Working with paraprofessionals: How to make it work

(from the perspective of a teaching assistant turned teacher)
Who is here?

- Paraprofessionals?
- Teachers?
- Parents?
- Teams?
- Other?
What we will cover

• Knowing your team
• Communication
• Duties: who does what?
• Problem solving
• Dealing with conflict
Knowledge is the key!
Know your team

• Your team starts with you. So, how well do you know yourself?

Picture from: writeronahorse.blogspot.com
Know Yourself

- What’s your personality?
- True Colors Test
What’s your color?

• Take the color test. You have 10 minutes, then we will discuss.

• If you’ve taken it before, take it again. People change over time. I used to be orange, but now I’m gold.
What’s your color?
Orange

• Oranges are:
  – Playful
  – Energetic
  – Charming
  – Impulsive
  – Creative

JOYS: people, adventure, thrills, success

NEEDS: freedom, expression, challenge, stimulation

STRENGTHS: independent, humor, adaptable, leader

FRUSTRATIONS: interruption, deadlines, criticism, nagging
Can you think of a famous “orange”?
Blue

• Blues are:
  – Mediators
  – Optimistic
  – Caretakers
  – Passionate
  – Peacemakers

JOYS: Romance, hugs, acceptance, helping others, sharing

NEEDS: understanding, security, sensitivity, support

STRENGTHS: communication, optimism, compassion, giving

FRUSTRATIONS: disharmony, injustice, conflict, disorder
Can you think of a famous “blue”?
Green

- Greens are:
  - Intellectual
  - Theoretical
  - Philosophical
  - Perfectionist
  - Cool, calm, and collected

JOYS: high achievement, recognition, challenge of possibilities

NEEDS: independence, accuracy, closure, space

STRENGTHS: confidence, persistent, insightful, inventive

FRUSTRATIONS: noise, unfairness, control, sarcasm
Can you think of a famous “green”?
Gold

• Golds are:
  – Planners
  – Trustworthy
  – Loyal
  – Responsible
  – predictable

JOYS: home, tidy, organized, achievement

NEEDS: stability, consistency, order, respect

STRENGTHS: loyal, structured, reliable, responsible

FRUSTRATIONS: inefficiency, procrastinators, change, lack of control
Can you think of a famous “gold”?
So, who matches these quotes?

- And how does that make you feel?
- Why?
- Just do it!
- I’m making a list and checking it twice.
Know your team

• What color are your team members?
• Take a minute and share with your team
  – If your team members are not all here, then see if you can guess their colors.
Hold up your cards. Which type is the most popular here?

Percentages of Population by Leadership Style

- **Green** – 10% - 13%
- **Orange** – 12% - 33%
- **Blue** – 12% - 25%
- **Gold** – 33% - 50%
Communication is the “other” Key

- Sheldon gets a date for Penny
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkzNiqXWFzI
How do I communicate to others?

• Do I think first?
• Do I give explanations?
• Do I share stories?
• Something else?

• Share with your group your typical communication style at work.
How do I talk to a “blue?”

- Relate what you are saying to feelings
- Avoid open criticism
- Put peoples needs ahead of procedures
- Be honest and genuine
- Leave room for input and questions
- Keep your promises
How do I speak to a green?

- Use clear and precise language
- Use logic in support of your decision
- Get right to the point
- Keep the conversation relevant
- Ask meaningful questions
- Talk about possibilities
How do I talk to an orange?

• Cut to the heart of a problem
• Give them the straight stuff
• Be bold and say what is on your mind
• Focus on action
• Talk about results
• Keep the conversation lively
How do I talk to a gold?

• Give straightforward information
• Use references to the past and tradition
• Don’t get sidetracked
• Keep conversation in order
• Follow and agenda
• Talk about responsibilities
Know that miscommunication will happen!

• When it does, take time to correct it and apologize.
• Sometimes writing it down is the only way.
  – Example:
I'm Making a List

I'm making a list of things I must say
For politeness,
And goodness and kindness and gentleness
Sweetness and rightness:
Hello
Pardon me
How are you?
Excuse me
Bless you
May I?
Thank you
Goodbye
If you know some that I've forgot,
Please stick them in you eye!

— Shel Silverstein, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*
Depend on each other!

- There are a ton of things that need to happen with students with disabilities: from toileting to teaching.
• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qzzYrCTKuk
• Penguin teamwork video
Problem Solving

• Believe it or not, we have addressed this a lot already.

• Look at your team colors:
  – What are their frustrations?
  – How do you talk to them?

• Communication:
  – Were you clear and honest?
  – How can you communicate effectively to fix the problem?
8 Steps for Successful Problem Solving

1. What’s the problem?
2. What are all the parts to the problem?
3. What is our goal?
4. Why did this problem happen?
5. What will we do about it?
6. Do it.
7. Did it work?
8. If it worked, then do that next time.

From Toyota business model Oct 2010
Problem Solving

• Think of a problem that you have faced on your team or a problem that is likely to occur.
• Brainstorm some solutions.
• (If you can’t think of a problem, I can give a hypothetical one.)
Once again, knowledge is the key

- Do you know what the responsibilities are?
  - Often paras are given lists of responsibilities, but they do not see the responsibilities of the teachers.

- As a TA turned teacher, I was shocked with all of the added responsibility. I thought teachers had it easy—until I became one!
Examples of Duties: paraprofessionals

• Helping with self-care needs of students.
• Implementing lessons.
• Inclusion
• Data collection of IEPs
• Supporting communication of student
• Assisting student while trying to keep student independent
• Etc, etc, etc,
Examples of Duties: teachers

• Everything a paraprofessional does, AND
• IEP paperwork, ARDs, testing, monitoring
• Contacting parents and teachers
• Planning lessons
• Giving information to paras and others who need it.
• Implementing TEKs, curriculum, and district or school mandated programs.
• Etc, etc, etc,
What worked for me as a TA.

• Being given a chance to share ideas and problem solve.
• Knowing who to go to for help.
• Being given clear expectations, and then be respected to complete those expectations.
• Being trained on working with more challenging students instead of the “figure it out” method
What worked for me as a teacher.

• Doing it all. I did not ask a TA to do anything I didn’t do. Including toileting, feeding, inclusion, etc.

• Looking at strengths of TA and giving assignments that matched.

• Giving clear expectations.

• Modeling everything.

• Direct discussion for conflicts as soon as there was an issue.
Brainstorm

• In your groups, write down things that have worked for you in your role.
Dealing with conflict: what not to do
“Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.”
Ronald Reagan

http://www.brainyquote.com

“Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”
Albert Einstein

http://www.brainyquote.com
Checklists

• These are some checklists I made for a team. You can use, add, take away items that work best for you.
How do I handle stress/frustration with others?

- Confront verbally
- Confront in writing
- Think first, then discuss
- Talk to others (vent)
- Walk away, then talk
- Hold it in
- Problem solve with person
- Another way ____________________
How do I want people to handle stress/frustration with me?

- Confront verbally
- Confront in writing
- Think first, then discuss
- Talk to others (vent)
- Walk away, then talk
- Hold it in
- Problem solve with person
- Another way _________________
What are my areas of strength?
Pick 3 biggest strengths.

- Behavior
- Communication
- Patience
- Academics: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies
- Social aspects
- Daily Living Skills
- On time
- Following a lesson plan
- Organized
- Dedicated
- Loving/ caring
- Creating lessons or projects
- Dealing with medical/personal issues with students
- Changing my strategy quickly
- Multi-tasking
- Computer skills
What are my areas of weakness?  
Pick 3 biggest weaknesses.

- Behavior
- Communication
- Patience
- Academics: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies
- Social aspects
- Daily Living Skills
- On time
- Following a lesson plan
- Organized
- Dedicated
- Loving/ caring
- Creating lessons or projects
- Dealing with medical/personal issues with students
- Changing my strategy quickly
- Multi-tasking
- Computer skills
Dealing with Conflict

• Let’s look at different personalities and see what to do.
• In your group brainstorm:
  – Orange, blue, green, gold
How do we fit together as a team?

• If your team is here, this is a time to sit and figure it out. Use your checklists and colors to see what works best for you.

• If your team is not here. Then, you can plan how you could use this with your team or ask any specific questions.
Sources

http://freepdfdb.net/pdf/true-colors-personality-test-printable
www.true-colors.com
www.truecolorstest.com

All video clips from youtube.
Photos from google images, if not specified.
All clipart from Microsoft.