

Journal of Career Development



CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

An Overlooked Educator Workforce in Schools: Investigating the Career Development of Paraeducators

Guest Editors:

Conra D. Gist, University of Houston
Yukari Takimoto Amos, Central Washington University
Amaya Garcia, New America

Background and Rationale for the Special Issue

Paraeducators are among the lowest paid in the educator workforce: the average annual wage of a paraeducator¹ is \$28,750, which is close to the federal poverty line of \$25,750 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). In contrast, the average teacher salary is \$62,150 since they are the instructional leaders in the classroom (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Still, paraeducators more closely match the demographics of the American student population in terms of race/ethnicity and home language than the general teacher workforce (Williams, Garcia, Connally, Cook & Dancy, 2016). In addition to their linguistic and cultural competencies, research suggests that paraprofessionals often have strong connections to the communities where they work and are strong advocates for students and their families (Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, Aragon, Bernal, Berg de Balderas, & Carroll, 2004; Villegas & Clewell, 1998). Recent research documents the positive impact that paraprofessionals have on student learning (Hemelt & Ladd, 2017). Given these strengths, states and districts across the country have developed programs to attract and prepare paraprofessionals to become certified teachers.

Despite increased interest in expanding pathways for the paraeducator workforce, research has consistently revealed that they encounter obstacles along the career development continuum from recruitment, preparation, placement, and induction (Abbate-Vaughn, & Paugh, 2009; Gist, Bianco, & Lynn, 2019). Some of these obstacles include: prohibitive entry requirements (Lau, Dandy, & Hoffman, 2007); difficulty completing certification exams (Hunt, Kalmes, Haller, Hood, & Hesbol, 2012); inflexible preparation design (Flores, Clark, Claeys, & Villaerreal, 2007); lack of financial support (Abbate-Vaughn, & Paugh, 2009; Smith, 2003); unresponsive curriculum and microaggressions in classrooms (Amos, 2013); and race-neutral approaches to teaching and learning (Pabon, Anderson, & Kharem, 2011).

¹ A public-school paraeducator is often called a paraprofessional, a teaching assistant, or an instructional aide.

Unfortunately, their obstacles continue along the career development continuum even after becoming certified teachers. They are frequently alienated and experience weak professional networks (Berecin-Rascon, 2008), and have limited resources when transitioning to become teachers of record (Amos, 2016). Furthermore, they are embedded in educator power structures in which they often feel marginalized and on the periphery in their roles (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006) because their professional expertise and experiences are devalued (Rueda & Monzo, 2002). Unresolved obstacles for the career development of paraeducators prohibits them from maximizing their potential.

Given these challenges and the potential strengths of the paraeducator teacher pool, there is a need for interdisciplinary cross-pollination of scholarship, in particular from the fields of career development, labor studies, developmental psychology, occupational mobility, and public policy, to better understand approaches to support the expansion of professional pathways for paraeducators throughout their careers. Scholarship on teaching pathways is often situated within the field of teacher education and social foundations, but frequently disconnected from a bureaucratic systems analysis, the exploration of constructs of organizational culture and climate, a dissection of various developmental experiences related to race/ethnicity, class and language, the structural inequality among professionals in school buildings, and interpersonal power dynamics among educators.

The interdisciplinary nature of career development can assist the field of education in understanding how to support the professionalization of paraeducators in the educator workforce by examining: (a) career development theories related to the paraeducator workforce, (b) organizational structures in schools, essential to supporting their development, and (c) personal agency and decision-making needed to persist in the profession. The goal of this special issue is to integrate research on paraeducators with other fields of inquiry to yield a more robust set of research, policies, and practices to strengthen paraeducators' career development pathways to the educator workforce. We envision that manuscripts for this special issue will examine the following areas:

- Historical perspectives on the changing nature of paraeducators' work and their role in influencing the organizational culture within schools.
- A critical examination of the ways in which raced, gendered, and classed conceptualizations of the educator workforce disadvantage and/or disenfranchise low wage school building employees', such as paraeducators, access to professional pathways.
- Theoretical and conceptual analysis of paraeducator state and district level policies from the vantage point of career development scholarship.
- The application of novel research methodologies to identify the working conditions of paraeducators and their relationship to career satisfaction and advancement.
- The range of paraeducator to educator preparation models, program designs and features, and impact on educator workforce development and retention.
- Impact of paraeducators on student achievement, school climate, and/or communities prior to becoming an educator, and how these affect their decisions of career development.

- Comparison of paraeducator career development to other grow your own, residency, and alternative models for advancing labor shortage and retention in schools.

In addition to submissions from academic scholars across the disciplines, we also encourage submissions from university-school district partners, policy influencers, program practitioners and leaders, labor unions, economists, human resource professionals, and community-based organizations.

The guest editors will select approximately five-six papers to be included in the special issue; other papers submitted in this process may be recommended to be published in a regular issue of the journal. All questions regarding the issue should be directed to the guest editors.

Timeline

Call for abstracts due – December 1, 2019.

Abstracts should be 250 -350 words and include a full title page with author names and contact information. Please email abstracts directly to the guest editors (at the email addresses provided below) for this special issue.

Abstract acceptance notifications distributed – December 15, 2019.

Authors notified about abstracts that are accepted for the next stage, that is, full manuscript submission.

Full manuscripts due - April 1, 2020.

Manuscripts must adhere to JCD manuscript guidelines and be submitted online via <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jcdjournal> by selecting “Special Issue Paper” as the article type.

Decision letters on full manuscripts sent to authors - June 15, 2020.

Authors revise manuscripts that are invited for resubmission - June 15 – August 15, 2020.

Revised manuscripts submitted - August 15, 2020.

Second round of reviews - August 15 – September 30, 2020.

Decision letters on revised manuscripts sent to authors – October 15 - November 20, 2020.

Guest Editors

Conra D. Gist, University of Houston, cdgist@uh.edu

Yukari Takimoto Amos, Central Washington University, Yukari.Amos@cwu.edu

Amaya Garcia, New America, garciaa@newamerica.org