhappy in what I do.”

Self-efficacy. Other participants identified doing their jobs well as an element of job satisfaction. R. M. related that, “I’m getting to where I’m really able to do my job well.” J. J., a full-career paraeducator, found self-efficacy in loving her job, “. . . or I wouldn’t still be doing what I do.”

Enjoying challenge and change. M. F. shared that he likes to learn and grow and that his job is quite challenging; however, he also enjoys the variation. He said, “[I]t is very rewarding [because] it’s a job that is constantly evolving and changing.” R. M. described her engagement in her job challenges by saying, “I felt like I was making a difference.”

Feeling needed/useful. R. F. shared how she experiences success by feeling needed, “these kids need someone.” K. H. shared about what she finds to be most meaningful about being a paraeducator and how she feels connected, “[It] is making the connections with students . . . by the end of the day, you feel like you’ve been successful.”

Serving the greater good. S. N. shared about how feeling needed contributes beyond her own interests and to the interests of the students she serves. “. . . because you get to go into the classroom and feel like you [are] needed there.” A. J. also shared about having a larger purpose:

> I think being a paraeducator is really important job. I really like working with children; I really get a lot of satisfaction when I can help teachers and help students.

Job satisfaction and the expectation to receive satisfaction on the job was also identified

by V. T. in her service orientation:

> I feel like being a paraeducator plays to my strengths—not just my "Love Language," but [in] doing acts of service. It is what I was born to do, just being there for everybody, participating in the big picture all the time and being part of the big group.

In summary, for the participants, job satisfaction, as an expected norm of employment, came from relationship building over time, utilizing one's strengths, helping students and teachers, being a part of a learning community, and acts of service.

Norm 2: Paraeducators experience low status. Another norm identified by paraeducators is low status in the school and district hierarchies. Being left out of critical communication loops regarding students they work with and not being included as team members can often lead to a lack of respect for paraeducators and exacerbate their reduced status in comparison to other employees. Low status included sociocultural status and pay status.

Sociocultural status. V. T. shared that not having earned an advanced degree reduced her status. She said:

> I think I would say one negative thing about being a paraeducator in defining myself is that I don't possess degrees of education that other people possess, and so sometimes you may feel very isolated even though it's not true. The degrees are part of it, but that shouldn't be your identity to prove that you are a success at doing your job.

V. T.'s example shows her feeling judged by others and isolated from others due to her lack of a formal education pedigree, generally acknowledged to be higher educational training.

R. B. shared her self-critical analysis from earlier years in her career regarding low status, "I was called stupid and dumb and what not; there was a clear division." "I was the maid, I was

the gopher." She explained how being called names and having to perform as a maid contributed to her immobilization and low status, leaving her in a state of dysfunction:

> It was not a good situation. I ended up walking out the door and said, "I quit," because every day I woke up crying. All of a sudden, it's like I got a backbone and I thought, "I'm better that this. I don't need to be treated this way," and I went for help because I wasn't getting it from her [the certificated teacher].

This example shows R. B.'s decision-making process and finding agency to move towards change.

Pay status. Low pay also contributes to low status. The issue of inequitable financial compensation, including benefits, came to the forefront of paraeducator's not feeling valued. Pay status highlighted the division between the personal need to feel valued and the sober reality of living below poverty level. V. T. shared:

> Recently, I spoke at my first [school] board meeting last spring about wages. I didn't have a script or anything. I just impromptu and went up and said, "Please help us have a livable wage."

Sociocultural status and pay status contributed to low status, or positioning, of paraeducators. Regarding both sociocultural status and pay status, paraeducators in this study were aware of their negative positioning and were speaking up.

Norm 3: Paraeducators experience institutional/systemic inattention to basic job needs. Institutional/systemic disregard for basic job needs, as represented by the data, is the practice of making work-life more difficult for paraeducators than work-life needs to be. Institutional/systemic disregard for basic job needs included four subthemes: (a) time needs; (b) space needs; (c) communication needs; and (d) representation needs.

Time needs. Most participant paraeducators expressed a lack of time for reflection and time to adjust throughout the day. For instance, V. T. expressed desiring time built into her schedule for teaming with her certificated teacher: “it would be nice to have 15 minutes built into our schedule where I could debrief with my main teacher.” In contrast, M. F. shared that the time structure of his job inadvertently lent itself to reflections upon personal success regarding having time needs met and student learning. M. F. found that his helping to run the English Language Opportunities (ELO) program in the mornings before breakfast and grade-level schooling provided positive time with the students. The early day timing was positive for himself and the students. He reflected, “Yeah, I’m here before anybody else at 7:30 [a.m.]. I, myself, help to run the ELO in the morning. So, we teach coding and expose the children to that.” M. F. also found autonomy in “my math booster service,” the second activity in the ELO program. Regarding time, he continued on to say that early mornings had fewer distractions for students as there were so may fewer “influences on them” (aka people). He said:

> I think that's a great time of the day. There are not as many influences on a child's life at that point. So, the students are all quite focused. They're all quiet . . . there's nothing to stifle them at that time of the day.

M. F. continued in his follow-up conversation:

> It can also be a real boost to have them in a positive learning environment earlier in the day. The occurrence of negative external influences can even be avoided (or at least minimized) for those students that are extra sensitive [psychosocial safety] or have special needs [socially/emotionally/behaviorally].

Time to plan. H. M. expressed regarding lack of time to plan, “Yeah, my own time. I stay late all the time. Sometimes I don’t have planning time,

There are many competing forces between continuing with the daily schedule, and time for planning. H. M., as an example, used unpaid time.

Time clock. S. N. described the time clock system as challenging. S. N. recognized that small children had to wait for her to punch the time clock before they could be received from their morning bus ride. S. N. said, "I feel sorry for the kids because I know that they're going to be waiting the five or ten minutes until the time I actually start." She felt that her students had an extended waiting period due to the time clock system.

C. K. described strong feelings and frustration as she approached her workday, such as being treated as "I'm not responsible" and the implication that she was "going to cheat or lie" about her hours and minutes worked. She related:

> When I get to work in the morning, you have this window of time that you have to be there, to clock in. I've gotten used to it. I was not happy with it. I found it . . . because of the way it began and still is as far as I understand, teachers don't have to clock in, regular teachers. Paraeducators have to clock in. Everyone else has to clock in . . . that to me says I'm not responsible. I'm not capable of . . . or reliable, or ethical enough to be at work. There's something in there that says, I'm going to cheat, or lie, or not get my work done, or whatever . . . and being a paraeducator, you have a lot more work to do than can be done within the hours of the day, because of the needs of the kid, of the children. The students' needs have to be met, and you try to do it within the window of time you are given . . . your workload is enormous.

Certainly, C. K.'s feeling that others were not bound by the time-clock indicates poor transparency regarding communication and poor understanding of policies and procedures, which furthers the feeling of being othered. She shared about her frustration with the time-clock

system. At the core of her frustration was that she felt she was not meeting the needs of her students due to lack of planning time included in her workday. She was not being treated as a professional.

Space. M. F. shared in his follow-up interview that he has his own classroom space that he works in with his students. M. F. said:

> When setting up the room, it was important to think about how best to utilize the space in order to reduce potential distractions whilst also dividing up the room for different purposes, both a necessity as I work with children with a variety of special needs. The psychology of the space had to be factored in.

Thoughtful consideration of his students' needs could affect student behaviors.

S. N. shared from her follow-up interview regarding space:

> I have felt very separated from the general school population at times. It can sometimes feel like a self-contained classroom is not a part of the school, but just shares the space.

Institutionally, thoughtful use of space allows for paraeducators to function more efficiently and can also impact their feelings around inclusion as part of the school community.

Communication needs. Paraeducators experience disruptions that are not scheduled. K. H. said:

> The schedule does not change, but sometimes working with students might change. For example, I may be working with a student. I might have a time frame for working with a one-on-one with a student, who has an off day, so in that particular case, I'm not necessarily working with him/her, academically, I'm more or less sitting with the student and talking them through his/her issue that he or she had for that afternoon or that morning. And so then it requires me to just sit and listen and . . . try to problem solve

> what is going on and what's the real issue we had that caused the disruption of the child being able to learn, for that hour. That kind of a disruption, but not scheduled.

Supervising teachers sometimes do not give paraeducators the necessary information, such as lesson plans prior to the lesson, for them to perform their jobs. In this case, with an emphasis on their student learner. R. F. shared:

> The teacher in the room doesn't include her [the student's] disability [blindness] when it comes to activities. He'll leave it on me to do and he'll only tell me the day of, maybe the day before, "This is what we are doing." And so, I have to quickly, on the fly try to come up with something, which isn't fair to her because by the time I come up with it, the activity has already passed. It's not going to be meaningful for her. It's not my job to have to be the one to come up with all that stuff anyway, to come up with activities. That's not my job. That's the teacher's job.

H. M. shared her frustration with the lack of institutional communication to teachers about what a paraeducator's job is and is not. She said:

> You can have many feelings when you work, you know. So, sometimes you're frustrated with somebody that they don't understand what my job is. Sometimes they just want me to do a job like this one and then after that do another one, as they wanted. This is a problem.

Representation needs. Paraeducators have a union, which they are required to join. Union dues will be taken from their paychecks regardless of whether they participate in or want to join the union. Union meetings are held after work hours to discuss policy and procedure rather than personal grievances**.** Some of the participants suggested that connecting with the union and having their own opinions recognized or validated would provide opportunities for

involvement and personal growth.

S. N. shared about her experience as a para representative with the union:

> I have actually been a para rep for the union, and I went to probably three or four meetings, and I felt like I was in there just to hear what they had to say. They didn't really want to hear what I had to say, so I don't feel like I've ever really been able to be a part of that policy-making piece even when I was in a position where I could have.

In contrast, R. B. suggested that her participation with the union influenced her leadership aspirations and professional practice over her years of service. Her participation in the union had given her agency and voice to participate in important decision-making regarding issues that affected paraeducators at the state level:

> I'm not afraid to speak up when I think something's not right, but I think a lot of things like the bill on paraeducator training--people had enough sense to bring paras in to ask what our needs are. The subcommittees have been working long and hard hours. I've put two years into it . . . I think 10, 15 years ago, that wasn't even a part of the process. I think now they're [the state legislature is] seeing that if you want to have something that's going to be genuine, that people are going to be interested in, will want to participate [in], you have to have the input from the paras. Like I said, I think my unionism is the key to that one.

S. N. and R. B. both were candid and shared their stories of relationships with union professionals. R. B. went on to share about policymakers, which enabled her to deal with the neglect of policymakers regarding paraeducators' voices when developing new policy concerning paraeducators. "I let people know what I think when something is not right." Unions

can be a great resource and support for paraeducators to create agency, to give voice to their ideas and opinions, and to develop leadership and change.

Institutional/systemic inattention to basic job needs is a norm that paraeducators still experience. Basic job needs are the foundation for positionality, agency, voice, value, and respect.

Norm 4: Paraeducators safety needs are often ignored. The safety of paraeducators is rarely considered during the school day. Subthemes revealed under the thematic norm of safety included physical safety, emotional safety, psychological safety, and intellectual safety.

Physical safety. Physical safety regards the physical aspect of the repeated injury of paraeducators, perpetuated by students. R. M. shared her experience regarding physical safety. and the various ways that she could be injured. “She [the certificated teacher in the classroom] had to know how hard we were working, were teaching her classes and getting beat up literally every day . . . bit, kicked, stuff thrown at us.” R. M. implied that the teacher should have intervened in some way, but did not.

J. J. also shared her about her physical safety, “. . . people probably don’t realize that we get kicked and pinched and bit, and all that, sometimes daily.” J. J. implied that more people (perhaps teachers, administrators, parents, etc.) should be aware that paraeducators are at risk for injury as a daily part of their job.

R. F. shared an outside perspective from a concerned family member: “You shouldn’t be doing stuff like that, getting hurt every day.” In this example, the family member was aware of R. F.’s injuries but did not offer a viable solution.

Emotional safety. Emotional safety can be disrupted by acts of physical harm. When the stress level paraeducators experienced increased, the amount of emotional safety they experienced, including keeping students safe, decreased. Keeping students safe, in this case, generated a level of needing to be clairvoyant, "whose behavior is going to lead what," R. F. described the stress level required in order to anticipate student behaviors and keep safe. R. F. shared:

> When she [the student] bit me right on my leg, and I got a bruise, it was that big. It was like six inches across . . . I had to end up going to the principal . . . breaking down in tears in the principal's office.

Feedback from supervising teachers can lead to ignoring or minimizing the emotional safety of paraeducators. C. K. shared how she received feedback regarding emotional stress:

> When I came in, I didn't have a clue. And you're just tossed in there . . . [The teacher said], "No, just go, you'll do it, you're great, you're fine, you're just meant for this job." It's scary sometimes.

Psychological safety. Practically, R. M. constructed new knowledge to create a different pathway for herself. She recognized that the teacher had the power to actively engage in the oppression of paraeducators by not acknowledging the paraeducators or their physical injuries. R. M.'s self-discovery, and in her analysis of the situation, led to the emergence of her leadership, voice, and self-agency.

When asked about a typical day, H. M. shared saying, "You're busy all day." She continued and explained that she was assigned to crossing duty. Crossing duty entails stopping traffic and assisting students across busy streets when walking to and from school. She said,

> I'm worried about crossing because we don't get trained about how to cross kids. My big concern is crossings kids. I am afraid that something can go wrong . . . it is my responsibility . . . [I am] scared about that.

The phrases H. M. used "I'm worried," "I am afraid," and "[I am] scared"—demonstrates her lack of psychological safety. Her phrases— "we don't get trained" and "something can go wrong . . . it is my responsibility" show the institutional embeddedness of the lack of attention to her psychological safety. There was no operational attention to training the paraeducators in crossing, leaving H. M. feeling alone and responsible for the children rather the institution taking on its responsibility.

J. J. shared how she keeps her psychological safety in focus, "I don't take a lot of time to think about what others think about what I do." M. F. was direct in his positive thought by saying, "positive side—I've been a paraeducator for six years . . . I've seen some teachers really know how to implement paraeducators."

Psychological safety is important when having to perform duties and managing the unpredictability of student behaviors that require a quick physical response and the internal, quiet managing of focus needed for student safety.

Intellectual safety. Intellectual safety is built on trust. For the participant paraeducator intellectual safety included training, reciprocity, and consistency. C. K. shared that: ". . . they [the district systems] could give us more education, prepare us better to do our job. It's really hard to do this job knowing what I am doing . . . I could use some education."

J. J. share about reciprocity, ". . . when you lose teachers in these [SPED] programs and having to start from scratch, you need to give them [the teacher] time to figure it out, too."

S. N. shared about consistency:

> We're [the paraeducators are] just doing the best that we know how because no one's talked to us about, "I'm working on this with this child, and I would like it to be this way."

V. T. further explained about intellectual safety:

> When you look at the definition of what a para is supposed to be doing, those plans were already supposed to be in place and communicated to the para so the para can then put them into practice . . . we aren't there yet.

Systemic inattention to participant paraeducators' physical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual safety needs detrimentally impacts positive positionality. The routine lack of attention, action, and follow-through by teachers and administrators endangers the well-being of paraeducators: it positions paraeducators as not being worthy of humane treatment—externally and internally.

Norm 5: Invisibility: Paraeducators are to be not seen and not heard. Participant paraeducators experienced an expectation from the hegemonic district system that they should be invisible, both in presence and in voice.

Paraeducators are to be not seen. Paraeducator invisibility means that they are not acknowledged. For instance, R. F. described being used as a token display for administrators during a federal audit:

> For many years, I was in a program that I didn't . . . I think they respected me, but they didn't show it or didn't say it. Whenever they had big wigs from downtown come or from the program, they always brought them into my room to show off my room and the kids, but they never said to me, "You're doing a great job. This is why we come here." I had to make those assumptions on my own.

R. B. reflected on how administrators brought federal reviewers into her classroom during program audits on numerous occasions. Although administration had the opportunity to articulate in person that they were intentional regarding their visits to her classroom, they chose to leave without giving R. B. acknowledgement, leaving her feeling invisible. She was not seen.

Paraeducators are to be not heard. Being a visually-impaired paraeducator working with a visually-impaired student adds another layer to invisibility. R. F. shared about her current paraeducator position that she had wanted because she is also visually impaired. She shared about invisibility and not being heard:

> Everyone will be discussing something, and I am not included. I'm not told what the activity is that is going on, so therefore I can't prepare for what I need to do, which for her [my student] I need to prepare at least two days ahead of time because [of] some of the stuff I do. I use puffy paint, and I need it to dry.

Visually impaired students need adaptations to support their learning which require prior planning and preparation by the paraeducator. R. F. also needs accommodations from the lead teacher to do her job well. Since she is treated as invisible by the teacher and her requests for information go unheard, she cannot use her voice to provide necessary spoken details and tactile learning materials for her student.

Paraeducators take steps to advocate for their SPED students, with efforts that may slowly change systemic assumptions. SPED student invisibility often represents paraeducator invisibility.

C. K. shared about her experience with invisibility and inclusion. She said, "The inclusion doesn't always happen automatically. The SPED community is still often invisible." She went on to say:

> Include us in everything. They're [the SPED students] not invisible. They see you. See them, please. And a lot of, like I said, comes from I think an uncomfortable, [place] that the administration or the other teachers sometimes are just not used to [us] . . . please see us. We're here.

C. K.'s reflection expressed how she used leadership and agency to help overcome the invisibility that the special education students and paraeducators experienced in the school building by teachers and administration. While she focused on speaking about SPED students, it was also clear that she was speaking about her own invisibility as a SPED paraeducator.

A huge part of paraeducators' days with their students includes transitions. These transitions bring about many changes and movement (into and out of inclusive environments); yet paraeducators and their students experience invisibility and often are unheard in inclusive environments. V. T. said:

> I've had the opportunity of working with a student in a wheelchair, and so I had to be able to come into classrooms. Teachers have a certain way they want their classrooms set up, and then you come in and go, "That isn't going to work, because how is my student going to be able to join the group in the front of the class when we got to get a wheel chair through here?"

V. T. shared about transitions and valuing space within the classroom environment and concern regarding modifications for her student who uses a wheelchair.

Invisibilityto be not seen and not heard, is a norm that participant paraeducators experienced in this study—individually, through their students, and through the continuous transition process.

Norm 6: Paraeducators experience continuous anticipatory stress. Another norm that paraeducators experience is continuous, anticipatory stress. Anticipatory stress is when one thinks about the possible outcomes of a situation and worries that the outcome might be negative. Anticipatory stress has different effects on paraeducators, and it can look and feel threatening or challenging. One element of anticipatory stress leaves the individual asking, "Will this happen again?" which contributes to the cycle of stress. Anticipatory stress is a logical outcome of the other found norms experienced by paraeducators in this study.

Factors influencing anticipatory stress. Participant paraeducators experienced both anticipatory stress and modes of alleviating anticipatory stress.

> R. M. described her "main job" as being the anticipator for her student. She said:
>
> My main job is to watch my student for signs of seizure, to help her get from place to place because she has CP [cerebral palsy], and there are places that are just difficult for her to navigate.

Anticipating and watching for seizures and negotiating the environment for R.M.'s student, while part of the job, were expressed by R. M. as stressful, anticipatory, and continuous.

R. M. described how she anticipated stress at the beginning of her day and how it continued throughout her day by saying, "I can usually tell when she [my one-on-one student-to-paraeducator] gets off the bus if we're going to have a difficult day. Her [my student's] bus is late every single day." It has almost become an expectation that R. M. and her student will have to "wait in the hall, . . . so we don't interrupt the Pledge [of Allegiance] or whatever." R. M. continued, "I think it's important that people understand that we [paraeducators] are constantly adapting [to our students needs and to other's expectations]. Knowing that her student's bus would be always late, and that R. M. and her student would not

be able to participate in opening activities of the school day in the same manner as everyone else caused anticipatory stress."

J. J. shared how she experienced anticipatory stress from working in a self-contained classroom with SPED students: "It's trying and trying [different accommodations] and not giving up on them [the SPED students]." She also said, "So it's a lot to figure out and work around and be productive on a daily basis." Her work was continuous and not always productive; she expressed that she thought about it frequently. J. J.'s desire was to be productive and successful in meeting the needs of her students, especially in isolation in the self-contained classroom. She wanted to meet her own and other's expectations. Having to "figure [it] out," including the workarounds, caused J. J. anticipatory stress.

R. B. shared how anticipatory stress for her was created from past visits to the staff room. She said:

> It used to hurt my feelings when I'd go in [to the staff room] and hear a teacher talking about Joey, and Joey did this and Joey did that . . . to me, that hurts me, . . . because I [think] there's some good in every child.

R. B. took her student's experiences to heart. It hurt her emotionally and philosophically/ morally when she heard colleagues talk negatively about students because she believed in the good of each child. The repetition of this experience—overhearing negative gossip about one's students or another's—caused anticipatory stress for R. B. when visiting the break room.

S. N. experienced anticipatory stress as she added becoming a full-time student to her job responsibilities as a full-time paraeducator**.** "I am quite excited and also terrified because I have to do this [get my AA, . . . get my BA, and . . . get my Special Education Certification] while working."

V. T. shared about anticipatory stress during travel time and logistics to attend meetings and professional development:

> To get to some of these places, they do set times a little bit later for us, but by the time you travel, you are so tired. How much easier [it would be] if it [training] were in a central location. It does make a difference mentally when you're driving to get there.

Driving is stressful. Am I going to be on time? What if I am late? These questions reflect V.T.'s narrative about anticipatory stress regarding commuting professional development sessions.

Reduction of anticipatory stress. Paraeducators may be required to respond to situations that they might not have anticipated or that appear suddenly. The participants reached different levels of critical thinking and self-awareness as they responded to how they reduce experiencing anticipatory stress.

K. H. reduced anticipatory stress by meeting with her supervising teacher before the school day began. If anything, new arises, then they were both aware of it. She said, "I'm aware of it before the day begins."

M. F. shared how he reduced anticipatory stress by using a specific time in his schedule to meet with teachers. "I'm quite fortunate that I finish the morning activities at 8:30, and I have between then and 9:00 to go down and speak to the teachers. It's a huge benefit."

For M. F., a simple 30 minutes reduced his anticipatory stress each day.

V. T. identified herself as a "peace-maker," which implies that she anticipates both having to make peace and that being a "peacemaker" is a solution-oriented stance regarding anticipatory stress.

B. P. provided a solution to paraeducator anticipatory stress by saying:

> I almost wish they had . . . almost like a supervisor of paras, somebody that would be able to go around and see what's working in some schools and see what's struggling in others.

B. P. was asking for data to influence solutions to paraeducator anticipatory stress.

Stress levels of paraeducators heightened with low levels of emotional safety, which included keeping children safe. Keeping students safe in these cases often required being a first response person during a student crisis. The participants each described their experiences with having an awareness of anticipatory stress as they performed their daily jobs. Paraeducators may be required to respond to situations that appear suddenly. While the paraeducators anticipated these stressors, they had to live with the unpredictability.

Summary of Findings: Critical Theory Lens

The identification of norms experienced by paraeducators in this urban Pacific Northwest school district, as they gave voice to their narratives, included: paraeducators expect and seek job satisfaction; paraeducators experience low status; paraeducators experience institutional/systemic inattention to basic job needs; paraeducator safety needs are often ignored; paraeducators experience invisibility; paraeducators are to be not seen and not heard; and paraeducators experience continuous anticipatory stress.

Expecting and seeking job satisfaction included general job expectations, self-efficacy, enjoying challenge and change, and serving the greater good. Low status included sociocultural and pay status. Experiencing institutional and systemic inattention to basic job needs included time needs, time to plan, time clock, space, communication needs, and representation needs. Safety needs often ignored included physical safety, emotional safety, psychological safety, and intellectual safety. Invisibility included to be not seen and to be not heard. Lastly, experiencing continuous anticipatory stress included factors influencing anticipatory stress and the reduction

of anticipatory stress.

Impact of Institutional/Systemic Norms on Participant Paraeducators

Overall, institutional/systemic norms experienced by participant paraeducators were reductive, othering, and disfranchising of them by the school district and educational community, and sometimes beyond. Regarding Norm 1: Paraedicators Job Satisfaction, I found that paraeducators wanted to be positioned by others as valued. Paraeducators recognized themselves as professionals. They also believed that they were necessary members of the teaching team and expressed their own growth potential as paraeducators over time in both skills an knowledge. Regarding Norm 2: I found that experiencing low status was demotivating and demoralizing for paraeducators. Norm 3: Institutional/systemic inattention to basic job needs is a norm that paraeducators still experience which effects positionality, agency, voice, value, and respect. Norm 4: I found that systemic inattention to participant paraeducators' physical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual safety needs detrimentally impacts positive positionality. Norm 5: Invisibility is a negative norm that participant paraeducators experienced in this study—individually and through their students. Norm 6: I found that anticipatory stress levels of paraeducators heightened with low levels of emotional safety, which included pressures to keep children safe.

Positionality Findings

Findings using a general lens and a critical theory lens revealed details and generalities about paraeducator positionality. When immersed in the data, I found that the two themes of how paraeducators positioned themselves and how others positioned paraeducators were at opposite ends of the spectrum in this school district. Rarely was there middle-or shared-ground. While paraeducators knew they were seen as less-than by others, they nevertheless positioned

themselves as professionals.

How Paraeducators Position Themselves

Paraeducators described their positioning of themselves in varying degrees and emphasized the importance of cultural location, communication, and expectations.

R. M. identified how she felt about her positionality, she said, “I’m lucky because I get to do other things in the classroom [besides watching my 1:1 student for seizures]” R. M. further explained: “It’s interesting how this [being a paraeducator] is secondary [to me being] a mom, . . . a wife, . . . and a homemaker. R. M. indirectly reflected upon how her position changed as her self-identity changed.”

R. B. connected institutional leadership as an element that affected her positionality. She said, “I really think leadership has a lot to do with how people think about themselves.” R. B. looked to her leadership for messages regarding her positioning.

Cultural location. H. M., a bi-lingual paraeducator, shared, “Sometimes you just have to accept everything surrounding you,” meaning the hierarchy and hegemony in regard to multilingualism. H. M. went on to say, “[I] love my job . . . to work at a school. I love the children.” “Enjoy” was a key word for H. M. She expected to and actually does “enjoy myself, enjoy with the kids, enjoy with everybody.” “With” is an additional key word for H. M., as it implies teaming and togetherness. It is also a very culturally-linguistic word. H. M. uses “with” differently from U.S. Americans using dominant America English. As a dominant person, I would “enjoy the kids,” and “enjoy everybody” which both have very different meanings from “enjoy with.”

Communication. K. H. shared about the importance of communication:

I think what is important in being an educator—a paraeducator [note how she corrects

> herself]—is being to be able to have good communication skills [and] training, so that you are . . . able to be on the same page as everyone.

Being able to be on the same page as other educators empowers her positioning as an equal, but also enables her to function in her job.

Expectations. A. J. shared about her positionality of not knowing what was expected of her initially, “I just kind of jumped in, and I really didn’t know what was expected of me.” A. J. continued describing how she has grown to position herself as part of an educational team, “It makes me really proud of what I do . . . and to be part of an education team.”

How Others Position Paraeducators

How others positioned paraeducators also had effects on paraeducators. Participant paraeducators described how others positioned them as conditional, separate, and that first impressions mattered.

S. N. shared how others positioned her as conditional and that it depended on the teacher that [one was] working with. She said:

> Some teachers are very . . . what's your input, this is what I want to accomplish. How do you think we could, as a team, accomplish this? And, some teachers that I've worked with are very, my way or the highway, and if you don't like it, then we have issues. So, it really makes a difference on how the teacher views us [paraeducators], and not all the teachers view you the same. Some teachers view you as, "You're a para. That means that you didn't get the education; you're not as smart as me." And others view you as, "You're a para. You're doing this because you care about the students, and I know you have experience doing this.

S. N.’s felt sense of conditional acceptance as a team member with certificated teachers appeared

to act as a reminder of the importance of teaming, especially from teachers, to give direction, explain desired outcomes, and most importantly, for paraeducators to have a voice.

C. K. shared her feelings regarding pay and respect: “As a paraeducator who did not finish her degree, you’re not compensated [re pay].” C. K. added, “. . . they are not already treating you along the lines of, ‘I will treat you well no matter what . . . I think it’s almost a classist sort of feeling.’” C. K.’s reflection described the contributing factors to others positioning her to low pay and an attitude of disrespect towards paraeducators.

M. F. mentioned regarding first impressions. He said: “I think that at face value, when I am first introduced to somebody, I think that they . . . you are almost treated as limited.” He continued;

> . . . there’s a perception that you are where you are in the hierarchy for a reason . . . I was viewed differently because you [as a paraeducator] are set apart. You are in your own little world.

M. F. viewed first impressions as important because of the perception’s others hold about paraeducators.

Positionality Summary

Both the general lens and the critical theory lens provided findings regarding positionality. I found that the data clearly articulated the hegemonic oppression of paraeducators in this district study in the Pacific Northwest. I also found that the paraeducator participants refused to succumb to being “less than,” and that they found other ways to position themselves positively, which were deeply personal and professional. They wanted to be positioned by others as valuable. They also believed that they were necessary members of the learning team and expressed their own growth potential as paraeducators over time in both skills and knowledge.

Metacognitive Interview Data and Findings

Four paraeducator participants completed tertiary, or metacognitive, interviews (see Appendix E for Interview Timeline). The purpose of these interviews was two-fold—first, to honor the paraeducator participants, who wanted to talk further, with opportunities for more self-critical reflection; and second, to gather reflective data from some interviewees on how participation in this phenomenological research study did or did not give them voice and opportunities for reflection and change—that is, how participation in this study impacted their positionality. Metacognitive interviews and findings speak to the importance of using phenomenological methodology. (See limitations of this study for further discussion).

In the metacognitive interviews, as in the Demographic Questionnaire and the initial interviews, questions matched and were presented in the same order. The questions posed to the paraeducator participants were:

1. Since we started this interview process, how has your thinking/awareness about your experiences as a paraeducator changed?
2. Since we started this process, how has your thinking/awareness about your positionality as a paraeducator changed?
3. What actions have you taken, if any, around your positionality as a paraeducator (e.g., talking to others, speaking up, getting more information)?

Four participants expressed interest and were re-consented. The same four participants responded in writing to the metacognitive analysis questions. Whether or not the participants answered the questions in order is unknown. Responses (textual data) were coded and analyzed thematically.

Metacognitive findings. The metacognitive level findings affirm using the phenomenological method for releasing the voices and documenting the lived experiences of paraeducators. Metacognitive interviews were asked and interpreted through the lens of critical theory and the phenomenological research process. While the general and critical theory lenses made clear the previously presented findings, the metacognitive findings were more driven by the participants' situatedness in the phenomenological research process. Three metacognitive interview themes were revealed: shared experiences as paraeducators; positionality changes in awareness and thinking; actions taken regarding positionality.

Shared experiences as paraeducators. Paraeducator shared experiences came from unity, deeper appreciation of their role, and self-efficacy.

R. M. captured her experience by sharing: "I think the most profound realization I have come to is that my experiences are not singular."

M. F. shared his self-reflection and his awareness of his experience describing a cycle of positive appreciation:

> "I think this shows a positive cycle—greater, more efficient use of paraeducators followed by deeper appreciation of the role of a paraeducator which is inevitably followed by an increase in trust/responsibility."

S. N. shared how her positionality changed her awareness and thinking. She said, "I just need to stand up for myself and be willing to say 'no' if I can't do something." S. N. showed that she could identify when it was appropriate for her to say 'no', which showed a positive change in her thinking towards self-efficacy and self-positioning.

Positionality changes regarding awareness and thinking. The paraeducator participants narratives describe changed perspectives through awareness of and thinking about their positionality.

R. M. was self-reflective with regard to her positionality stating, “I think personally it [participating in the study] showed how far off the radar we are to teachers and administrators who don’t see what we do every day.” S. N. also mentioned, “I have definitely started to choose to stand up for myself about things that are not meant to be my responsibility.”

M. F. shared his broad experience and stated, “I feel I have seen an increase in scope on how effective I [and other paraeducators] can be and the increase in productiveness of the ‘team’ when all members feel [and are] more involved.”

Awareness and personal reflection changed perspectives about paraeducator positionality which brought them clarity.

Actions taken regarding positionality. The paraeducator participants described actions that they have taken regarding their positionality through the union, using their voice and agency, and through servant leadership.

R. M. shared how her self-reflection with regard to the union opened up an opportunity in the area of communication stating, “I have signed up to be on the communications committee because I felt like we were lacking in that department. And it’s not fair to just expect someone else to take care of it when there is a desperate need and I have the time.”

S. N. described her new action of using her voice and agency for herself and other paraeducators by saying, “I have taken steps to speak up for paraeducators in my classroom, to hold those people in authority [i.e., teachers, responsible] . . . There are things that are not my responsibility in the classroom.”

B. P. summed up her experience by saying; “I take it to the cross and leave it there.” B. P. has strong self-help systems in place and practices faith-based servant leadership.

The metacognitive level findings revealed that paraeducators experienced similar growth during the dialogic and reflective processes of giving voice to their experiences; that voicing positionality increased paraeducator awareness and thinking about their positionality; and that paraeducators began to take action, especially around how others positioned them. While my research was neither intervention- nor action-oriented, it is important to note these effects as described by the participants.

Chapter Summary

The first objective of this chapter was to briefly present the narrative of my experiences with the paraeducators and their data. The data allowed me to be situated in the phenomenological research process in order to fill a gap in the current literature. The second and more primary objective was to explore the narrative experiences of the study participants as they expressed themselves. These experiences were collated and transformed into findings through both a general lens and a critical theory lens. This dialectical lens was important as the paraeducator participants shared their deep and rich lived experiences, providing data towards answering of the research questions. Each finding was explored through the experiences of the paraeducator participants, using excerpts to tell their stories to support the findings.

In this next chapter, I answer the research questions of my study. I then compare my research findings to the literature reviewed in Chapter II. I note how my study confirms and/or adds to the literature. Additionally, I note my study’s limitations and make recommendations for areas of further study.

Chapter V: Implications for Leadership and Change

In this chapter, I first provide an overview of the contributions my study has made to research and practice. Secondly, I present recommendations for leadership and change around the treatment, positionality, and acknowledgement of paraeducators based upon my study and within its context of critical theory. Then, I proceed to the lifetime of work that is still needed, beginning with local recommendations.

I begin with local recommendations for changes in beliefs and attitudes (or beliefs and values), which may result in changes of positionality and power around the professional work and work environments of paraeducators. Some of the recommendations came directly from the participant paraeducators and are noted as such.

Following, I present local recommendations for changes in systems and structures, which negatively influenced the lived experiences and positionality of the paraeducators studied. Again, some of the recommendations come directly from the participant paraeducators and are noted as such. Systems and structures can only be changed after critical assessment of the underlying values in practice (Freire, 2000; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Critical assessment continues the difficult transitions into the potentially more positive lived, professional experiences for the paraeducators.

Next, I present changes in practice which could improve the lived experiences and professional practice of the participant paraeducators in my study. Practice changes are the most easily implemented of the three levels of intervention I propose.

All recommendations provided are followed by specific actions that can be taken to implement the recommendations in practice. Theoretical support from the critical theory lens and a leadership lens is provided. Additionally, following the specific actions and theoretical support,

each recommendation includes assessment and modification steps, with transparent communication to all key stakeholders.

Towards the end of Chapter VI, I subsequently describe how this study has changed my theoretical orientation to leadership and change and how I will use my own *Framework for Valuing Paraeducators* to influence the values, systems, and beliefs in the educational environment. I also briefly address adult learning theory. Adult learning theory provides a set of principles and practices, which guide respect and civility, as well as andragogy, when working with adult learners. Adult learning theory links with change in some important ways and creates avenues of personal development by valuing the participant paraeducators' own actions and the actions of others. Reflective practice calls attention to discourse and how different perspectives are or are not honored.

Finally, I address how I will carry my thinking and research into my own future work on leadership and change, regarding education.

Recommendations to Improve the Lived Experiences of Paraeducators

In this section, I present the contributions of my study to the literature and towards improvement to the positionality and lived experiences of paraeducators. Then, I delineate the changes that need to happen to address adaptations and revisions in beliefs and attitudes.

Contributions of My Study to the Literature

My study adds to the research literature by including the voices of paraeducators and a frank discussion of their lived, professional experiences—as they expressed them, showing hegemonic oppression of paraeducators in this school district in the Pacific Northwest. It fills a gap in research methodology used to study paraeducators and provides a model for phenomenological study predicated on inclusion, trust, and respect—giving voice to

paraeducators and sharing their voices with other professionals. Their voices provided a different slant on previous research, such as their thematic emphasis on (a) relationships over relational roles and (b) job complexity—not just the large variety of tasks and transitions paraeducators make daily, but a professional emphasis students' academic support needs, behavioral amelioration, or health needs. My research showed that paraeducators view themselves as professionals and take satisfaction in serving the greater good. My study adds a critical theory lens to the literature, providing a social justice framework for reflection and analysis. And my study presents a beginning prototype for organic analysis at the metacognitive level by which participants can reflect upon the impact upon themselves of their participation in a phenomenological study about them.

Contributions of My Study to Improving the Lives of Paraeducators

In addition to the contributions my study adds to the literature around paraeducator positionality, my study also potentially contributes to improving the lives of paraeducators by documenting their own recommendations for systemic and practice change. Much change is needed, as the positionality of paraeducators has not much improved over the past 20 years. For instance:

- Paraeducator participants refused to succumb to being "less than"; they found other ways to position themselves positively, which were deeply personal and professional. They wanted to be positioned by others as valuable. They also believed that they were necessary members of the learning team and expressed their own growth potential as paraeducators over time in both skills and knowledge. They suggested acknowledgement.

- The paraeducators in my study wanted to be both included and supported with continual opportunities directed to develop their professional expertise to feed into the teaching and learning culture.
- They wanted their years of experience to be respected.
- They wanted to be seen and heard.
- They suggested that policy changes and changes in communication at all levels—both towards inclusion—could work towards improvement in paraeducators' sociocultural and pay status.
- They wanted basic job needs met, such as safety, designated places to put their personal items, and equipment, such as computers, that would enable their fuller participation in professional communication and development.
- Participant paraeducators saw themselves as both teachers and learners, and, for the most part, they were adult learners interested in transforming themselves and others through their influence in the school system.

Recommendations to Advance Changes in Beliefs and Attitudes

Underlying the educational system I studied, the lived experiences of the participant paraeducators revealed a culture of beliefs and attitudes which fostered systemic hegemony and negative positioning of paraeducators. In order to change the culture/the system, each member of the system must continuously engage in self-critical reflection (see Rodgers, 2002) to initiate and sustain change. My recommendations include confronting systemic prejudices, evolving the fear-based system into a culture of inclusion, and acknowledging and appreciating the formal and experimental credentials of paraeducators.

Confronting systemic prejudices. Administrators, teachers, and all school personnel must seek out and confront the systemic prejudices which make paraeducators and their students invisible.

The paraeducators recommended that they wanted to be seen and recognized for their presence in, and contributions to, their schools. I broadened their suggestions to, "Administrators, teachers, and all school personnel must seek out and confront the systemic prejudices [against paraeducators and others]."

Promoting inclusion by seeking out and confronting ingrained biases can be accomplished by:

1. Paid retreats, using an outside professional facilitator (such as the city's human rights coordinator) to guide the dialogic process to make observations, and to provide concrete exercises which close sessions with work accomplished and steps to take upon return to the educational environment;
2. Regular, social media check-ins as to what actions have been working, what is hard, and sharing ideas;
3. Inclusion of a column about paraeducators in the district monthly newsletter;
4. Check-ins on progress and barriers encountered, with time to suggest ways to overcome them, as one item on the agenda at all team, grade-level, and higher-level meetings;
5. At least one assembly per year to include the students and parents;
6. Quarterly documentation of steps taken, progress, and backsliding—quantitative and qualitative data. Make a hard copy notebook available to all staff of agendas, minutes, assessments, and next steps;

7. Annual climate surveys for each school in the district and for the district as a whole, with reporting out and follow-through, posted for all to see in staff lounge, in the school halls; and
8. Paraeducator representation by a paraeducator on all committees.

Creating dialogic space for paraeducators, other staff, teachers, specialists, and administrators through paid retreats are supported by Freire (1970/2000) and critical theory. Freire advocated for change against oppression, such as bias and prejudices, through the consciousness-raising process of dialogue. Likewise, critical theory focuses on analyzing the sociocultural, political, and economic structures (Bohman, 2015), which empower or disempower individuals and groups in relation to one another, especially within hierarchical and hegemonic organizations, such as the school district in which participant paraeducators practiced. Through paid retreats, educational key stakeholders may also learn to identify boundaries and/or barriers between them. Then, they will have common ground to convert inappropriate boundaries and barriers into appropriate, professional boundaries. They can use collaboration to transform (Prysor & Henley, 2018) the sociocultural educational landscape to improve the lives of paraeducators.

Regular, social media check-ins, a column about paraeducators and their professional practices, regular inclusion as an agenda item at all meetings, and at least one assembly per year are consistent with Dewey (1916/2001, 1959), who promoted the idea of having a strong, positive relationship between democracy and the educational experience. Education as an instrument of social change should be cooperative and shared. Using multimedia and face-to-face communication tools will facilitate ongoing progress towards confronting the systemic prejudices which render paraeducators invisible.

Quarterly documentation, annual climate surveys, and public postings of initiatives for sociocultural change are supported by authentic leadership (see Terry as cited in Northouse, 2010, p. 208) and the practice of transparency. Bennis (2009) promoted transparency and decried the not-sharing-of-information when he wrote, "Opacity blocks the free flow of information, the *sine qua non* of informed decision making and organizational health" (p. 207). Prysor and Henley (2018) suggested that "joint evaluation and review mechanisms" (Table 1, p. 2216) must be established in order to weave common ground into a transformative educational culture.

Paraeducator representation of themselves and by themselves is supported by Dahl (2009), who theorized that people often position themselves, or are positioned by others, as *victims* or *agents*. Both terms suggest that these people have brought the victimization upon themselves or have survived being victimized by taking an agentic stance, paradoxically being responsible in both cases. However, a victim may also suffer for reasons unrelated to his or her own agency (Dahl, 2009). Having representation and voice on all committees and at all of their meetings will help to change beliefs and attitudes around paraeducator positionality by initializing agency.

Evolve the fear-based system into a culture of inclusion. The fear-based system—which prevents paraeducator voice, recognition, and acknowledgement—should be conscientiously evolved towards a culture of inclusion and safety, and it must be sustained. The paraeducators recommended that they needed physical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual safety. The physical safety recommendation came from being hit and kicked by their students, from being disallowed from communicating directly with parents, and from receiving the hidden message that they should not file for Labor & Industries (L & I) compensation if they wanted to keep their jobs; Administrators had implied that paraeducator injuries were not claim

worthy. Their need for recommending emotional safety needs be met came from a general lack of empathy for their daily job duties. The paraeducators' psychological safety recommendation came from being unwelcomed in shared spaces, such as the teacher/staff lounges and in the classrooms. The paraeducator's recommendation for intellectual safety came from the assumption/belief that all paraeducators want to, or should want to, become certificated teachers. I contextualized the paraeducators' safety recommendations within the broader framework of sustained inclusion to actively seek paraeducator voice, to recognize their contributions, and to acknowledge their expertise—each of which will reduce fear in the workplace.

Consciously evolving and sustaining a culture of inclusion and safety can be accomplished by:

1. Making it a daily practice that the policy that all employees report, verbally and in writing, any physical injuries to the school and district safety administrators and Human Resources, without fear of retaliation;
2. Administrators insuring that safety committees have been established, meet regularly, include paraeducator representation of themselves by themselves, and that minutes and follow-up actions are accessible and posted promptly for all employees;
3. Instituting timely communication and shared professional language;
4. Practicing collaboration between certificated teachers and paraeducators using collaborative training, collaborative teaming, and collaborative classroom teaching;
5. Commenting publicly on improved teamwork among the school community;
6. Bringing back Years-of-Service awards; and
7. Using a paraeducator experience framework, including effective orientation, paraeducators' ideas for improvement, frequently scheduled meetings of

administrators and paraeducators, a paraeducator professional development roadmap, and equitable investment in technology for all employees—especially paraeducators and their students.

Creating a culture of inclusion and safety is supported by Shyman (2010). Shyman asserted that in order for paraeducators to feel that they can adequately do their job and feel fulfilled in doing it, they need to work in a stable environment, be given access to information, and have a voice in the system. Providing a culture of inclusion and safety, by meeting the conditions for a safe work environment (physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially) can be linked to living stated values, successful performance, and team building (Kusy & Holloway, 2010). "…[O]ne of the best ways to make sure that . . . values are clear is to engage your team in thinking about values as a part of everyday actions" (Kusy & Holloway, 2010, p. 54). Then, acts of communication can be aligned with values. Safety is a basic need (Maslow, 1970) and should also be a value.

Moreover, the law dictates mandatory reporting of all on-the job injuries, without fear of retaliation—an important piece of job safety and security (WAC 392-400-225). Likewise, monthly safety audits, the establishment of a safety committee, and the reporting of the audits and the committee's minutes, and timely follow-through by administration are also required by law (WAC 296-800-13020). Regulations also include the posting of all of these documents and records in a place visually accessible to all employees. I recommend that the records also be posted on-line, with streaming, text, and audio-visual formats available to accommodate all employees.

Actions to take regarding shared language and collaboration and making these actions transparent to all are supported by Rueda and Monzo's (2002) work on "the collaborative

relationship between teachers and paraeducators" (p. 1). Jansen Kraemer (2011) wrote that "Openness and transparency are vital if you want to develop the best team" (p. 105). I would add that the best teams are safe, use shared communication and transparency, and are recognized as individuals and as a group. Years-of-Service awards are a symbolic way to recognize individual commitment, experience, and longevity (see Bohman & Deal, 2008). Lasater and Fernly (2020) promoted using a paraeducator experience framework as a way of recognizing and fulfilling their professional needs through attention to the group of individuals and inclusion of the group of paraeducators as a whole. They also suggested that recognizing and fulfilling the needs of paraeducators required valuing them as diverse contributing professionals, who are valuable to the teaching team (Lasater & Fernly, 2020).

Acknowledge and appreciate the credentials of paraeducators. The formal and experiential credentials of paraeducators must be acknowledged and appreciated.

The paraeducators suggested that years of experience rather than professional training had a greater impact on increasing their knowledge, skills, abilities, and efficacy in serving students. I expanded their expertise to include their formal credentials as well.

Acknowledging and appreciating paraeducators' formal credentials can be accomplished by:

1. Educating teachers and administrators that paraeducators have either earned an Associates of Arts or Sciences degree and/or passed the national paraeducator credentialing test, as administered by the school district;
2. Educating teachers and administrators that paraeducators earn clock hours for professional development and that a certain number of hours are required annually;
3. Educating teachers and administrators that paraeducators must have current Right

Response Training and CPR in order to continue to practice professionally;

4. Educating teacher and administrators that paraeducators may earn subject matter certificates which follow standards of practice for educational personnel, based on available state and district funding; and
5. Announcing paraeducators' newly earned credentials at all-school meetings and in the newsletters on the district Web site, with specific ties to how these new formal credentials help the district to meet its mission, and vision, and current initiatives.

In order to support and evaluate paraeducators, teachers and administrators need in-depth knowledge about the requirements to become a paraeducator, the requirements regarding professional development to continue as a paraeducator, and additional certifications required of paraeducators in order to continue to practice. Additionally, teachers and administrators need to be intimately acquainted with the 5 core standards of practice which govern the accreditation of institutions of higher education, including technical and community colleges, and the competencies which paraeducators must gain through the curricula. Competencies include knowledge competencies and skill competencies. Districts are required to provide 14 hours of training (each year for two years for a total of 28 hours of training) on the paraeducator Fundamental Course of Study (FCS), when funding is provided by the legislature (Professional Education Standards Board [PESB], 2020; WAC 392-172A-02090). This means that in year two and each year thereafter that districts will be offering both the first-and second-year trainings. Teachers and administrators need to know how the skills and competencies learned during these paid hours of training dovetail with their own competencies and responsibilities as supervisory and teaching staff. Additionally, per State policy, paraeducators are not to seek FCS training outside of the district offerings (PESB, 2020). Subject matter certificates are offered as part of an

ongoing ladder of professional development for paraeducators (PESB, 2020). In order to improve the lived experiences of paraeducators, those who are responsible for supervising, evaluating, and providing required training for current and future paraeducators must be educated and trained on paraeducators formal credentials in order to acknowledge and appreciate them, which should then instill respect for paraeducators' and evolve their positionality beyond its current hegemonic state.

Announcing paraeducators' newly-earned credentials and ongoing professional development at all school meetings and in the district newsletter as a means of recognition is supported by Jansen Kraemer (2011), who wrote, "Actions showcase what an organization truly stands for, and demonstrate its commitment to acting not only on its own behalf but also for the greater good" (p. 170). Educational leadership, as an instrument of social change, should be based in current and reflective knowledge, responsibility, and celebrations of success.

Education as an instrument of social change should be cooperative and shared. Using multimedia and face-to-face communication tools will facilitate ongoing progress towards confronting the systemic prejudices which render paraeducators invisible.

Acknowledging and appreciating the experiential expertise of paraeducators can be accomplished by:

1. Designating a district paraeducator as a peer mentor. The duties of this peer mentor would be to unmask the hidden rules of the hegemonic culture for acknowledgement and discussion among paraeducators; and

2. Providing the opportunity for paraeducators to use years of experience in specialized areas to serve as equivalencies for subject-matter certificate courses.

Freire (1992/1994) supported peer-mentor-driven discourse, when he asserted that "critical, more precise knowledge" (p. 110), such as the hidden rules and what they mean is a right—a right of all, even the oppressed, a human right. Freire emphasized the importance of creativity as a way to remove social barriers and tensions, and he emphasized the transformative nature of dialogue and creativity. The process of transformation requires imagination, which to Freire, is the human being's most powerful tool.

Allowing years of specialized experience to replace formal credentialing coursework is supported by paraeducators' continued development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Acknowledging and appreciating the experiential expertise of paraeducators, which has long been undervalued, reflects appreciation for the paraeducators' lived experiences. Recognizing the potential contribution of paraeducators honors the paraeducators as no-longer-silent stakeholders by giving them agency. Paraeducators are both self-directed and responsible. Validating paraeducators' experience gives others the opportunity to hear paraeducators' voices and to seek them out as valuable resources.

Recommendations for Changes in Structures and Systems

The systemic changes I recommend are linked together by inclusion. They are:

- Participation in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and attendance at aligned Professional Development and district-wide curriculum training;
- Including paraeducators in teaching team meetings as full members of the team, including classroom, IEPS, and 504s, among others; and
- Paraeducators must be compensated at a living, professional salary.

Eaker et al. (2008) identified three cultural shifts that occur when a school begins to function as a PLC: learning, collaboration, and results. Paraeducators' attendance and inclusion

at PLCs and at district-wide curriculum trainings will facilitate learning, collaboration, and results by allowing paraeducators to experiment, take risks, and improve their professional practice. Dewey (1916/2001, 1959) suggested that a democratic civil society supports individual voices and worth. Full membership in the teaching team must be built from the inside out in order to build social and community capacity. Compensation for work done creates equity and inclusion and reduces hierarchy.

Recommendation for Changes in Leadership Practice

Recommendations for leadership and change are:

- To effectively change the positionality of paraeducators, instructional leaders with formal authority must champion the process to ensure progress; and
- There must be a commitment from leadership to create opportunities on all levels to access inclusion, sustain inclusion, and experience success.

Critical theory supports effectively changing the positionality of paraeducators with the presence of instructional leaders with formal authority to champion the process and to ensure progress. Leadership that generates opportunities on all levels to access inclusion, sustain inclusion, and experience success creates civility.

Implications for Leadership and Change: A Framework for Valuing Paraeducators

Clearly, the norms experienced by paraeducators in this study need to evolve into more positive practices. Institutional/systemic norms experienced by participant paraeducators were reductive, othering, and disenfranchising of them by the school district, the building communities, and the teaching culture, in general.

In this section, I propose a three-step framework for improving the lived experiences of paraeducators. Figure 6.1 introduces the framework of intent, action, and impact. I initially was inspired to create this framework by intent versus impact research around prejudice (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Husserl, 1962) and micro-aggression research (Runyowa, 2015). I have long been aware that intent (for change and fair treatment) does not always result in the intended actions and impacts. As represented by the results of this study, the lack of inclusion of paraeducators in discussions around policy, procedure, and teaching is clear. As implied by this study, the paraeducators' lived experiences, their expertise, and their voices have not been included in local educational reform and practice. Their voiced experiences and recommendations for change called to me for a recursive model to guide the teaching culture's key stakeholders—including paraeducators—into a cycle of dialogue, prioritization, action, assessment, reflection, and revision through a change process in the direction of the full inclusion of paraeducators as agentic and valued members of the teaching culture.

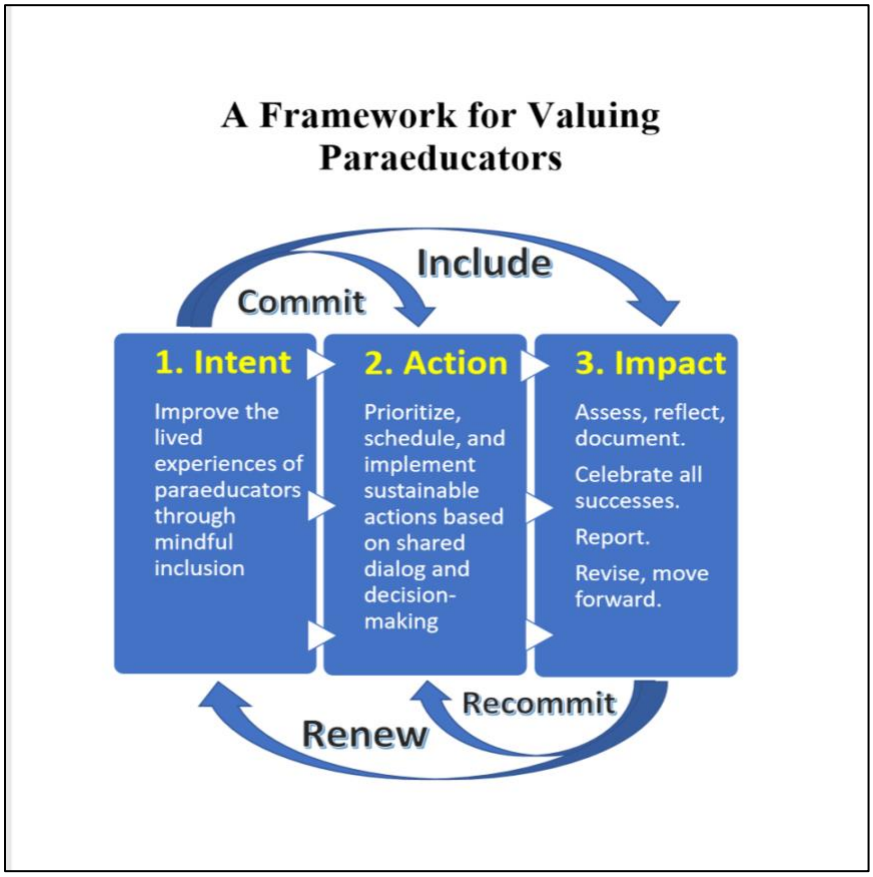
Thus, I present my *Framework for Valuing Paraeducators*. Figure 6.1, *A Framework for Valuing Paraeducators*, represents a three-step pattern that I derived from paraeducators' descriptions as they talked about their job satisfaction, perceived professional and personal value, and how others positioned them. Valuing paraeducators for their knowledge, expertise, and ideas must begin within an environment in which all key stakeholders commit to inclusion, respect, and shared voice, which also means active listening. Likewise, the key stakeholders (including paraeducators) must see themselves and others as integral to achieving the strategic intiatives of the schools and the district. Only then can the process of valuing paraeducators within a school system have meaning as their contributions to achieving the strategic intitiatives may be recognized, documented, and celebrated. As paraeducucators are mindfully included, all can also

begin to recognize how to implement changes in core attitudes and beliefs, as well as in systems and practices towards sustainable inclusion, and towards the elimination of dehumanizing hegemonic practices. The theory and practice of mindful inclusion, which I propose here, includes a constant cycle of recomittment and renewal. Valuing paraeducators through inclusion, like all social justice work, does not end; rather it is incremental and crosses generational and sociocultural divides. It is life-time work.

Within this context, my *Framework for Valuing Paraeducators* follows a three-step process, which begins with step one, *intent*, followed by step two, *action*, and step three, *impact.* The paraeducators in my study said even if others have intent with regard to acknowledging their value, it does not matter because the participants did not feel valued consistently. Intentions were not being followed through with action. Thus, the impact of their valuing (or de-valuing) by others was more frequently negative than positive. As well, along the postive-negative continuum of action, no data or results were collected or shared. *A Framework for Valuing Paraeducators* includes in its cycle a commitment to the process of inclusion as both action and value regarding paraeducators, a recommitment to inclusive action and change following an impact assessment, and a renewal of intention to improve the lived experiences of paraeducators within the teaching culture. The underlying assumption of my model is that paraeducators and other professionals are dedicated to improving instruction and practice—and thus improving the social and cognitive outcomes for their students. Glazer and Peurach (2015) wrote that "Teaching is largely consistent in its practice, but . . . it is static and lacks the means to integrate new knowledge or adapt to new demands" (p. 175). Valuing paraeducators needs to

Figure 6.1

Framework for Valuing Paraeducators



Note. Figure 6.1 was conceived and designed by Ann Flynn, 2019.

be treated as a new demand. The framework provides a way to collect and integrate new knowledge. The framework also keeps constant the goal of critical theory, which is to "[emanicipate] human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (Carr, 2005, p. 472). The purpose of critical theory is to change the reality of those oppressed by a system and its practices. My framework puts critical theory and critical dialog into action. It also supports changing the lived experiences of paraeducators from not valued to valued and from excluded to included. These changes will require shared leadership among all members of the teaching

culture, especially paraeducators. *A Framework for Valuing Paraeducators* provides a process for accomplishing the changes needed. In addition to critical theory, it is also supported by leadership theories, which I have drawn from my Antioch PhD expereince and beyond.

Intent

Intent is what we mean to accomplish, and it is generally based upon self-perceptions (I am compassionate; therefore, others will receive my acts of compassion as intended). Policy, such as standards of practice for paraeducators (Professional Educator Standards Board, PESB, 2020) and ESSA (2015) intend to create inclusion for paraeducators through voice and acknowledged shared professionalism. However, policy can be distant to the experiences of those at a local level, as evidenced by the lived experiences of the participant paraeducators in this study. Those involved in creating the policy may have been actively involved in the change legislation, yet the local actors were not. Policy may be perceived by many local keystakeholders as "[a] new generation of bureaucratic control intended to drive large-scale improvement" (Glazer & Peurach, 2015, p. 175). Instead, they suggested a movement towards occupational control, whereby each key stakeholder has a responsibility to find both common ground, such as shared values and commitments to student outcome and the betterment of the educational environment, and empowerment in and over their own positions (Glazer & Peurach, 2015).

In *A Framework for Valuing Paraeducators*, the intent is very specific—to improve the lived experiences of paraeducators through mindful inclusion. This means that paraeducators must be included as full participants in the change model. It should be championed by top leadership and certificated teachers, who are also full participants in the change model. The shared intent is the beginning of equity and liberation (see Freire, 1992/1994; hooks, 1994). It is the beginning of truly shared common beliefs and respectful interactions.

The basis for addressing intent, at all levels of leadership, lies in the premises and practices of servant leadership (Greenleaf, Covey, & Senge, 2002), which can become an normative factor when confronting the hegemonic oppression of a particular group. Servant leadership also focuses on the responsibility of the stakeholders to use their ethical and moral compasses (Keith, 2008). Servant leadership supports professional development of those whom the leaders are coaching. Using empowerment as a model, servant leadership facilitates building a supportive educational culture. Thus, Step 1: Intent is grounded in the shared commitment to the guiding ethic of improving the lived experiences of paraeducators through mindful inclusion.

Action

In *Framework for Valuing Paraeducators*, action is a process. Based on the commitment of the key stakeholders chosen to engage in "improve[ing] the lived experiences of paraeducators through mindful inclusion," action includes using shared dialog and decision-making to name, prioritize, and implement sustainable, positive change-oriented steps towards mindful inclusion of paraeducators as full members in the teaching culture. In this framework, actions may be delegated to individuals, such as the writer of the monthly column on paraeducators or the morning announcement maker. However, the authority and responsibility for making the actions and their content known to all key stakeholders is shared among the group following the sea-change process; it becomes a shared responsibility of the whole community. This means that not only are the actions communicated to the whole, but that the process is also communicated to the whole, and the whole buys into the process.

In this *A Framework for Valuing Paraeducators*, Step 2. Action is supported by the concepts of relational and transformational leadership. During action, action research may also be taking place.

Relational leadership. Relational leadership is process oriented and focusses on human connections in the workplace through a common purpose. It is inclusive and empowering. It is shared among members of a collaborating group and has the opportunity to influence cultural change (Brower, Schorman, & Tan, 2000). High quality connections, an outgrowth of effective relational leadership, have the ability to positively influence cultural changes, work identities, and organizational learning (Uhl-Bien, 2011). This study showed me the importance of relationships. Relationships were vital to the participant paraeducators. They shared a common purpose towards serving the greater good, yet the quality of work relationships among employees were often hierarchical, as described by participant paraeducators around their positionality.

Relational leadership also backs up the strategic thinking process by encouraging me, as a leader, to look at the mission and vision statements. In order for change to take place, all stakeholders can use their values to meet mission and vision statements. The change that transpires occurs on a deeper level. Also, through the use of critical theory tenets, change based on the stakeholders of the educational culture can move us out of silos to change the educational culture over time to be inclusive. We have an opportunity to develop our educational culture, to change how we treat each other, and to give voice, agency, and to act in a way that has a positive strategic effect towards cultural change as it happens. Relational leadership among all key stakeholders, including paraeducators, supports the shared dialog and shared decision making of Step 2. Action.

Transformational leadership. Transformation leadership is concerned with transforming people and their behaviors within the workplace (Northouse, 2010). It encourages leaders to be empowering of their employees and supports the idea that my proposed framework must be championed by administrators, certificated teachers, and others. It supports the action

step of this model in that, at its best, it motivates people to achieve higher standards that they might normally achieve, which can be beneficial towards recognizing and enacting systemic, cultural change in the positioning and treatment of paraeducators through valuing.

However, transformational leadership also buys into charismatic behaviors by leaders, leading others down the golden path to give up their independent thinking. In using transformational leadership to support this model, we must be cautious to keep the focus on satisfying the needs of the followers "and treating them as full human beings" (Northouse, 2010, p. 171). What can be useful from transformational theory for this *Framework for Valuing Paraeducators* is that transformational leadership "is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, and long-term goals" (Northouse, p. 171).

Thus, relational and transformational leadership theories provide some guidance for the action process of my framework. Still, the authority and responsibility for making the actions and their content known to all key stakeholders must be shared among the group collaborating in the process. Studying themselves and the impact of the changes on all key stakeholders will add to the richness of the data and dialog when assessing impact. In *the Framework for Valuing Paraeducators*, the shared interactions are prioritizing, scheduling, and implementing sustainable changes.

Impact

Impact addresses how actions affect the surounding commitment and is measureable over time. Authentic leadership, trust, and shared decision-making as a leadership practices support Step 3. Impact in *A Framework for valuing Paraeducators*.

Authentic leadership. Authentic leadership is knowing your purpose, practicing values, and establishing connected relations. (Heifetz, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Authentic

leadership supports the impact step of this model through assessment, reflection, and documentation. Reflective dialog creates new language and reframes the formerly hegemonic reality of paraeducators. Reflective dialog and celebration of success contribute to the renewal of intention to improve the lived expereinces of paraeducators.

Trust. Trust is built through inclusive dialog. Through inclusive dialog, a multitude of ideas are disclosed. There is value and power in building trust through dialog in educational teams. Freire's (1995) pedagogy for democratic education is centered in dialog. The concepts of a dialogic and democratic education stem from his belief that education, especially crictical thinking, can free the oppressed (the fearful) and provide hope (the trust of working towards a common solution). Building trust creates sense of safety and facilitates inclusion.

Shared decision-making as a leadership practice. Central to shared decision making as a leadership practice, shared decision making helps how decisions are made, it encourages inclusion as a part of the culture, and it must be practiced. These are examples of Step 3. Impact.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented recommendations for leadership and change around the treatment, positionality, and acknowledgement of paraeducators based upon my study and within its context. I have presented recommendations for changes in systems and structures, and for changes in practice regrading paraeducators. In addition to my own recommendations, I have included the recommendations voiced by participant paraeducators, as the ethos of phenomenological research. Finally, I described how this program and study have helped to evolve my theoretical orientation to leadership and change. That is, through the practice of servant leadership, relational leadership, and transformational leadership, as well as authentic leadership, trust, and shared decision making, positive change can be created, especially

regarding systemic and cultural beliefs, behaviors, and actions around paraeducator positionality. Through the voiced experiences of the paraeducators interviewed for this study, I have been able to create a theoretical model of practice, *A Framework for Valuing Paraeducators*, which may guide educational leaders and teams in their work to recognize, value, and include paraeducators as valuable members of the teaching culture.

I have gained, as a researcher, much hope for improving paraeducator positionality. In taking on a leadership and change stance, I believe that paraeducators can become mediators of their positionality. By gaining entrance into a new dialogic model of practice and behavior, paraeducators will help to guide their colleagues through the process presented in *A Framework for Valuing Paraeducators*. I am hopeful and will work with them towards being able to make use of both the skills they bring to the table of education in this district and increasingly to participate in having themselves represented, seen, and heard.

From my in-depth dissertation research, I have learned the value of critical theory in any social justice work. I have learned the value of action research and organic analysis, in conjunction with phenomenology. I plan to continue my research and to share it with district key stakeholders, as promised in my district IRB approval. Additionally, I plan to share my research and *Framework for Valuing Paraeducators* at in-service trainings, conferences, and publications. These planned actions comply with the ethics of APA research and my own commitment to advancing social justice for paraeducators and other oppressed individuals and groups in early elementary education.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Email to Potential Participants

Hello,

I am Ann Flynn, a PhD candidate in the Leadership and Change Program at Antioch University. As a part of this degree, I am completing a research study and dissertation on the lived experiences of K-5 public school paraeducators.

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of paraeducators in the K-5 public school system, and to gain a deeper understanding of their positionality in the K-5 public schools.

I am inviting paraeducators to participate in a demographic survey, primary interview, and potential secondary interview. All information shared during this research will be kept confidential. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from this study at any time.

If you are interested in participating in this research or learning more about it, please contact me. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you,

Ann Flynn

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

This informed consent form is for paraeducators who we are inviting to participate in a research project titled, "Positionality of Paraeducators: A Phenomenological Study in a Public School District in the Pacific Northwest."

Name of Principle Investigator: Ann R. Flynn

Name of Organization: Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program

Name of Project: *Positionality of Paraeducators: A Phenomenological Study in a Public School District in the Pacific Northwest*

***You will be given a copy of the full* Informed Consent Form**

Introduction

I am Ann Flynn, a PhD candidate in the Leadership and Change Program at Antioch University. As part of this degree, I am completing a project to document and analyze the lived experiences of K-5 public school paraeducators. I am going to give you information about the study and invite you to be part of this research. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with about the research and take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. You may ask questions at any time.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of paraeducators in the K-5 public school system, and to gain a deeper understanding of their positionality in the K-5 school system.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in:

1) a demographic checklist, where your professional demographics will be collected for a collective description of participants;

2) a primary interview where you will tell your own stories about what it is like to be a paraeducator and to describe your positionality;

3) reading and verifying the transcript of your interview for any additions or changes you would like to make, or simply to say it is fine; and

4) a potential secondary interview to gain more depth and reflection from you on issues derived from your and others' initial interviews.

Each of these interviews will be tape-recorded solely for research purposes, but all of the participants' contributions will be de-identified prior to publication or the sharing of the research results. These recordings, and any other information that may connect you to the study, will be kept in a locked, secure location.

Questions may include or may be similar to:

1. What is your life like as a paraeducator?
2. What do you find most meaningful for you in your workday?
3. Does being a paraeducator influence how you define yourself?
4. How do you define yourself?
5. How does your position as a paraeducator influence how others view you? How others treat you? Do you feel included?
6. What else influences how others treat you?
7. Where and with whom do you feel a sense of professional community at work?
8. Do you feel like part of a team? When and how? What is a typical day in your life as a paraeducator?
9. Do you get to express your opinion around policies that affect you and how you do your job? Why or why not?
10. How would you change the structure/system to create more engaged positionality of yourself?
11. Do you have any influence over how policies are implemented in your school?

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because you may be:

1. Currently working in the local K-5 public school system, so that the experiences you describe are both current and reflective;
2. Employed for a minimum of one year so that you have been in the school system long enough to be inducted;
3. Available to participate;
4. Are not currently working under the direct supervision of the researcher; and
5. are not evaluated on your job performances by the researcher.

You should not consider participation in this research if you:

1. are not currently working in the local K-5 public school system;
2. have less than one year of professional experience;
3. are unavailable;
4. do not speak English, as the interviews will be conducted in English; however, paraeducators may be bi-or multi-lingual;
5. currently work under the direct supervision of the researcher; or
6. are evaluated on your job performance by the researcher.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. You will not be penalized for your decision not to participate or for any of your contributions during the study. Your position in the Tacoma Public School District will not be affected by this decision or by your participation. You may withdraw from this study at any time. If an interview has already taken place, the information you provided will not be used in the research study.

Risks

No study is completely risk free. However, I do not anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed during this study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you become uncomfortable. If you experience any discomfort as a result of your participation, employee assistance counselors will be

available to you as a resource.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation may help others in the future.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any monetary incentives to take part in this research project.

Confidentiality

All information will be de-identified, so that it cannot be connected back to you. Your real name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the write-up of this project, and only the primary researcher will have access to the list connecting your name to the pseudonym. This list, along with tape recordings of the discussion sessions, will be kept in a secure, locked location.

Limits of Privacy/Confidentiality

Generally speaking, I can assure you that I will keep everything you tell me or do for the study private. Yet there are times where I cannot keep things private (confidential). The researcher cannot keep things private (confidential) when:

1. The researcher finds out that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused
2. The researcher finds out that that a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit suicide,
3. The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt someone else,

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person is at risk for self-harm or are self-harming, harming another or if a child or adult is being abused. In addition, there are guidelines that researchers must follow to make sure all people are treated with respect and kept safe. In most states, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to self-harm or harm another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before

agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that the researcher cannot keep some things private.

Future Publication

The primary researcher, Ann R. Flynn, reserves the right to include any results of this study in future scholarly presentations and/or publications. All information will be de-identified prior to publication.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without your job being affected.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, you may ask them now or later. If you have questions later, you may contact Ann Flynn.

If you have any ethical concerns about this study, contact Dr. Lisa Kreeger, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Antioch Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected. If you wish to find out more about the IRB, contact Dr. Lisa Kreeger.

DO YOU AGREE TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

DO YOU WISH TO BE AUDIOTAPED IN THIS STUDY?

I voluntarily agree to let the researcher audiotape me for this study. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.

Print Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

To be filled out by the researcher or the person taking consent:

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability.

I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent_____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent_____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Appendix C: Paraeducator Demographic Checklist

Initials: _____ Current School: _____ Grade(s): _____

Age: _____ Gender: _____ Race/Ethnicity: _____

Years as a paraeducator: _____ Years in current position: _____

Originally Hired for: (position, check all that apply)

_____ 1:1 Paraeducator

_____ General Education Classroom

_____ Resource Room

_____ Title 1: Literacy_____ Reading _____ Math _____

_____ ELL/Bilingual _____ SPED _____ Speech Pathology

_____ Before School Program Name of Program: _____

_____ After School Program Name of Program: _____

_____ Nurse's Room

_____ ASL

_____ Bus Monitor

_____ Other

I am working in the area that I was hired for: Y / N

I have been involuntarily displaced: Y / N If Y, when? _____

Current Position:

_____ 1:1 Paraeducator

_____ General Education Classroom

_____ Resource Room

_____ Title 1: Literacy_____ Reading _____ Math _____

_____ ELL/Bilingual _____ SPED _____ Speech Pathology

_____ Before School Program Name of Program: _____

_____ After School Program Name of Program: _____

_____ Nurse's Room

_____ ASL

_____ Bus Monitor

_____ Other

Goals:

_____

_____

Appendix D: Follow-up Pilot Interview Questions

1. How is it determined if you get to stay with your student year after year?
2. How do you describe crises and what does crises mean to you? What does it mean to your student?
3. When your student is absent, how do you decide what you're volunteered for such as lunch duty or recess?
4. How to you describe supporting your students learning when you were not given the content of the lesson, so you can prepare accommodations? How does your student react?
5. How do you describe classroom safety for yourself?
6. How do describe classroom safety for your student?

Meta-cognitive Follow-up Interview Questions:

1. Since we started this interview process, how has your thinking/awareness about your experiences as a paraeducator changed?
2. Since we started this interview process, how has your thinking/awareness about your positionality as a paraeducator changed?
3. What actions have you taken, if any, around your positionality as a paraeducator (e.g., talking to others, speaking up, getting more information)?

Appendix E: Peer Review Timeline

Interviews	Peer Review & Discussion
1, 2, 3	Met Monday, February 19, 2018
Follow-up to 1	Met Wednesday, March 21, 2018
4, 5, 6	Met Monday, May 21, 2018
7, 8, 9	Met Sunday, June 10 2018
Meta 1	Met Sunday, October 21, 2018
10, 11, 12	Met Sunday, November 25, 2018
Follow-up to 5, 6, 9, 11	Met Sunday, December 9, 2018
Meta 5, 9, 11	Met Sunday, December 16, 2018

Appendix F: General Lens: Relationships and Sub-themes

Participant:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Totals
Impact of being a paraeducator on self and family	17	37	16	11	18	18	11	8	7	9	12	10	174
Relationships with work "family"	0	11	3	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	0	0	26
Relationships with students	22	38	16	9	49	42	13	12	20	26	19	9	275
Relationships with students' parents/caregivers	14	11	0	2	0	1	2	2	0	3	0	1	54
Relationships with other paraeducators	12	7	14	7	6	0	5	1	1	6	3	2	64
Relationships with other classified staff	5	4	4	1	1	3	3	1	0	1	2	1	26
Relationships with certificated teachers	13	17	11	10	13	19	9	5	12	7	11	7	134
Relationships with administrators	7	13	4	2	12	2	1	1	1	5	2	1	51

Note. As a cross-check for saturation related to each sub-theme, I conducted a general census on each participant and totaled them for the group.

Appendix G: General Lens: Inclusion/Exclusion and Sub-themes

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Inclusion													
Communication	2	5	5	2	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	3	26
Language	6	1	1	1	4	1	0	1	1	1	3	1	21
Collaborative training	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	9
Collaborative classroom teaching	5	3	2	8	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	4	30
Collaborative teaming	1	3	1	1	3	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	19
Exclusion													
Communication	6	5	5	2	3	5	3	0	1	1	2	3	36
Language	2	1	2	1	4	1	2	1	2	1	3	1	21
Collaborative training	2	3	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	2	1	15
Collaborative classroom teaching	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	0	1	4	3	2	21
Collaborative teaming	6	5	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	3	27

Note. As a cross-check for saturation related to each sub-theme, I conducted a general census on each participant and totaled them for the group.

Appendix H: Critical Theory Norms and Sub-themes

Participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Norm 1: Paraeducators expect and seek job satisfaction													
Expectations	5	4	6	2	1	3	3	2	3	3	4	5	41
Self-efficacy	3	7	2	2	4	2	1	3	2	4	2	3	35
Enjoying Challenge and Change	2	6	2	2	2	1	1	3	1	2	5	3	30
Feeling needed/useful	4	6	5	3	3	3	2	3	1	2	1	2	35
Serving the greater good	2	3	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	2	1	21
Norm 2: Paraeducators experience low status													
Socio-cultural	11	16	6	5	5	6	7	4	5	12	4	12	93
Pay status	4	5	1	0	2	0	1	0	3	6	2	0	24
Norm 3: Paraeducators experience inattention to:													
Time needs	5	15	5	4	3	4	4	3	4	3	1	1	52
Time to plan	1	3	2	2	1	2	1	3	4	3	1	1	24
Time clock	2	9	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	17
Space	5	7	5	2	3	3	2	3	5	6	2	2	45
Communication needs	3	4	5	3	2	5	1	5	5	2	4	3	42
Roles and responsibilities	12	14	13	7	10	17	2	12	11	4	8	3	114
Representation needs	2	6	5	2	2	2	3	1	1	2	1	3	29

Appendix H continued

Participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Norm 4: Paraeducators safety needs are often ignored													
Physical safety	5	6	5	2	2	5	3	0	0	2	0	3	33
Emotional safety	3	4	2	2	3	5	2	2	0	2	4	1	31
Psychological safety	2	1	3	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	19
Intellectual safety	2	2	3	1	2	1	1	2	4	1	2	1	25
Norm 5: Invisibility: Paraeducators are to be not seen and not heard													
Paraeducators to be not seen	3	4	5	2	2	3	1	0	3	2	3	2	30
Paraeducators to be not heard	13	6	4	9	5	7	6	3	7	9	5	6	84
Norm 6: Paraeducators experience continuous anticipatory stress													
Factors influencing anticipatory stress	6	7	6	3	3	6	1	2	3	4	4	1	46
Reduction of anticipatory stress	2	3	1	5	2	2	2	2	3	3	4	2	31

Note. As a cross-check for saturation related to each sub-theme, I conducted a general census on each participant and totaled them for the group.

Appendix I: Researcher Journal Entries

Reflection

Re-reading the entries provided me additional information about the role of the researcher journal in my work. First, the researcher journal was another source of data for analysis for my research. As I started reading the journal entries, I began to identify what was significant, and it also reinforced the personal significance of my experience with the research process. In addition, my researcher journal stimulated insight into the emotional side of doing research by acknowledging and expressing the value of my role and voice.

Bracketing helped to separate my own experience from what the data was saying. It was not about me. In my researcher journal, I examined early assumptions about the preliminary data and found that I made notes about key words. Thus, I embarked on ensuing interviews, and I made sure to continue to bracket. Bracketing played an import role with individual interviews as well as transitioning seamlessly from the pilot study to the full study.

Following are three sample entries from my researcher journal. Key words are italicized.

Sample Entry One

Prior to officially launching my research and setting up interviews for my pilot study, I made my first journal entry noting, “What do I know about Paraeducators?” I have had twenty plus years working in the public school system in different capacities with paraeducators. This is how I answered the question:

- paraeducators are generally disrespected;
- paraeducators are committed to their teachers and students;
- paraeducators are constantly disrupted from their schedules; and
- it is difficult to witness the misuse of paraeducators.

Appendix I, continued

Sample Entry Two

Prior to my first interview, I re-read what I had written about my knowledge base and my experience with paraeducators. I reminded myself to lay aside my knowledge (bracketing) and to be open and to listen with a fresh perspective.

The participant was early and eager to get started. The Informed Consent was reviewed for participant one. The participant gave consent, signed, and I gave her a copy of the Informed Consent and collected my copy. Next, the interviewee completed the demographic checklist and gave me the copy.

I reminded the participant that we were being recorded and that at any time she felt uncomfortable, I would stop. She agreed to be recorded, was given a copy of the interview questions, and bottled water was offered.

Trust with *student* and *family* has taken about on year. Talked about day to day *responsibilities* and *communication*. She is a *mom* first, feels a definite *separation as a paraeducator* from *teachers* and *administration*. *Paraeducator Union* has a representative assigned to each building -no idea who it is. Thinks about, *"how can I be useful?"* Not sure about *being a part of the classroom team,* first the teacher teaches *and then I can break down the instruction. I can give input after*. *Training topic: adapting in the job to be more successful.*

Post interview (recorder was turned off) the participant expressed being glad to contribute to the study and said, "I hoped that I didn't come across as complaining." She also expressed how she felt like she was "babbling" and "that so many of her thoughts were coming out of her [because] she was excited to talk." I observed that her tone changed when she talked about the union. I double checked the recorder to make sure the interview was recorded. I prepared the

recorded interview to be transcribed. [I made no changes. Preparation simply involved sending the appropriate electronic format to the transcription service].

Driving home, I am thinking about my job as a researcher. The participant tells me their point of view from their lived experience, and it is my job to discover the meaning of it through my data collection and data analysis. So much preparation went into making my interviews possible. I feel that my first interview was like birthing a baby and that I will be handling it with great care. There is a newness, and excitement of what is to be discovered and rediscovered and an ambiguous space of what is unknown.

Sample Entry Three

Second interview: Met at 4:30 pm at local library in a private, reserved room. Completed the Informed Consent process and Checklist with participant two. Collected the forms and gave the participant a copy of her signed, Informed Consent. I asked if she was ready for me to begin the interview, gave a copy of the interview questions to her, offered a bottle of water, and turned on the recorder.

Notes: *teaming, acceptance, physically draining, mentally draining, emotional, happy, relationship building, have fun, connection, understanding, trust,* and, *believe that there is something more*. *Perception-grunt, heavy lifting, transforming, you're the hourly, humbled by the job, light hearted, service, necessary,* come from a family of educators who had *opinions about paraeducators*. *Their eyes opened, broader* view. *Top down, the top's attitude sets the tone, transition, assumptions*. *Inclusion doesn't happen, invisible, stereotypes, mistrust*, "*I don't see you*", *purpose, union rep*?

When the interview was completed, I thanked her for her valuable time and stated that I was turning the recorder off.

Appendix J: Permissions

Education Week. Figure 2.2: Federal Policy Timeline. Compiled from: Robelen (2005) and USDE (2020). Permission Granted on 8/19/20.

Ann R. Flynn
[redacted]

July 18, 2020

Education Week

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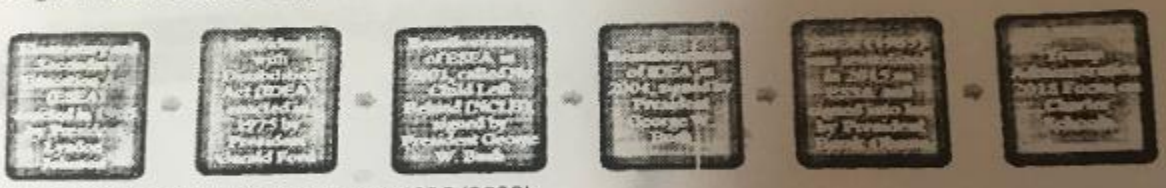
The figure compiled from Robelen (2005) is:

Figure 2.2: Federal Policy Timeline



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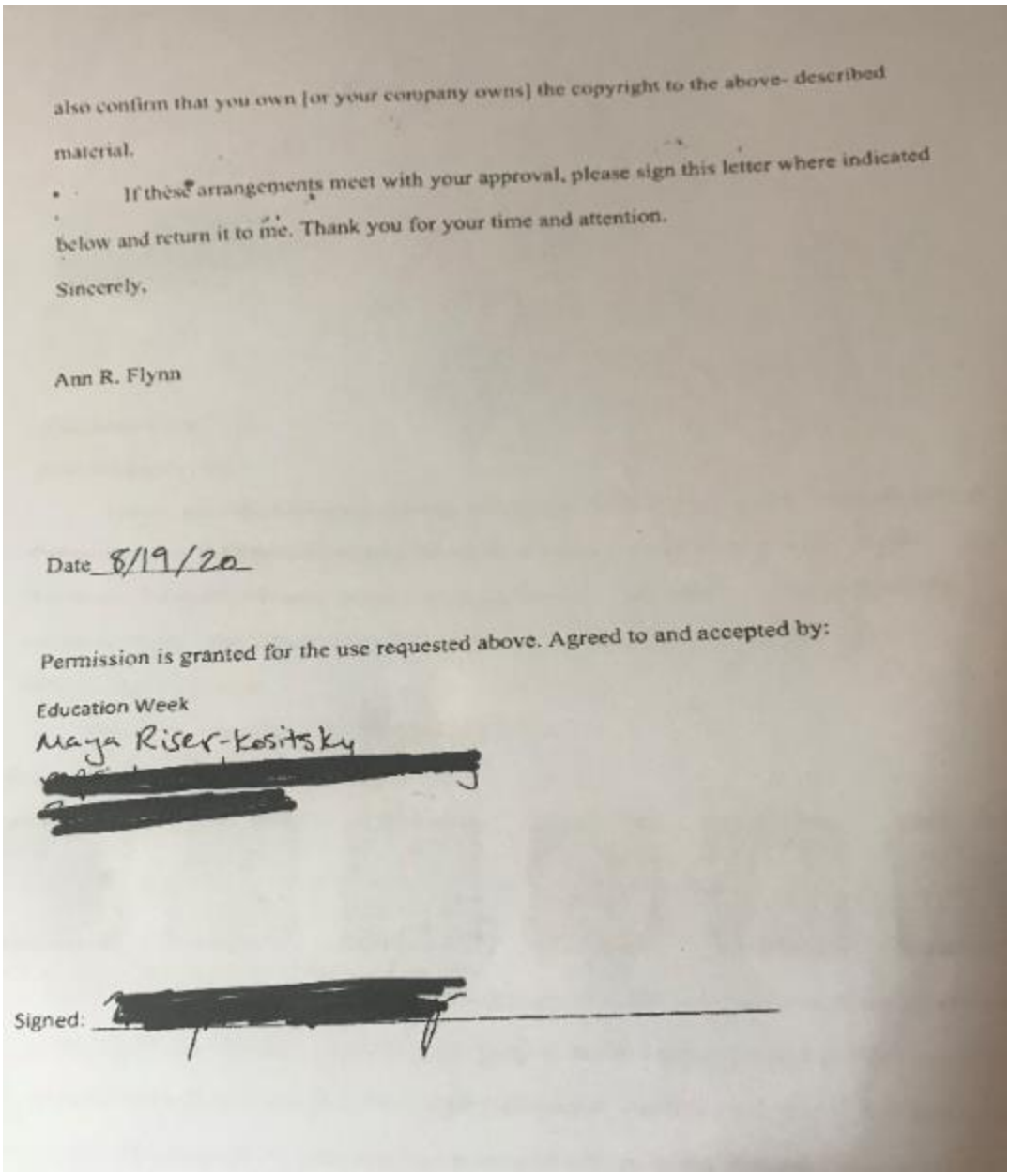

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