2021

Paraprofessionals' Perceptions of the Need for Professional Development in an Afterschool Program Setting

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Walden University
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MA, Walden University, 2020

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Education

Walden University

August 2021

Abstract

Afterschool workers often lack the training and formal education that would help them perform their jobs effectively. There is little research on professional development available to such paraprofessional workers. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore afterschool workers' perceptions of needed training. The central question focused on the perceptions of paraprofessional workers in afterschool programs regarding how professional development supported their work. Subquestions included what paraprofessional workers in afterschool programs identified as their primary learning needs and what approaches to professional development supported their work. The conceptual framework centered on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and Knowles's model of andragogy. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with eight paraprofessionals from different afterschool programs and coded to discern emergent themes. Findings included participants' need for professional development to deal with children with special needs, including virtual trainings, conferences workshops, webinars and archived modules, and ongoing team meetings. Without adequate support, they relied on their parenting experiences or the lessons they learned from their parents. Recommendations include the creation of professional development that incorporates workers' prior experiences and skills, draws on those strengths, and further develops them. Understanding workers' professional development needs could bring about positive social change by directing and informing administrators increased and targeted support of these paraprofessional workers, resulting in a possible increase in students' positive developmental outcomes.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my daughter, Lauré Darnell. May you always recognize the value of education and having your voice heard. May you know that all things are possible, and, when you feel like quitting and giving up, remember that I persevered.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge the importance of my family and those who helped me to complete this journey. To my husband, Larry, my biggest fan, and supporter, thank-you for motivating and encouraging me. To my dad, who set a good example of what it means to work relentlessly. To my beloved mother and my sister Tracie, I miss you every day, and wish you were here to celebrate this huge milestone and achievement. To my friend, Charlene, thank-you for having excellent computer skills and teaching me how to maneuver my way around the keyboard. At times, our working together proved to be therapeutic. To Jacqueline, thank- you for responding to my calls without hesitation. To Beverly, thank you for always knowing what to say and for never turning your back on me. To Leon, Walt, and Linda, I cannot remember a time when you were not there for me.

To my first committee chairperson, Dr. Laura Weidner, thank-you. The Dean of Student Affairs, Dr. Rochelle Gilbert, thank-you. My editor, Dr. Carol Koller, thank-you. My present committee, Dr. Cheryl Keen and Dr. Catherine Marienau provided all the support and encouragement needed throughout this study's conclusion. I am thankful and appreciative to have a committee of strong women dedicated to helping me achieve a Ph.D. in Education.

To God, be the Glory! Thank you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Research findings suggest a promising relationship between children's participation in afterschool programs and positive student outcomes (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a). However, there are issues regarding afterschool workers' training and evaluation because many of these individuals have not received professional training (Lange, 2014; Nicu, 2016). Lange (2014) emphasized that professional development for all workers may be the backbone of afterschool programs. Professional development for teachers in K–12 schools seem universal (Lange & Nicu, 2016). Students who attend school during regular classroom hours benefit from the professional training and experiences of teachers; however, in afterschool programs, staff training and professional development have been minimal (Lange, 2014 & Nicu, 2016).

Researchers have postulated that children aged 5 to 18 who failed to improve academically may have benefitted from afterschool programs if workers had more skills and training (Lange, 2014; Nicu, 2016). Providing vocational training for workers has helped their professional experiences and the emergence of best practices for the benefit of both workers and students (Bernatzky & Cid, 2018; St. Clair & Stone, 2016). Programs offered after school have recently gained attention as a significant venue in youth intervention (Oh et al., 2015). After the formal school day, afterschool programs often serve parents' logistical needs and provide the necessary care and supervision for students. Afterschool programming has increasingly become an essential institution in many students' lives.

Between the years 1998 and 2004, federal grant funding for programs offered after school expanded from $40 million to over $1 billion, mainly due to the increase in financing from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Kremer et al., 2015). Billions of public and private dollars are spent yearly to manage and operate almost 50,000 afterschool programs throughout the United States. Oh et al. (2015) suggested that the activities offered after school play an essential role in youth development. Specifically, at the secondary level, a high level of structure and staff experience in afterschool programs has reduced students' delinquency (E. P. Smith & Bradshaw, 2017).

Intervention programs, also known as afterschool programs, emerged as a space where children could experience a safe and supervised environment during hours when schools were not in regular academic session. Parents or guardians desire to know that their children are protected and supervised (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a; Bernatzky & Cid, 2018; E. P. Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). E. P. Smith and Bradshaw found that when youth were unsupervised, they became involved in risky behaviors such as drug use and sex. The responsibility to monitor and watch over children was a concern for all parents, regardless of their economic status, race, environment, or educational background (Bernatzky & Cid, 2018). Afterschool programs provided a critical service for working parents as they navigated the competing duties associated with parenting, employment, and other essential activities. When parents could not pick up their children after the formal school day because of work or other commitments, they typically would send their children to an afterschool program (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). When employment laws

limited youth involvement in the labor force, afterschool programs also helped meet the needs of parents who worked (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a).

The objectives of afterschool programs are to support the overall needs of the youth who reside in local communities. Afterschool programs have been associated with positive outcomes regarding students' learning (Bernatzky & Cid, 2018; St. Clair & Stone, 2016). Some factors, such as parents' educational levels and family involvement, affected the outcomes of afterschool programs to some degree. Bernatzky and Cid (2018), found that students who valued education and came from well-educated parents showed more positive results in afterschool programs than students whose parents had no education beyond high school. In an extensive study, Paluta et al. (2016) reported that quality indicators, primarily strategies that promote family engagement, best explained variance in academic and developmental outcomes.

Specific to the secondary level, research has indicated that a high level of structure and staff experience in afterschool programming helped reduce students' behavioral issues (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a; Kremer et al., 2015). Rinehart and Yamashiro (2017) found that afterschool programs helped improve regular school day attendance, fostered academic growth, and provided nutritious meals for students. These programs' goals and objectives included assistance with academics, social engagement, nutrition, and health needs (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a). Alternatively, Grogan et al. (2014), in a study on programs offered after school, highlighted improved attendance, engagement, and enrollment as their targets. When looking at goals and outcomes, researchers recognized that youth who regularly attended afterschool programs and were

highly engaged benefitted more than those who participated periodically (Grogan et al., 2014).

Background

Family circumstances explain why more women have chosen to work in afterschool programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a; Koball & Jiang, 2018). Most women who have worked in afterschool programs are parents and guardians of school-age children and chose family over full-time work (Slaughter, 2012). Some women found that being employed in afterschool programs suited their needs because daycare for their children was either unavailable or too expensive, and their children could attend the afterschool program for free or at a minimal fee. Some single parents had struggled to find a job while other women supported their spouses who could not find employment (Koball & Jiang, 2018). Most of their experiences came from nurturing their children.

Afterschool program educators have faced significant challenges in implementing afterschool programs to engage students of all ages and levels. Most afterschool programs have included a mentoring component to attracted students and specifically targeted student attendance from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. because this is a period of high crime activity that is challenging for both parents and the community (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a). E. P. Smith and Bradshaw (2017) found that providing students with a role in program decision making helped further engage them. For example, Davis and Singh (2015) noted that students wanted a program that offered incentives and rewards. In a student survey, Pasket (2015) found that technology ranked Number 1 in what they wanted in afterschool programs, followed by games and other outdoor activities.

Stakeholders also have input into the afterschool programs. Stakeholders could be teachers, athletic coaches, recreation leaders, community partners, volunteers, and/or administrators.

While the design and objectives of afterschool programs varies, schedules tend to be characterized by their service to children aged 5 to 18 and the curriculum typically incorporates nutritional, academic, and enrichment components (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a). Athletic programs and arts are also an intricate part of programs offered after school. The delivery of these components varies from large groups, small groups, and one-on-one settings. Afterschool programs range from unstructured, laissez-faire approaches to the intensive, directive, and structured methods (Afterschool Alliance, 2014b).

However, there are disparities in the professional development of paraprofessionals who had a range of roles and responsibilities in afterschool programs. In their study of community learning centers, Paluta et al. (2016) found that students entering these programs with low parental involvement who were assigned staff with limited professional development were less likely to succeed in an afterschool program. In a study of an elementary afterschool program in a midsized midwestern city, the afterschool center was designed to strengthen reading skills (McLurkin, 2013). However, community volunteers without specialized training who read to students with specific learning disabilities reported feeling stressed and overwhelmed with the task. Because afterschool programs are designed for all students, staff need specific training to work with all students in various areas to meet student needs. Tanang and Abu (2014)

supported this concept of improving staff training and meeting professional training goals in the 21st century.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, afterschool programs have not been a safe or accessible haven for children. Instead, many working parents had to find full-time supervision and learning options for their children or quit their jobs to ensure their safety (Adams & Todd, 2020). In addition, the afterschool programs that formerly provided care and learning environments for children faced challenges because of the pandemic, including program closings, loss of services, lack of space due to social distancing, and the decline in enrollment because of group size limitations (Adams & Todd, 2020). Not only did the pandemic affect attendance and group size, but according to Adams and Todd, it also affected workers as a result of job loss. According to the Bureau of Labor, by April 2020, an estimated 350,000 afterschool childcare employees had lost their jobs.

A significant number of paraprofessionals have become part of the educational workforce to assist students with unique challenges or who are at risk for needing or receiving special educational services (Lekwa & Reddy, 2021). According to French (2008), a paraprofessional is a part-time or full-time employee hired by a school that offers instruction, protection, and valuable services to students. School paraprofessionals increasingly serve students with the greatest needs with only the minimum training, in-service guidance, or professional development (Lekwa & Reddy, 2021). It is mandatory under federal law, including the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, that all paraprofessionals must be supervised by administrators or teachers, and all schools are encouraged to distribute funds for ongoing training and management for these workers

(Lekwa & Reddy, 2021). However, in these federal laws, only minimal guidance is given regarding the type and delivery of professional development training resources.

Eshelman (2017) suggested that paraprofessionals should have the basic skills in at least five areas before entering the vocation: basic knowledge in math, reading comprehension, and writing as well as fundamental thinking and reasoning skills and a positive, collaborative relationship with other staff members. Emphasis on occupational roles, performance, and determination can expand workers' learning and improve their practices through continuous professional training.

Research Problem

Professional development research has emphasized training for experienced teachers and often excludes nonprofessional workers operating in education. With the demand for increased afterschool programs across the nation, scarce research has focused on the workers staffing these programs, many of whom serve in these roles with minimal training. Workers in afterschool programs manage various responsibilities and scheduled activities that include academic tutoring, enrichment development, computer technology, physical activity, and nutrition (Beets et al., 2015). Afterschool settings are rich contexts for learning and provide youth with engaging and meaningful activities as wells as the opportunity to earn elective credits for participating in afterschool programs (Davis & Singh, 2015).

Students who attend school during regular school hours benefit from the professional training and experiences of teachers. Workers in afterschool programs tend to be paraprofessionals who lack training or formal education for the jobs they perform

(Adnyani, 2015). Few afterschool programs include ongoing professional development training (Beets et al., 2015). There is minimal research regarding the training needs of paraprofessionals in afterschool programs. Notably lacking is research on the workers' perceptions about whether professional development might be beneficial and how they prefer to engage in these activities. Training provided to staff in their workplace is a continuous process that improves their learning and skills (Adnyani, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The focus of this basic qualitative study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) was to explore paraprofessional workers' perceptions of the types of professional development that might help them in their work in an afterschool program. The key to learning the specific needs of these workers was understanding their experiences. The stories they told, the emotions they displayed, and their apparent desire to help children assisted me in glimpsing a day in their afterschool lives. Understanding the experiences of paraprofessional workers who operate in afterschool program settings helps to shape efforts that support and develop training programs for all nonprofessional workers in these programs (Bradshaw, 2015).

Research Questions

There was one overarching research question (RQ) that guided this study and two sub-RQs.

RQ: What are the perceptions of paraprofessional workers in afterschool programs regarding how professional development supported their work?

Sub-RQ 1: What did paraprofessional workers in afterschool programs identify as their primary learning needs?

Sub-RQ 2: What approaches to professional development supported their work?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was based on Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy and Knowles's (1970) model of andragogy. Bandura's self-efficacy component of social learning theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals perceive the support provided for professional development in their work environment. According to Bandura, this belief in self-efficacy influences both the individual's choice of activities and motivational levels. Bandura's theory provides the distinguishing characteristics of adult learners.

Knowles's (1970) model of andragogy provides different assumptions about adult learners than Bandura (1997). In the model of andragogy, Knowles stated that as adult learners mature, they move from relying on support to seeking help as needed. They view life's problems and situations as opportunities for learning, thus gaining a wealth of knowledge over a lifetime. In this model, the adult learner collaborates and stores knowledge as a resource for learning. Using an andragogy model for professional development could prove to be an effective tool that influences services to adults who self-direct their education.

Nature of Study

I chose a basic qualitative research design (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to explore paraprofessional workers' perceptions of the need for professional development

in an afterschool program. Originally designed to be conducted in a single setting, I had to change venues for this study due to COVID-19 restrictions. Using convenience sampling, I searched for eligible participants by reaching out to sorority members and social media friends. The participant selection criteria included that each (a) had received minimal professional development in a research site setting, (b) were at least 18 years of age, and (c) had worked at the afterschool program for a minimum of 6 months. The participants interviewed had little experience in the role, possibly because the relatively low pay in the profession leads to attrition. I received acknowledgment through social media communication from individuals who believed they met the criteria, which I confirmed early in the process of setting up the interview. In semistructured interviews, conducted on the virtual platform, Zoom, the eight paraprofessionals were asked open-ended questions. I used open coding to analyze the resulting interview transcripts for emergent themes.

Operational Definitions

Specific terms have various meanings in the literature and in practice. In this study, I used the following definitions:

Aftercare programs: This type of program usually consists of babysitting services offered after school (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a).

Afterschool programs: A myriad of programs offered after the regular school day ends. Programs may include academics, computer literacy training, and general educational development tutorials as well as aftercare babysitting services for working parents (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a).

Andragogy: A model based on adults' characteristics as learners and the conditions that help them learn (Knowles, 1970).

Positive youth development: Afterschool programs designed to give families options for their children instead of staying at home unsupervised. These programs help students avoid risky behaviors (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a).

Professional development: Minuti et al. (2015) noted that professional development is best described as a form of training that increases knowledge and experience for all workers in a program. Training includes learning job-related skills, attending workshops, and shadowing experienced workers.

Self-efficacy: The belief an individual has in themself to carry out a course of action (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy has been used interchangeably with a sense of agency. Agency is the ability of individuals to make a range of choices and act on those choices in ways that transform their lives (Code, 2020). Self-efficacy was important in this research because I explored how individuals handled a specific course of action and how these decisions affected their self-efficacy in the work setting.

Untrained worker (i.e., paraprofessional): According to French (2008), a paraprofessional is a part-time or full-time employee hired by a school that offers instruction, protection, and valuable services to students. For the purposes of this study, this term referred to any individual working in an afterschool program who had little or no specific training working with children at risk or with special needs (see Bernatzky & Cid, 2018).

Assumptions

A few assumptions informed this study. The first assumption was that all participants would respond to the questions truthfully and I could build enough trust during the interview so that they would be willing to share their experiences. If it had not been for the COVID-19 pandemic, I could have conducted the interviews face-to-face, which may have established a higher level of trust (see Opdenakker, 2014). I also assumed that the study would yield rich data based on the semi structured interviews and open-ended questions asked. An additional assumption was that I would not encounter technical problems with Zoom or any other negative outside influences that might have impacted internet service to enable virtual interviews.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations in a study are essential so the researcher does not become overwhelmed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Originally, the setting for this study was going to be one middle school afterschool program; however, due to COVID-19 restrictions, I reached out to members of my sorority and used social media to find paraprofessionals who worked with students in the lower and middle school grades. The study focused on paid paraprofessionals only and did not include any certified faculty or volunteers. My interview questions did not address pay rates; however, I did ask about their duties and responsibilities in the workplace.

Limitations

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, afterschool programs were closed, and concern was heightened regarding working condition safety; therefore, interviews were not

conducted in person as I had hoped when I first conceived this study. Another limitation

due to the COVID-19 pandemic was the self-selection (see Archibald et al., 2019;

Opdenakker, 2014). In addition, I could not use a single school setting; instead, I

recruited the participants online and through a sorority. Another limitation of Zoom is

audio or video reliability and quality. In a study conducted by Archibald et al. (2019)

regarding the use of Zoom videoconferencing for qualitative data collection, the

researchers discovered that 88% of their participants expressed difficulty with the

technology. One participant in the abovementioned study indicated problems signing into

their Zoom session and two had a limited knowledge of how to use it effectively.

Significance of the Study

Examining the experiences of paraprofessionals who worked in various

afterschool program settings revealed how they perceived their responsibilities, roles, and

preparedness to perform their duties. The paraprofessionals with limited training in this

study viewed and valued themselves as learners and individuals who influenced and

impacted others' lives. Bradshaw (2015) found that workers who operated in an

afterschool program shaped the effort to support and develop training programs for

skilled and unskilled workers. They did this by training a few individuals who then taught

others, known as the "train the trainer" model (Suhrheinrich, 2015, p. 1). Paluta et al.

(2016) concluded, in their study on afterschool programs, that the program's quality was

related to the positive impact they had on students' lives. These studies supported the

need to examine paraprofessionals' perceptions to determine the areas in which they need

professional development and what they perceive to be the best form of training.

Summary

Afterschool programs are essential to students and the workers who are employed in the afterschool setting. Afterschool programs allow children to socialize, have fun with friends, and develop relevant skills (Mallett & Schroeder, 2015). After the school day, these programs offer students help both socially and academically (Bernatzky & Cid, 2018; E. P. Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). The hours between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. remain a time of high crime activity, which is a challenge for both parents and the community (Paluta et al., 2016). Little research has targeted how afterschool programs support workers who lack experience and professional training at various developmental levels. However, researchers have found that professional development, when linked to student outcomes, boosts students' learning (Bernatzky & Cid, 2018; & St. Clair & Stone, 2016). In the literature review in Chapter 2, I will provide a further investigation into the need for professional development and synthesize previous research related to the topic, focusing on the depth and breadth of knowledge.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I focus on recent research on the significance of afterschool programs, professional development for afterschool program personnel, the impact professional development has had on workers, professional development experiences, and support in the afterschool program setting. The research problem in this study stemmed from findings that suggest a strong relationship between participation in afterschool programs and positive student outcomes (see Afterschool Alliance, 2014b). Organized, high-quality afterschool programs positively impact the lives of youth and their achievements (Paluta et al., 2016). Afterschool programs also help school-age children develop and mature regardless of their circumstances and environment (Afterschool Alliance, 2014b; Bernatzky & Cid, 2018).

Afterschool workers' training and evaluation is also important because many of these workers are not professionals and do not have the necessary skills to feel confident in their work (Paluta et al., 2016). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore paraprofessional workers' perceptions of professional development that could help them in their work in an afterschool program setting. The professional development of teachers increases student learning; equips students to compete globally; and most importantly, provides paraprofessionals with skills to help students (Blanchard et al., 2016). Thus, afterschool programs that include relevant professional development training to aid staff become valuable resources that help families (E. P. Smith & Bradshaw, 2017).

In this chapter, I examine the literature related to the conceptual framework consisting of Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy and Knowles's (1970) model of

andragogy. I also analyze additional empirical literature that highlights the perceptions of paraprofessional workers who have not received specialized training in afterschool programs and whether or how professional development might support their work. In the empirical literature review, I focus on the necessity of afterschool programs, paraprofessional workers' self-efficacy, professional development, and the connection between professional development and student achievement. Afterschool programs, which focus on and foster the development of both academic and social skills (Mallett & Schroeder, 2015), are also examined. COVID-19 restrictions, such as early school closings and individual quarantines, restricted me from recruiting participants from individual schools. As a backdrop to the literature review, I first explain the literature search strategy.

Literature Search Strategy

I utilized several search terms and various combinations of terms to identify the research literature related to professional development and support in the afterschool setting. Search terms included *professional development*, *staff development*, *teacher training*, *staff training*, *afterschool programs*, *student engagement*, *seasonal staff*, *training programs*, *tutor*, *student learning*, *support staff*, *model of pedagogical education modernization*, *initial training*, *life-long learning*, *knowledge sharing*, *school-based recreation*, *school-based homework center*, *training course*, *adult education*, *education services*, *self-efficacy*, *collaboration*, *co-teaching*, and *in-service teacher education.* I used the following databases and search engines: Thoreau Multiple Database, EBSCO, Education Source, Google Scholar, SAGE Premier, and ERIC. I also used ProQuest

Central for comprehensive research on professional development. In some cases where the current research was minimal, the reference lists of dissertations and textual citations of research studies were reviewed to find additional possible sources. The thorough investigation of the literature supported the conceptual framework of this study and emphasized the depth and breadth of the field of knowledge.

Conceptual Framework

This section includes an investigation of how professional development researchers have previously applied Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy and Knowles's (1970) model of andragogy. Bandura's self-efficacy component of social learning theory provided a framework that helped me, as the researcher in this study, understand how workers perceived professional development and systemic support. Bandura noted that efficacy beliefs were less relevant in a new employee's initial skill development, but they were particularly crucial once activities became routine. Any time after a routine was established, adjustments evolved and could be put into place. According to Bandura, this belief in self-efficacy influences both the choice of action and a person's motivational level and, therefore, facilitates the process of knowledge acquisition in which a person establishes skills. Knowles's model of andragogy provides a framework through which to view how adults learn from real-life contexts and situations.

Bandura's (1997) theory and Knowles's (1970) model framed this study and linked strategies for achievement and adults' readiness to learn how to think and manage in a new setting. The two approaches also demonstrate how adults perceive, transform,

and understand information. Bandura (1997) indicated that self-perception provides a framework and structure for individuals to gather, view, and assess knowledge. Adult experiences, including mistakes, provide the basis for continuous learning (Knowles, 1970). The adult workers' self-perceptions help them to determine if they feel they have enough information and experience to complete their assigned duties (Bandura, 1997; & Knowles, 1970). If they saw something as being novel or different, adult learners were more likely to make it the center of their attention (Knowles, 1970). Social contexts also helped and reinforced their perceptions.

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

The self-efficacy theory originated from Bandura's (1997) social learning theory that suggests that people learn and derive motivation through observation and imitation of others. Therefore, learning could be the knowledge gained from a series of adjustments individuals make to improve their opportunities for future successes and advancements. Building upon social learning theory, I examined how individuals' choices affected the outcome of their lives. Bandura further stated that perceived self-efficacy and self-efficacy are different. Perceived self-efficacy is more potent in individuals when they focus on decisions about their capabilities. For example, if asked to dance, someone may feign an inability to dance well. In contrast, Bandura noted that self-efficacy concerns the decisions a person makes regarding their self-worth, goals, or the challenges they had set for themselves.

Moreover, individuals' beliefs in their efficacy to strengthen and master their skills influenced their objectives, level of motivation, and professional accomplishments

(Bandura, 1997). Paraprofessional workers who lacked professional development had limited experiences and opportunities to practice positive behaviors that may have significantly increased their self-esteem (Bandura; Orth et al., 2012; Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Those who had high self-esteem visualized success scenarios that provided definite guides for performance, while those who judged themselves as inefficacious envisioned strategies that highlighted defeat by dwelling on things that would go wrong (Bandura, 1997). However, as individuals constructed and rehearsed their courses of action, these self-efficacy beliefs helped shape the anticipatory scenarios (e.g., scenes that the individuals visualized in their minds). In the current study, self-efficacy theory was particularly useful for understanding how afterschool program workers perceived the need for professional development and support within an afterschool program setting.

When individuals with a low self-efficacy engaged in assigned tasks, they drew upon a sense of self that grew out of a lifetime of experiences without being consciously aware of their qualifications or skills (Bandura, 1997). For instance, Iroegbu (2015) studied the connection between work performance and self-efficacy, and the results revealed a positive association between workers' specific jobs and job performance. The higher the self-efficacy, the more employees accomplished at work (Iroegbu, 2015). However, it was uncertain how much self-efficacy a worker gained that influenced their attitude and beliefs regarding how they perceived themselves in the workplace. Sowislo and Orth's (2013) research supported Bandura's (1997) findings that workers with opportunities for advancement had a higher self-efficacy and usually responded well to critiques of their overall performances from supervisors and other workers with

backgrounds in professional training practices. Sowislo and Orth's (2013) research further indicated that higher self-efficacy positively affected an individual's well-being and success.

Individuals with low self-efficacy may be at risk for adverse outcomes, such as depression and pulling back from difficult tasks (Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Nevertheless, Cherian and Jacob (2013) found that self-efficacy was an essential concept for understanding a worker's motivation and ability to complete their job successfully. Moreover, in workers who completed their tasks successfully, Bandura (1997) pointed out that there was a difference in how workers viewed and defined themselves. Adults explained who they were, portraying their own experiences and what they had accomplished. The adult learner had input into their learning process and made sure not to imitate others.

Bandura (1997) also suggested that there were two types of workers: the ideal worker and the actual worker. The ideal worker was authentic, whereas the actual worker depends on the ideal worker, who had training. The actual worker viewed the training as complete in their practice. Bandura asserted that the ideal worker was trying to enhance their motivation, personal self-esteem, and advancement opportunities. A person's self-efficacy level influenced new choice behaviors, such as occupational roles, performance, determination, or effort. The theory applies to those choice behaviors that influence individuals' perceptions of themselves in a workplace setting.

Knowles's Model of Andragogy

Up to the mid-20th century, adult education teachers depended on research studies from educational psychology and psychology to understand how adults learned (Hagen & Park, 2016). The core assumptions of how adults learned, and processed knowledge came from Knowles's (1970) andragogy model. Knowles's model highlights adults' readiness to learn, prior experiences, self-direction, and ability to use their new cognitive skills. The andragogy model shifts the responsibility and motivation away from teachers to learners (Fornaciari & Lund Dean, 2014). Moving in the direction of andragogy requires determining what is essential versus what students believe to be necessary (Fornaciari & Lund Dean, 2014). Knowles surmised that teaching adults was not the same as teaching children.

Knowles (1970) framed the art and science of how adults learned as the concept of andragogy, stating that adult learning represented a lifelong process of discovering what a person did not know and understand. As adults mature and accumulate a wealth of information and experiences, they move from dependence to independence, and here, the responsibility shifts from the teacher to the adult (Fornaciari & Lund Dean, 2014). However, every adult enters this process with different backgrounds and life experiences and accumulates expertise and various types of experiences (Knowles, 1970). Adults differ in what they learn from experience and how deeply they reflect on that experience.

According to Knowles (1970), adults' self-concepts change when they see themselves as a doer. Adults are concerned about their performance as citizens, parents, spouses, workers, and providers, and they receive pleasure from these responsibilities

because they see themselves as being in charge, managing their affairs, and being ready

to handle consequences. Adults need to be treated with respect and situations that make

them feel like children or less than adults should be avoided. How adults perceive

themselves affects their future learning.

In the andragogy model, Knowles (1970) emphasized the involvement of adults in

the process of self-evaluation. Self-diagnosis is critical and consists of three phases. The

first stage is the performance model, where the adult learner and the teacher come

together. Self-assessment, the second stage, and accountability, the third phase, are when

the adult learner becomes aware of the distance between where they are and where they

need to be in their performance. The adult also defines who they are, and their own

experiences indicate what they have accomplished.

The process of teaching an adult involves a pedagogical or an andragogical

approach to how they learn (Knowles, 1970). The learning environment must be

conducive for adults to feel at ease. On the other hand, Knowles found that students have

new experiences from self-directed learning. The self-directed method uses the expertise

of the adult to develop their education solutions. For example, Siriwongs (2015)

experimented and found that adults learned more from their experiences independently.

In Siriwongs's (2015) study, a group of adult learners and traditional-age students

were instructed to sell various juices. During the experiment, Siriwongs discovered that

juice extracts were prepared and stored differently. Some of the fruit used to make the

juice extracts spoiled and had to be refrigerated. Students learned as they went along and

sought help from one another; they worked together to set the prices for the juices and

realized that teamwork led to their success. The learners now had a new experience

guided by the concept of self-directed learning. The example took the adult learners and

students through the various stages where Siriwongs (2015) observed how they owned

and solved their problems while gaining new experiences. Providing adults with a

network of support and resources helped them learn and become involved in planning

their goals (Bandura, 1997; Knowles, 1970).

Empirical Literature Review

Much of the empirical research literature indicates the importance of professional

development for afterschool programs by increasing student engagement and

participation (Jita & Mokhele, 2014; McClurkin Patrick, 2016). However, there is

minimal reference to how the workers' value professional development and perceive their

roles (Jita & Mokhele, 2014; & McClurkin Patrick, 2016). In this section, I focus on

recent research regarding the significance of afterschool programs. I also focus on

professional development for afterschool workers and how they experience professional

development in the afterschool program setting. Lastly, I concentrate on students in

afterschool programs academic success and outcomes.

The Significance of Afterschool Programs

Parents' continued involvement in the labor force required that children outside of

a traditional family system become supervised (Afterschool Alliance, 2014b). Since

2012, the high number of working parents caught the attention of the federal government,

which was committed to funding pre-K programs across the states (Currie & Rossin-

Slater, 2015). In turn, the federal government engaged and supported afterschool

programs (E. P. Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). Working parents relied on afterschool programs to balance parental and job-related obligations (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a). Not surprisingly, parents who worked more than 35 hours on average per week were more likely to require nonparental afterschool care than parents who worked less (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a). These programs gave parents a haven for their children and supported academic learning. Now, because of the COVID-19 virus, the concerns of parents have shifted.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the feelings of parents toward remote learning have been mixed. A study of 122 parents conducted by Garbe et al. (2020) revealed that most parents had to take on new and unfamiliar roles and responsibilities as their children participated in online education. Some parents viewed these roles as burdensome, while others felt inadequate because they lacked knowledge of the subject. Other challenges, according to Garbe et al (2020) included a lack of economic resources and internet access, a lack of interest in using technology, and low digital self-efficacy.

Impact of Professional Development on Student Achievement

Yoo's (2016) study found a link between teacher self-efficacy and student learning. The research conducted by Gaikhorst et al. (2015) stressed an open learning culture among teachers where sharing knowledge and interventions benefitted students. According to Kuswandono (2019), professional development's main goal is to create critical changes in teachers' beliefs and attitudes, their teaching-learning practices, and the learning outcomes of students. Gaikhorst et al (2015);.and Peters-Burton et al. (2015) found that collaboration that influences professional development, instructional methods

employed by teachers, and self-efficacy levels experienced by the teachers, positively impacted students.

Additionally, afterschool programs aligned with other school day programs led to a shared professional culture that offered active collaboration from all workers (Peters-Burton et al., 2015). Continuous training enhanced workers' familiarity with their various roles and helped them create plans and anticipate solutions for youth (Gaikhorst et al., 2015). Student cognition and achievement improved due to the teachers' strategies and the continuous training of workers (Yoo, 2016; Yurtseven & Bademcioglu, 2016). Barrett et al. (2015) pointed out that the effectiveness of training linked workers to student academic success. Their study on professional development as a reform suggested that professional development training that focused on content improved the academics of students with lower grades. The success rate or the failure of students depended on comprehensive training and retraining (Nicu, 2016).

Improving student achievement through comprehensive training and retraining depends upon the high quality of professional development programs (Gore et al., 2021). To increase the rate of student outcomes, Kennedy (2016) recommended that professional development programs focus on more than improving teachers' content knowledge. Gore et al. (2021) and Furtak et al. (2016) put an emphasis on curriculum content as well as formative assessment. For example, workshops with an emphasis on curriculum content proved vital to the effectiveness of professional development and student achievement (Furtak et al., 2016; Gore et al., 2021;). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) conducted an evaluation of professional development programs in which 31 of 35 focused on

enhancing teachers' knowledge of curriculum content. Their study found that professional development that highlighted teaching strategies associated with specific curriculum content helped teachers become better equipped in their classrooms and helped with student achievement.

Additionally, teachers' beliefs have been found to affect their decision-making process when interacting with students in the classroom. However, Bandura (1977) noted as a part of self-efficacy theory, that individuals' convictions regarding their effectiveness are likely to impact whether they will attempt to carry out their given assignments. The professional development conducted and studied by H. Lee et al. (2017) included 2 years of learning with 9-day summer and 3-day winter workshops, and 2-hour monthly meetings throughout the school year. The results of this program suggest that the teachers' educational beliefs were impervious to change, and the change they were looking for such as, student achievement, may come later.

Worker Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy helps to determine worker's job satisfaction, job performance, and career development. Self-efficacy is also important for predicting, improving, and supporting worker's performance (S. C. Lee et al., 2016). According to Ogba et al. (2020) adequate training makes workers more motivated, boasts their self-efficacy, and makes them more dedicated to their duties. Researchers in the early 1990s found that self-efficacy significantly affected individuals and how they perceive themselves (as cited in Paluta et al., 2016). Individuals with a low self-esteem also experienced depression making it harder to be successful in the workplace, while individuals with a higher self-

esteem performed better and were encouraged to motivate and assist others (Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Moreover, researchers found that the interventions organizations initiated modeled positive behavior, promoted self-efficacy, and provided professional development (Paluta et al., 2016; Sowislo & Orth). A study by Wrzesniewski et al. (2013) utilized an educational approach that helped employees improve their self-efficacy.

The employees' perceptions of their work strategies included the significant and positive changes they made to their jobs. Wrzesniewski et al. (2013) defined job crafting as a form of collaboration that uses changes in individuals' job assignments to create a better work environment. In contrast, they could experience different meanings of the work and themselves. Job crafting allowed workers to collaborate and outline their tasks to reduce adverse outcomes and create a sense of alignment between themselves and the organization's mission. Modeling positive behavior could help organizations reduce harmful consequences and increase positive collaborations between workers on the job.

According to Paluta et al. (2016), workers had training equivalent to teachers to acquire new knowledge and develop self-confidence through professional development training. Paluta et al. found that through professional development and hands-on training for nonprofessional workers, the collaborative professional practice-built team spirit and created a positive work environment conducive for staff and academic achievement among students. Moreover, Kalimullin et al. (2016) advocated that professional development should be activity based and concentrated on communication, competence, content, and workers' confidence and self-efficacy.

A firm sense of self-efficacy is an essential contributor to the social reality individuals construct for themselves (Bandura, 1997). Cherian and Jacob (2013) assessed the influence of self-efficacy on individuals' performance in the workplace and how it determined their work performance and motivation. Training to acquire the skills needed for learning and self-renewal rested on how the workers maintained their engagement and sense of self-efficacy (Kalimullin et al., 2016; Paluta et al., 2016). The high praise workers received on the job increased their self-confidence and improved their low self-esteem. For some workers, their positive self-efficacy meant contentment and the beginning of self-determination (Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Also, positive self-efficacy leads to positive outcomes between workers on the job and their trainers (Valmas et al., 2020).

Professional Development

Professional development has become an essential organizational practice that addresses the lack of training and unpreparedness employees face in the workplace. According to Minuti et al. (2015), some paraprofessionals found themselves unprepared for their jobs. However, unpreparedness did not necessarily mean that the workers lacked the initiative to take responsibility for their self-development. Minuti et al. indicated that learning in the workplace is a crucial process motivated by the impact of individuals' changes. Moreover, individual workers found that much of their created knowledge took place on the job and was not addressed in their initial training (Maitra & Maitra, 2015). An example of learning on the job is how one handles breaking up a fight between two students or resolves a contentious situation between parents.

The concept of professional development centers on the employee's experience of the work they perform. Implementation of professional development is not just to satisfy district and state requirements, such as when one is newly hired; instead, professional development is implemented to support workers' needs (Minuti et al., 2015). Without professional development, workers who operate in an afterschool program feel unprepared and unsupported (McLurkin, 2013). Professional development can be as simple as a resource book that equips and encourages workers to discuss and collaborate with staff on various instructional strategies that meet their needs and better prepare them to work with students (Minuti et al. & Paluta et al., 2016).

An empirical case study of secondary school policymakers was conducted in southeast Nigeria to prepare teachers to work with students with special needs. The study conducted by Ogba et al. (2020) stressed the need for substantial retraining of teachers and administrators to help improve professional efficacy and insufficient training. Lack of inadequate training led to teachers' stress, negative attitudes, and low morale on the job.

According to Paluta et al. (2016), the logic behind workers' continuous training is to maintain existing skills and develop new skills and practices. Paluta et al. (2016), found that implementing ongoing training combined with practical program goals was a successful way to run an organization offered after school. These researchers further noted that continued training aided workers in remaining focused and well-informed about policies and different practices that help them with all children in afterschool programs. The ongoing training proved beneficial as it opened doors and provided

opportunities for workers to develop and pursue new ambitions outside of their everyday experiences. Also, teachers' motivation and self-esteem increased once they start to receive adequate support and professional development. Findings from the study by Ogba et al. (2020) also demonstrated that teachers needed more training and knowledge of teaching methods to gain communication skills in an inclusive classroom and evaluate students' performance.

Workers' Professional Development

Learning something new requires ongoing professional development in and out of school programs. Blanchard et al. (2016) conducted a 3-year research study on professional development and concluded that knowledge and skills in the field of technology improved the teacher's instruction and prepared students to compete globally. The findings of the research performed by Yurtseven and Bademcioglu (2016) agree with those of Blanchard et al. in that professional development should be consistent and ongoing. Yurtseven and Bademcioglu went a step further and advocated that the professional development process would continue throughout an individual's career, such as when they started a new profession or entering retirement.

While paraprofessionals may have shared their challenges in working with students, many could not articulate the type of support they needed (Sahin et al., 2014; Yurtseven & Bademcioglu, 2016). Yurtseven and Bademcioglu, and Sahin et al. found that workers' challenges concerned their ability and proficiency with necessary skills, such as communication and collaboration. McLurkin (2013) also examined the expertise and competence of volunteers who had no teaching skills or prior knowledge of

educational practices. The study found that although the volunteers felt their students'

literacy skills had improved, research data suggested that the volunteers had not helped

their students strengthen these skills. The lack of confidence among the volunteers left

them questioning whether they should stay or quit tutoring. Finding the right training

programs for volunteer staff required performing periodic evaluations and assessments

that ensured that volunteers' and students' needs were recognized and met (Blanchard et

al., 2016; McLurkin, 2013; & Yurtseven & Bademcioglu, 2016).

Many scholars believe quality professional development experiences to be central

to the improvement of teaching and student learning (Trust et al., 2016). A study on

professional learning networks conducted by Trust et al. demonstrated that knowledge

did not just take place in training programs but became part of every employee's

everyday activities. Staff training was not limited to what occurred in training sessions

but rather what transpired when the staff attempted new practices in their work

(Saunders, 2014). Professional development training occurs every time an individual

reads a book or article, participates in walkthroughs, receives workplace observations,

and asks questions.

Nicu (2016) compared professional development education in Romania to

professional development in the United States and found that both countries experienced

shortcomings and that workers needed more training and continued instruction. Nicu,

(2016), also pointed out that teachers in Romania could not talk about their professional

success apart from their students' achievements because their success depended on their

students' accomplishments. In Indonesia, Rahman et al. (2015) found learning

opportunities, such as professional development, gave workers resources they could relate to their personal experiences.

Successful professional development enables workers to do their jobs and leaves them feeling more confident and prepared. Freeman et al. (2018) found that strategic self-management improved staff participation in professional development training. Targeted professional development is essential and prepares afterschool workers for the academic challenges they face in their roles in an afterschool program setting. Barrett et al. (2015) and Yurtseven and Bademcioglu (2016) asserted that ongoing, job-embedded professional development leads to daily learning opportunities. The success and perception of a worker's professional development depend on how they view themselves and respond to the experienced, trained individual.

Freeman et al. (2018) found that replication of professional development studies benefitted and supported professional training strategies used in the workplace. This replication provided validation of new support strategies and ideas, such as how research supported teachers' classroom organization and management in a new environment. Freeman et al., 2018, noted that professional development approaches that stressed teachers' self-management approaches were less resource-intensive for improving teachers' use of effective practices. Freeman et al. and Saunders (2014) explored the impact of a targeted professional development approach that boosted teachers' praise. Teachers received brief, specific, skill-based training on individual praise and applied it with a self-management package.

The findings from Freeman et al. (2018) and Saunders (2014) encouraged teachers' recognition to increase and duplicate this in other schools. In their study, Kang et al. (2013) identified various tools to enhance knowledge for current and prospective teachers, such as working with instructional experts and ongoing workshops. Kang et al. indicated that subject-focused professional development training influenced teachers' practices, student learning, and education. Rahman et al. (2015) looked at Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding and identified strengths and weaknesses of teachers' ongoing learning process of professional development. The idea of scaffolding was to provide vital but short-term support to teachers. The instructional staff provided structures that temporarily supported and assisted learners in acquiring new insights, new beliefs, and unique talents and skills. As the learner acquired these skills, teachers slowly withdrew that support and offered help only for extended or new tasks, understandings, and concepts.

Professional development training for workers, both novice and veteran, strengthens content knowledge by introducing different professional development training methods. Coaching is a type of professional practice in an educational setting or wherever learning occurs (St. Clair & Stone, 2016). Coaching involves assisting teachers and workers with acquiring, improving, or refining specific, evidence-based intervention practices or teaching behaviors and offering continuous help and feedback (Datnow & Hubbard, 2016). Based on Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding, coaches work one-on-one with teachers and enhance their knowledge and understanding through processes of instruction, guided practice, and reflection. Coaching related to professional

development has frequently been offered as part of a multicomponent professional development program that included introductory workshops, an ongoing course, or web resources that provided information on evidence-based practices (St. Clair & Stone, 2016). St. Clair and Stone found that professional development was more advantageous when participants involved themselves in the process of design and implementation.

In a study that explored methods to assist workers with adequate training and ongoing professional development, Donaldson (2015) found that the cognitive apprenticeship model served as a preparation for staff. The study demonstrated how these individuals perceived others' work. Some examples of the apprenticeship model were seminars or workshops that provided instructional strategies as well as modeling and coaching exercises designed to help afterschool workers gain experience related to their assignments. McClurkin Patrick's (2016) study found that professional development, such as required workshops, weekly meetings, and unannounced walkthroughs, supported the mandated professional development, and served as a means of preparation training for teachers and assisted untrained workers in undertaking assignments or tasks. The vocational training of staff, when linked to student outcomes, boosted students' learning. Also, prior training afforded workers with rich experiences insight into what their careers could look like in the future.

Yurtseven and Bademcioglu (2016) found that workers created opportunities that broadened their professional experiences by emphasizing previous training and continuing professional development. Professional development improved workers' ability to transfer knowledge to new situations and create more optimal opportunities for

success. Similarly, a study in Australia described professional development as everyday learning that occurs in the workplace and practiced turn learning in which employees work together and transfer knowledge (Reich et al., 2015). In other words, professional learning did not have to be limited to a core of mandated workshops (Donaldson, 2015). Nevertheless, Donaldson found that learning throughout different settings supported professional development.

Additional research by Kang et al. (2013) explored workers' perceptions of professional development. Kang et al. argued that knowledge is situated, and that learning occurs in a variety of situations. The workers' experiences on the job became situated when it progressed and became a part of the action, the job, and the environment in which it was developed and practiced. The applicability of Bandura's (1977) research, for example, relates to how workers viewed their performance in real-life situations (e.g., working with students who have special needs). The experience is vital to both the novice teacher and worker because both lack expertise and training. To bring about learning through this experience, Suhrheinrich (2015) found that pivotal response training as professional development improved all engagement levels and workers' capabilities to work with children who had special needs. The professional development in this situation needed to be relevant and context specific.

Professional development contributes to teachers' competencies and job motivation (Gaikhorst et al., 2015). Kang et al. (2013) found that various activities contributed to staff professional development. Petrie and McGee (2012) noted that events, such as playing games, kept teachers motivated and engaged. The creation of a

professional learning community in schools that focused on teacher learning and collaboration was an encouraging way to promote teachers' continuous professional development (Gaikhorst et al., 2015). However, Gaikhorst et al., found that an open learning culture's value positively contributed to and affected self-efficacy, leadership, and professional development among teachers.

Limitations of Existing Research

Research studies document the role of professional development in school systems as it relates to professional educators. The same attention does not apply to research that explores professional development in an afterschool program setting relative to afterschool program workers. The qualitative research reviewed in this study demonstrates that professional development opens the door for new ideas to develop and personal and professional experiences to emerge, which connects workers to program goals and objectives that reinforce afterschool programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2014b; Dunst, 2015). More research is needed concerning workers' perceptions of the professional development they need to succeed in their assigned tasks. Professional development is required to help all workers, especially those with low self esteem and no skills to succeed in the workplace. Without ongoing professional training, the organization is at risk for failure (Yurtseven & Bademcioglu, 2016). The effects of professional development indicate that most teachers' and workers' practices are positively influenced by activities that promote collaboration and training (Yurtseven & Bademcioglu, 2016).

Summary and Conclusions

Professional development allows teachers and paraprofessionals to gain personal and professional insights that connect to their afterschool programs' goals (Afterschool Alliance, 2014b; Dunst, 2015). A worker's self-efficacy influences learning and accomplishment in the workplace (Bandura, 1986; Gaikhorst et al., 2015; Oproiu & Liţoiu, 2013). Self-efficacy affects a worker's choices, motivation, and how they respond to negativity in the workplace. Self-efficacy is not the only effect on behavior that might be pivotal to workers' success in an afterschool program setting. Factors such as talent and skills, expectations of results, and how workers perceive their efforts' value are also crucial to the afterschool environment's success. A worker with low self-efficacy will not improve their performance while they lack essential skills (Bandura, 1986). The implementation of professional development is important to advance and improve vocational training.

In Chapter 3, I discuss this study's research design and rationale and my role as the researcher. I describe the methodology used, including the participant selection logic, instrumentation, and procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. I also address issues of trustworthiness and the ethical procedures put in place during this research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore paraprofessional workers' perceptions of professional development that would help them in their work in an afterschool program. While professional development for teachers in schools seems to be universal, training and professional development for workers in afterschool programs are kept to a minimum or not provided at all, with the exception of the mandatory minimum in these areas (Lange, 2014; Nicu, 2016). In this chapter, I describe the research design and its rationale. My role as the researcher and the methodological approach used, including participant selection, the interview approach, and the data analysis plan, are also discussed. Following a review of issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures, I conclude the chapter with a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

There was one central RQ that guided this study and two sub-RQs.

RQ: What are the perceptions of paraprofessional workers in afterschool programs regarding how professional development supported their work?

Sub-RQ 1: What did paraprofessional workers in afterschool programs identify as their primary learning needs?

Sub-RQ 2: What approaches to professional development supported their work?

I chose a basic qualitative design because this interview-based approach enabled me to understand and interpret the meaning of participants' experiences (see Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). I considered two other qualitative research designs before selecting a basic qualitative approach for this study. I did not select a case study design because I did

not think I could learn as much about afterschool programs from a few individuals or through observations. Documents are also valuable in case studies for analysis, but these were limited in the current study. Focus groups would have been difficult to arrange given the schedules of the staff, and by the time I had received permission to collect data, COVID-19 restrictions made doing a case study less than feasible. Interviewing multiple participants on Zoom allowed me to listen to a myriad of responses rather than individual cases in a bounded setting (see Creswell, 2007). A phenomenological approach would not have been appropriate because my research was not designed to delve into the meaning participants made of their experiences or how they understand their world (see Patton, 2002). I could not count on finding participants with several years of experience, and my central RQ and sub-RQs were more pragmatic than those designed for phenomenological studies.

Role of the Researcher

In the role of researcher, I conducted all interviews and analyzed the data (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I had no personal or professional relationships with the participants interviewed. In carrying out this study, I strived for objectivity, given my passion for quality afterschool care and 40 years of experience as a leader/teacher in similar settings. To increase my objectivity, I kept a journal where I recorded my reflections and reactions to the participants' responses as well as my thoughts and considerations of how my subjectivity might influence the interviews or data analysis (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Methodology

In this section, I discuss the study's setting, the participant selection process, instrumentation, participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis.

Setting

My research study was originally to take place in one afterschool program setting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many changes went into effect. During this time, afterschool programs were closed, and classroom instruction was virtual. The participants I interviewed were also out of work and relied on memories of their experiences. For the safety of the participants and myself, I conducted the interviews using Zoom. A professional transcription service was used to transcribe the interviews.

Participant Selection Logic

I used convenience sampling and contacted paraprofessionals through social media sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, as well as reached out to sorority groups online. I decided to focus on eight to 10 individuals who worked with youth in an afterschool program setting. Of the eight participants, seven were female and one was male. Five participants were African American and three were European American. Everyone interviewed resided in the southern or northern United States and ranged in age from 25 to 60 years old, with most being in their 50s. All participants had at least 6 months experience in an afterschool program.

The participant selection criteria included that each (a) had received minimal professional development in a research site setting, (b) be at least 18 years of age, and (c) had worked at the afterschool program for a minimum of 6 months. I chose staff who had

worked at least 6 months in these programs because I could not be sure I would find enough participants with several years of experience given the low pay in the profession (see U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). I received acknowledgment through social media from individuals who believed they met the criteria, which I confirmed early in the recruitment process.

Once I received Walden University's Instructional Review Board (IRB) approval (No. 07-06-20-0278209), I started the interview process. Researchers attain saturation when additional data do not lead to any new emergent themes, and the participants' responses are repetitive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I reached saturation around the fifth or sixth interview; therefore, I determined that eight interviews were adequate to develop meaningful themes and useful interpretations.

Instrumentation

I developed a semistructured interview guide with open-ended questions (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interview questions were approved by Walden's IRB and aligned with the RQ and sub-RQs as well as the conceptual framework. I drew on the information from the literature review for additional probes (see Appendix). The questions were open-ended so I could identify what was important in the participants' perceptions of what took place on the job before probing other aspects suggested by the research I reviewed. In the interview protocol, I included the wording for how I planned to introduce the study to the participants at the start of the interview (see Creswell, 2013). I tested my interview protocol with four people who were not participants in the research study but offered reliable feedback on the questions. This process of testing my interview

protocol permitted me to gain the experience and confidence needed when conducting interviews and asking follow-up questions. The interview questions included:

- How did mentoring/coaching/modeling/professional development/trainings, etc. support you in the workplace?

- What approaches to professional development/trainings/informal education/ learning opportunities would you like for current job and/or career advancement?

Procedure for Recruitment and Participation

Initially, all interested participants worked at the same school. I planned to meet with the participants for face-to-face interviews at their convenience at the school. The COVID-19 pandemic changed this, and due to safety concerns, I decided to conduct Zoom interviews instead. I had to make modifications to my IRB application, which was approved. Once I received approval, I sent an invitation to the contact person at the school, who was supposed to put the invitations in staff mailboxes; however, the school closed, and they were unable to do so.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, staff were not present to receive the invitation, so I obtained and used their email addresses to contact them. Participants were not from the same school. Therefore, I had a difficult time making contact due to the pandemic, although I only needed eight participants. The email included the informed consent form. I also provided my personal contact information so that the interested participants who met the selection criteria could respond directly to me. I introduced myself, explained the study's background, and offered a thank-you gift of $35.00 for their participation.

If I did not receive an immediate response, I emailed the participants a second time. Upon receiving an affirmative reply, I arranged interviews via email or phone. I asked the participants which format they preferred. The interview format preferred by all the participants was the virtual platform, Zoom. Interviews lasted for 45–60 minutes.

Upon meeting with each participant, I restated that their participation in the interview was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any point in the study if they changed their minds. I also reiterated that there were no risks in being interviewed beyond those of typical daily life. They were informed that a potential benefit in talking about their professional development might be to inspire them to think and learn about opportunities for their current job or career advancement.

Data Collection

I collected data through semi structured interviews. During this process, I maintained a reflective journal (see B. Smith & Sparkes, 2016). According to Gubrium and Holstein (2012) and B. Smith and Sparkes, the investigative researcher is the study's instrument in qualitative research. Using a reflective journal helped me to better process and understand the data I collected. Similarly, this journal enabled me to reflect on the overall research process.

To collect data, I utilized the digital recorder on Zoom and an additional digital audio recorder as a backup in case of a mishap. During one of the interviews, a storm caused a disruption with the electricity and internet connection; however, the Zoom program automatically saved the data. With my cell phone, I sent an email to the participant and explained the circumstances and asked if I could email when all was

working properly to continue. I also made it clear that if the timing were not convenient, we could reschedule; however, service was restored within 1 hour and we were able to continue with the interview. However, the second recording did need to be uploaded to the transcription service, which incurred an additional cost. If any of the participants voiced concern over being recorded, they could have exited the study at any time, but this did not occur.

Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) noted that researchers generally start with more categories of codes than they use. I analyzed and coded my data to determine primary themes. This was accomplished by color coding the similarities among the interview responses. I examined each response in relation to the RQ and sub-RQs and further coded the categories that the themes represented. The interview transcripts were also reviewed, and I jotted down information that I found useful in the margins as I did so. As I coded, one set of interview transcripts were compared with another. I analyzed the codes, refining and revising the themes into a smaller number of categories. Next, I looked for patterns and themes among the categories I discovered.

After interviewing the first few participants, I found that I wanted to add probing questions, such as, "How would you like that professional development delivered? For example, would you prefer a lecture, internet, workshop, or reading materials, to name a few?" While I asked everyone the same set of questions, I liked the flexibility afforded by asking probing questions if necessary. However, I did not go back and ask the first few participants any probing questions.

Another recommendation of Merriam and Tisdell (2015) that I followed was to make notations that included the questions I asked and any reflections I had on each. I penned the decisions I made regarding any issues or ideas I encountered while I collected data and recorded my data interpretations. I was unfamiliar with Zoom and transcription services; therefore, I investigated which service to use and discussed this with colleagues in my research forum. The cost was a factor in selection as was accuracy, so I would not have to edit the transcripts for errors. The audio recording was uploaded to the transcription service the same day I completed each interview.

I reiterated to each participant that I would use a pseudonym to refer to them in the study to ensure their privacy. Once the transcription service returned the transcripts, I reviewed them. In the margins of each transcript, I wrote notes to help me reflect on what the participant conveyed during the interview process. Within 7 days, I sent the transcript to the interviewee and asked them to review and respond regarding its accuracy. None of the participants indicated any discrepancies. Interview data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years and stored on my personal computer.

Issues of Trustworthiness

A research study is considered trustworthy if the individual who reads it evaluates it as reliable (Gunawan, 2015). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is the degree to which an individual can have confidence in the study's results. Qualitative researchers use several strategies, such as member checking, triangulation, comprehensive transcription analysis, organized planning, and coding, to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness (Gunawan, 2015). I used four strategies to help establish

trustworthiness in the current study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I explain these aspects, how I achieved each in this study, and their relevance in the following subsections.

Credibility

The researcher in a qualitative study is the main instrument of data collection (Patton, 2002). When I began my studies, I embraced my involvement and the role I played in the research process. The credibility of my qualitative study depended on my purpose and skills. Qualitative research utilizes a naturalistic methodology to identify phenomena in context-specific settings, such as a "real-world setting where the researcher did not try to influence the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 39). Patton supported the notion of the researcher becoming immersed in their study as well as having an awareness that things are subject to change in the real world. Therefore, a qualitative researcher should be present to record those pertinent changes. Interviewing and keeping detailed notes of the process added credibility to make my research richer (see Patton). I returned the transcripts to the participants for confirmation of their accuracy. The reflective journal I kept, the member checks, and early saturation of the data, all ensured credibility.

Transferability

To establish transferability, I presented evidence to readers that may apply to other situations and contexts by explaining how I framed the study and what the participants expressed during their interviews. I also provided a detailed account of the participants' perceptions recorded during the data collection process (see Merriam &

Tisdell, 2015). These interviews provided rich, thick descriptions on which I based my conclusions.

Dependability

According to Maxwell (2013), recording and reviewing data ensures authenticity and reliability. Also, journaling is a method to prove or confirm the accountability of data collection. Audit trails provided dependability when the participants authenticated the transcribed interviews. Further dependability was established when the participants agreed with my findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability concerns how much of a study's findings were determined by the research components and not the researcher's bias. The chair of my dissertation committee reviewed my data and checked for potential biases. I kept a reflective journal throughout the research process. According to B. Smith and Sparkes (2016), maintaining a reflective journal helps the researcher to recall as many details about the interview as possible, such as how the participant reacted to the questions. I then transcribed and explained all data (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used, verbatim, the participants' words when presenting the results of this study.

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Ethical Procedures

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I obtained approval from Walden University's IRB. Once I received this, I sent out recruitment emails and invited the participants to partake in the study. The participants reviewed the consent form that contained the study's relevant information. The consent form indicated that I had received approval from the IRB and that the

participants could contact Walden University with any concerns. I asked all participants the same set of questions. I also explained my study's purpose, background, procedures, risks, benefits, privacy, and voluntary participation. I offered complimentary gift cards to the participants for taking part in the study. I did not have any personal affiliations with anyone from the research sites. I will keep the interview data for a minimum of 5 years, stored on my personal computer and flash drive in a file cabinet, locked in my home office.

Summary

This basic qualitative study explored paraprofessional workers perceptions regarding their need for professional development and what they perceived would be the best type of training for them. With the research showing an overall lack of training for these volunteers, I chose to conduct semistructured interviews to discover if this held true with paraprofessionals in afterschool programs. In this chapter, I presented the research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, methodological approach, and issues of trustworthiness. In Chapter 4, I describe my study's setting and demographics and provide background on each participant. In addition, I discuss data collection, analysis, and the study's findings.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore paraprofessional workers' perceptions of professional development that assists them in their work in an afterschool program. I secured the eight participants needed for my research by reaching out through social media, using Facebook and LinkedIn, and contacting sorority groups. One overarching RQ and two sub-RQs guided this study:

RQ: What are paraprofessional workers' perceptions in afterschool programs regarding how professional development might support their work?

Sub-RQ 1: What do paraprofessional workers in afterschool programs identify as their primary learning needs?

Sub-RQ 2: What approaches to professional development supported their work?

Study Setting

Each participant was interviewed and recorded in an environment of their choosing using Zoom. I established a connection using Zoom to speak face-to-face (virtually) with the participants, help them feel comfortable with the setting, and observe their body language. Specifically, because the participants chose their location while being interviewed, I believe it gave each a sense of privacy and security. I collected the data necessary for this study from the eight participants who talked about their perceptions of their experiences in response to my interview questions and probes. Initially, I had planned to gather data from participants from one afterschool program and had a contact who provided me with the email addresses of interested participants. Data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the fear of contracting

COVID-19 played a significant role in some of the original participants' decision to participate in my research study. I did not use any of the original participants. The COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, and I received IRB approval in July 2020. By the time I received approval, the participants may have thought I would have postponed my research study. Due to the unprecedented worldwide changes resulting from the pandemic, I informed the participants that I would not conduct face-to-face interviews but that these would be virtual for those who still wished to participate.

Demographics

To secure the participants I needed for my study, I reached out through social media to individuals on Facebook and LinkedIn and contacted sorority groups. Of the eight participants, five were African American and three were European American. All participants were female except for one. Everyone interviewed resided in the southern and northern United States. Of the eight participants, two previously worked in an afterschool program and six were currently employed in an afterschool setting. Four participants worked in an afterschool program that was an extension of their school, three were employed in an afterschool program established by community members and stakeholders, and one participant worked in an afterschool program established by social services. Two of the 8 participants were college students and worked full time during semester breaks and holidays. At the time of these interviews, schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the participants did not know when they would return to their jobs. Table 1 provides the demographics of the eight participants.

Table 1

Demographics

	Abigail	Eleanor	Hillary	Martha	Lady Bird	Barbara	Michelle	James
Children	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Age	57	24	57	48	54	60	25	25
Race	Black	Black	White	Black	White	White	Black	Black
Months of experience	10	7	12	12	10	7	8	8
Student grades	1–8	1–8	1–8	1–8	1–8	1–8	5–12	5–12

I have protected the participants' identities by not specifically revealing their ages, where they worked, and by using pseudonyms. With two exceptions, the participants were employed in different afterschool programs. In the interviews, the participants described their afterschool programs and what it was like working in these environments. I provide a brief profile of each participant below.

Michelle is a young woman with no children of her own. She described herself as having high aspirations, compassion, and confidence. She started her day in the afterschool program by helping students complete their homework, going outside for recess, and providing a snack. Michelle defined her students as "developmentally delayed or handicapped."

Eleanor is also a young woman with no children of her own. She described herself as having high aspirations as well as being efficient, confident, friendly, and accomplished. She started her day in the afterschool program by watching the students on the playground. Eleanor seemed pleased with the task of supervising students because she

lacked experience. She described her task: "Nothing too challenging; something I was able to do with the experience that I had, which wasn't any experience." Eleanor made it clear that "you cannot treat kids with autism the same as a kid that does not have this disorder."

Abigail is the mother of three children. She described herself as having high aspirations and compassion, along with being humorous, sensitive, and observant. She started her day in the afterschool program by offering "cookies and ice cream parties . . . in addition to the normal stuff that people would do like homework help, or playing in the playground, and getting all their energy out before they would go home." The students would also watch movies and play games. Abigail observed that students with challenges did not engage with children unlike themselves.

Lady Bird is the mother of two children. She described herself as a communicator and collaborator with high aspirations. She started her day in the afterschool program by providing students with "snacks [and] then they went straight to getting your [*sic*] schoolwork done, and then they knew after that, they had free time." Lady Bird noted that she could see the deficiencies that many "kids" had in the program. Part of her job was to "help support them with their transition after school into bedtime or whatever."

Barbara has three children and described herself as having high aspirations as well as being caring and nurturing. She started her day in the afterschool program by providing extra support to students who needed help in math, science, or English. All students had a snack, and "we would play games to help them with the skills that they were missing." She worked with students who had various needs and required a 504 plan,

which prevents discrimination against an individual with a disability, and an Individualized Education Program. She stated that "The program ran for 90 minutes, and the kids sometimes didn't stay the whole time."

Martha has two children and described herself as having high aspirations, compassion, sensitivity, and as being discerning. She started her day in the afterschool program working with the same children. The children in this afterschool program had parents who were incarcerated or had drug abuse issues. The students did their homework with assistance, and the children with challenges met with their group counselors.

Hillary is the mother of three children. She described herself as being easy to talk to, energetic, and optimistic as well as a hard worker with high aspirations. She started her day in the afterschool program working on crafts and preparing snacks for the children. After about 30 minutes, the children would go outside to play games. Hillary enjoyed seeing the maturity of children grow from year to year.

James, the only male participant in the study, did not have children. He described himself as having high expectations and a cheerful demeanor. He also stated that he is creative, playful, and patient. James worked in an afterschool swim program and started his day reviewing swim protocols for the pool.

Data Collection

After IRB approval was attained, I began my data collection in July 2020 and finished in August 2020. Interviews with each of the eight participants were set up, conducted, and recorded using Zoom and lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. The questions and probes I used during the interviews played a significant role in encouraging

descriptive responses from the participants. For instance, I asked, "How would you like

that professional development delivered? Are there any other topics or foci for

professional development that you would like?" (See Appendix). Moreover, I had each

interview professionally transcribed to make it easier for me to code and determine the

initial categories.

Unfortunately, I was unable to secure the number of participants needed for my

study with my initial criteria, so I expanded my search beyond one afterschool program

and received further IRB approval. Due to the widespread COVID-19 pandemic, I faced

difficulty contacting and recruiting individuals. Initially, I had selected one site for this

study and had obtained the email addresses of staff members there. The COVID

pandemic prevented me from visiting the school, so I used their email addresses to try

and make contact; however, I did not receive any responses because it appeared staff

were not checking their school emails.

As I reviewed my list of potential participants, I cross-checked them on Facebook

and LinkedIn. I found one on Facebook and asked if they worked at the initial study site

school and gave them my name. I told them the nature of my study, and she was happy to

assist me by participating in an interview. I also increased the gift amount from $30.00 to

$35.00 to attract potential interviewees. I did not have success in reaching my original

participants, so I reached out again through social media using Facebook and LinkedIn

and to sorority groups to recruit participants.

I achieved data saturation at eight interviews. These were usually arranged late in

the afternoon to give participants more flexibility. In the interviews, the participants'

demeanors were pleasant, and they spoke with ease. The exchange between the

participants and myself was cordial and friendly. Their responses were detailed and

demonstrated how much they enjoyed working with children. I believed I understood

each participant because of the rapport we established before the interview began. To do

this, I asked questions to put them at ease, inquired how they were doing, introduced

myself, and shared a few pieces of personal information. I did this with each participant,

and it helped to set the tone for my interviews. The participants chose a room in their

home where they felt comfortable participating in the interview from. Because the

participants selected their interview location, I believe this gave them a sense of privacy

and security. All participants reviewed the transcripts of their interviews for accuracy.

None of the participants responded with any changes to the transcripts.

Data Analysis

To protect the identity of the participants, I used pseudonyms (i.e., the names of a

U.S. president and first ladies). I read the interview transcripts multiple times and jotted

down my reflections on each transcript in the page margins. Colored markers were used

to highlight keywords and phrases. Following this, I refined and revised the codes and

themes that emerged. As I read and reviewed each transcript, similar words and phrases

emerged, such as communication, collaboration, autism, flexibility, and the high cost of

professional development. Other significant words and phrases also emerged from the

transcripts of those participants who were parents, such as initial training, extra money,

and parenting skills. From these words and phrases, I moved to developing themes. In the

final analysis, I arrived at three themes, each reflecting a RQ or one of the two sub-RQs:

Theme 1: They needed support in assisting students with special needs.

Theme 2: Training would assist them with students who had special needs.

Theme 3: Parenting experiences guided them.

In the results section, I provide rich, thick descriptions of the participants' perceptions regarding each of the three themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers must take action to ensure the authenticity and trustworthiness of their work. A research study is reliable if the individual who reads it evaluates it as trustworthy (Gunawan, 2015). Researchers conducting qualitative studies consider many aspects when evaluating trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In the following subsections, I describe each of these standards and their pertinence to the study. I also explain how I achieved each to ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

Credibility

Credibility is supported by the steps that a researcher takes to ensure their study accurately characterizes the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To ensure the credibility of this study, I conducted mock interviews, which gave me an idea of what to expect when I was ready to conduct the actual interviews. A transcription service was also used to transcribe the participants' responses verbatim. Once transcribed, I sent a copy of their interview to each interviewee by email to review and respond to any concerns they might have had. One participant responded by saying, "Thank you"; otherwise, there were no additional replies. I took their lack of response to

mean that they agreed with the content of the transcripts. I sent each participant a $35.00 gift card to thank them for participating.

Transferability

To achieve transferability, the researcher must present comprehensive, descriptive data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Transferability is enhanced by a documented synopsis of the research setting, the participants, and a thorough narrative of the results, including quotes from participant interviews. According to Merriam and Tisdell, a description of the study's results needs to be illustrative, descriptive, and provide rich data to make transferability possible. I studied the transcripts, and I asked participants to verify the data by emailing a copy to each.

Dependability

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), dependability is how the researcher conducted the study, ethically followed procedures, and kept consistency in their findings. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I planned to conduct my interviews face-to-face in one school setting or meet the participants at a location of their choice. Instead, to ensure the safety of participants and myself, I conducted interviews via Zoom. My chairperson helped me with my interview protocol. I asked the same questions of each participant, with some variation in the probing questions. My chairperson read my first interview transcript and provided helpful comments regarding searching for codes and possible themes. I multiplied my learning process by sharing iterative drafts of the themes that emerged with my chairperson and colleagues on Zoom.

Confirmability

An audit trail helps establish confirmability and provides a written account of the results of the study. Confirmability is verification that the findings are shaped by the participants rather than the qualitative researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Another popular technique is reflexivity, which a qualitative researcher adopts when collecting and analyzing the data. I maintained a reflective journal to describe how the research process affected me. I also referred to my journal or notes from each transcript for clarification.

Results

The participants' responses varied regarding how they wanted to receive training; however, I found that the themes cut across all RQs. The themes all applied to the main RQ and both sub-RQs and are briefly explained at the beginning of each theme discussion.

Each afterschool program in which the participants worked or had worked required some training for them to reach their goals and objectives. The participants' responses that correlated to the sub-RQs highlighted their training and how it was perceived and received as well as identified their additional learning needs.

Theme 1: They Needed Support in Assisting Students With Special Needs

The participants in the study described scenarios that demonstrated their need for professional development and assistance, which relates to the main RQ. The first theme also focuses on the support needed in assisting students with special needs as it pertained to sub-RQ 1: What did paraprofessional workers in afterschool programs identify as their

primary learning needs? Six of the eight participants described the support they needed in

assisting students with special needs, especially those identified as autistic. Eleanor

shared an illustration of why this was a learning need for her, as a child bit her, and she

felt she would have been more of an asset to the program if she knew what to do in this

situation.

> There was a little boy who was autistic, and he is the sweetest kid when he gets
>
> his way. I think something happened where something was not going his way,
>
> whether it was that naptime was over or it was time to put away the toys and eat
>
> snacks. Something did not go the way he wanted. When you are dealing with kids
>
> with autism, you cannot treat them the same as a kid that does not have this
>
> disorder.

Eleanor tried to tell him to stop what he was doing as he was having a temper tantrum,

and then he bit her on the leg. She pointed out to other teachers that the little boy had just

bit her, and they responded: "Oh yeah, he just does that." Eleanor said she looked at them

and replied:

> What do you mean he just does that? Is there not something that we're supposed
>
> to do when this happens? Did I not do something right? Help me help you guys
>
> run this program smoothly because I had no clue what I was supposed to do.
>
> When I say he bit me, he did not release his grip. It wasn't just a little bite. It was
>
> like he was grabbing onto my leg. I removed him from my leg and told him,
>
> "Don't do that."

Eleanor shared how she tried to handle the situation before she was bitten. She noticed the boy had a plastic banana in his hand (he liked bananas) and described what she did: "I took the banana from him, and I think I told him to go sit down, and he was just screaming, which then disrupted every other child and aggravated them." Over time, Eleanor described how the boy's behavior changed, but in that moment, she did not know what to do because no one had told her that the child was autistic. She addressed the incident:

> This child is autistic. You must do this with this child or when you are dealing with this kind of child. The ABC [pseudonym] program had very weird policies on how to even discipline children. I believed at the time we didn't do timeout, which was the way I was raised. The timeouts almost cured everything because no child wanted to sit down and not have any entertainment; they just have to sit there and be quiet. When I was a child, that worked for me. That is all I knew to do for this child was to put him in a timeout, but that did nothing. It escalated the situation.

Martha expressed some of the same feelings of inadequacy that Eleanor described. Martha addressed feeling lost trying to handle children who had behavioral issues and were removed from school. Martha paused and said very quietly that she was shocked by a student's description of an incident, and she did not know how to respond.

> It was a young girl. She was adopted, and her adoptive father was in the military, and she had a stepmom because her biological father killed her biological mother. He had beaten her over 3 days while she and her sister were in the house where

her mom was found dead. It is sad because now she does not have a mother, and

her father is incarcerated.

Martha expressed remorse when she said she did not know how to respond and wished

for support or training to address such situations.

Lady Bird worked with students who were not able to communicate. She shared

that the autistic children "many times would look at a teacher, and you knew how they

were feeling. They could not always speak." Lady Bird described a situation with a

student and how many of the workers had different opinions on handling and conveying

the problem to the parent. Lady Bird explained,

The child wet himself and did not have a change of clothes. However, we had

extra clothing, but knowing that parent, I did not feel comfortable to put

something else on the child because then you hear stories like, "Oh, are you

changing my child's clothes because you're trying to do something to him?"

Lady Bird felt that the best approach was to email and call the parent, explaining the

following: "Look. Your son wet himself, and you do not have a backup pair of clothes.

We have extra clothes here so we can change his clothes so at least when you pick him

up, he won't be wet." The parent responded cordially and was very thankful that Lady

Bird asked her permission first rather than assuming that she would agree with her son

wearing someone else's old clothing. Lady Bird said, "To always communicate with

parents ahead of time is better than putting it off until later." She felt strongly about

needing the training to address all kinds of scenarios. She shared that some staff members

argued that they thought it would be fine to change the boy's clothes and address it when

the parent came to pick up the child. Lady Bird responded, "You cannot just assume that parents will be okay with what you decide about their children on your own."

Barbara, however, presented a different scenario. She described needing training on how to respond and set the tone from the beginning with disruptive students as well as training on how to create generic plans to work with children academically. Barbara paused and shared that it helped when teachers sent a note with the students that explained what they needed. She worked with students who needed extra support after school in math, English, or science. Barbara shared that she felt some students attended just to disrupt the positive environment, and it was frustrating to her that she did not know how to respond. Barbara felt that this was a large part of her dissatisfaction with the program. She did not feel equipped because there was a substantial combination of children with diverse personalities in the afterschool program.

However, Barbara learned much from the other teachers or counselors who worked in the program. Barbara responded, "Their job all day long was to counsel students and to help them move through difficulties, frustration, anger, and whatever issues the students may have brought with them." She posed these questions: "How to maintain discipline so that all students could benefit from the program? How do I do that?"

With Barbara's situation in mind, Abigail's views were quite different. Abigail worked with students who had an Individualized Education Program or a 504 plan that describes any pertinent information about the student. Overall, she said,

I did not feel comfortable engaging with students that had behavioral issues. I had

to keep a close eye on them. The afterschool program was mainly if students

needed help with their homework. "Come and see me," that sort of thing, but

there was never any follow up with me with teachers on students who were

struggling.

Michelle, like Eleanor, worked with autistic children in the ABC afterschool

program. She implied that she needed to know more about the legal ramifications of

working with children with special needs. She described an encounter: "One conflict I

can definitely recall was a situation where there was an abuse allegation." The allegations

were not made against Michelle but against a coworker who worked the same schedule.

She described what happened:

There was a situation where a child was having a bad behavioral reaction to

something, and he was attacking a lot of people. The administration called a

restraint on him, and they tried to say that the coworker dragged him down the

hallway where the cameras were, and so we witnessed what happened. We do not

think he was dragged.

Michelle emphasized that she was disappointed in how the administration handled the

infraction and felt the worker was cheated. Overall, she thought this was a good time for

professional development; instead, they placed her coworker on probation.

Theme 2: Trainings Would Assist Them With Students Who Had Special Needs

Theme 2 emerged from the participants descriptions of what training might

support their work, which corresponds to the main RQ, as well as the type of training

they perceived would help them work with students with special needs. Theme 2 also

relates to sub-RQ 2: What approaches to professional development might support their

work? The participants mentioned various training types, such as intensives over several

days, online training, workshops, and shadowing. Eleanor, Martha, Lady Bird, Barbara,

Abigail, and Michelle provided the most details regarding the kind of training that would

help them assist students with special needs, especially those identified as autistic. Two

participants did not have any suggestions for future training; when I probed for responses,

they specifically addressed the training they received.

Eleanor shared that she would like to see an extensive 7- to 14-day paid training

session on fulfilling the job requirements before starting work. There were many autistic

children in this program and more than one in Eleanor's care.

There are different forms of autism. Things that I have learned over time was [*sic*]

not because someone told me; I learned on the job. For example, sometimes,

when you are speaking to a child, it is better to bend down so you are on their

level instead of speaking down to them. Little things like that; if someone would

have just told me, then I would have been better prepared.

Eleanor also wanted professional development to include ongoing training

sessions on working with autistic children to determine what is effective and what is not

in supporting their development and learning. Eleanor said she needed to know what

methods the program had employed for children with autism. She emphasized that the

training could be done through online modules: "I had no idea when I applied up for the

job that I was going to be working with autistic children." Eleanor said she felt like she

would have benefitted more if she could shadow another worker with experience. She described the incident with the boy who bit her further:

When the little boy bit me, there was an experienced worker in the room that could have shown me what to do in that moment to ensure that it would not happen again—that I would not get injured again, and that the little boy would not get injured. However, I did receive a bite mark and had to receive treatment. I think with the proper training, this could have been prevented.

Martha portrayed herself more as a hands-on learner. Her work experience, she said, was best described as a learning-as-you-go process. Martha also stated that if someone gave her a self-help book to read, only a small amount of training would be needed. Martha had to attend cardiopulmonary resuscitation classes because she worked with children and disabled adults depending upon which group was assigned to her. I asked Martha to describe how she would address and implement the training.

You need the training as a group because there are things that happen as a group, and everybody needs to be on the same page when they are confronted with a situation. Also, I would implement visual aids, reading materials, [and] workshops from the computer.

According to Martha, any training that took place was completed upon hiring. There was "no training after that first day."

Lady Bird favored having small breakout sessions to discuss professional development scenarios in a group setting. She shared,

Allowing them to have open communication and sample case studies permitted the workers to take an active role in the training and made that training applicable to their position on the job. Take-home resources and handouts should always be available.

Barbara liked the idea of take-home resources and handouts but felt that training should offer workers the opportunity to view other programs before being hired so they could be discussed as part of their interview process. Shadowing or visiting other programs was imagined by the participants as an opportunity for workers to ask and receive answers to any questions they might have. For example, she said she would ask, "What do these kids really need? What is the purpose of your afterschool program? What is my responsibility?" According to Barbara, these questions may be asked and answered as part of an in-service program and discussed when placed in small collaborative groups.

Abigail preferred online training. Her tone was confident and strong. She expressed her enthusiasm for being interviewed, believing it would make a difference in how afterschool programs would emerge. She knew that her preparedness depended on the training she would receive.

There's tons and tons of stuff online that are not expensive. I think that it is important for everyone who engages with children to be kept abreast with the latest products and terminology, such as academic games that are germane to their learning. I think training sessions should be ongoing and mandatory to keep us updated with any new trends.

Michelle would have liked to see 7 days of extensive training before hiring and online internet modules implemented. She would have preferred brainstorming with a group of coworkers to see what situations they have experienced and how they handled them. Michelle welcomed collaborating and brainstorming to find the best outcomes so that these techniques might be implemented in the future. Michelle continued, "I would also like someone to come in and conduct an in-service day of professional development." There was hesitation in Michelle's voice, after which she asked: "What if I am doing something wrong? What are the legal ramifications?" Because Michelle works with children who are autistic, she wanted to know the perimeters concerning what staff can and cannot do to control autistic children. Michelle concluded the interview by commenting: "I definitely think learning something before you go into a job and learning while you're on the job helps."

Hillary shared that the afterschool program where she worked provided professional development on the first day of school. She stated that this entailed sitting down with the afterschool director while he explained the program for the year and her assignment. Hillary shared that the support group at her school was "amazing." She explained,

> The afterschool director knows that I am not trained to work with children that are classified with special needs. Therefore, I am not given that assignment. Veteran workers who previously worked with children who are classified are given that assignment.

Hillary looked at me intently and asked: "What if this veteran worker that I work with is absent one day? I should be prepared to carry out her responsibilities so that the children do not recognize any change in their routines?"

James, who worked in an afterschool swim program, was the only male participant I interviewed. He was full of excitement. According to James, professional development training was essential to his development on the job. Safety measures had to be in place and followed to protect the well-being of the children. For example, parents were required to be present while their children were swimming. Therefore, if a child were horseplaying in the water, James would summon the parent. James also shared that swim instructors are not allowed to hold the children in or out of the water: "We cannot touch them." He found this to be difficult because he was trying to teach the backstroke. He collaborated with his colleagues, and they created a plan to teach this technique.

James also discussed his willingness to share and to learn. He described a scenario:

> When they start swimming, they drag their feet, or their hips come down. Then they end up swimming incorrectly; they are swimming with their necks up, which brings about a doggie paddle. I've always wanted to learn a better way to stop that from happening because, as of right now, all I'm doing is putting a noodle under their legs and having them kick on that, which keeps their legs up. Gradually, I take it away. I feel there is a better way of doing that. Also, I would like to learn how to teach the butterfly because I am not particularly good at teaching that. That stroke is the one stroke that I really struggle on [*sic*].

James noted that when the swim classes are over, any instructor can call all the swim instructors to discuss various approaches to teach any stroke. Most informal discussions include a live demonstration of each stroke, if necessary.

Theme 3: Parenting Experiences Guided Them

In Theme 3, the participants related their perceptions on the job to how they were reared. Their perceptions guided those experiences in the workplace. Theme 3 is the last of two themes related to sub-RQ 2 regarding what professional development approaches might support afterschool staff's work. All eight participants shared their personal life experiences and how these helped them on the job. Out of the eight participants interviewed, five had children and all shared stories of what they learned through parenting. The first three participants I describe here did not have children and reported what they knew they learned from their parents. James explained,

> Growing up, my mom would tell stories to me all the time to help me with why I needed to clean my room or to make things seem more fantastic around me. My mom would sing the "Old McDonald" song, but it was not a regular "Old McDonald's" [*sic*] song . . . a Black brother had the farm. It would be, [singing] "Brother Mohammed had a farm, E-I-E-I-O." Brother Mohammed didn't have pigs on his farm. The next day when I went to school, they were singing the "Old McDonald's" [*sic*] song. I was confused. I did not know what was going on. When my mom picked me up from school, I told her how the school was singing the wrong "Old McDonald" song.

James said he could still picture his mom saying,

"Oh, I just created a different version of the song for you. That way, you felt like you could picture yourself in there as a Black man owning something." I took how my mom created a different version of the "Old McDonald" song and envisioned myself creating a game to teach the students how to backstroke.

James renamed the backstroke Tickle T Snap. The students had to bring their arms up and tickle themselves to make a big T. Next, the students had to snap their arms together and push off. He emphasized their excitement in learning how to play a new game and a new swim technique at the same time. James concluded our interview by stating that even if every student could not swim freestyle, they would swim away with Tickle T Snap in their head and associate it with learning the backstroke.

Eleanor's parents' approach to childrearing featured the use of time-out. She thought that being put in time-out almost cured her bad behavior. Eleanor did not like time-out or like sitting alone. She shared that trying to put the child who misbehaves in time-out did not work; however, without any training, at the time, that was all she knew.

On the other hand, Michelle said that growing up in a church environment and witnessing the many acts of kindness shown to others by her mother and aunt left her wanting to do the same. She shared that her home had become an extension of the church, and her church an extension of the community. Michelle gave me a nod as if she just had a revelation and said,

Yes, I used my experience of helping others that I learned from my mother and my aunt to assist me in my job. Caring for others, wanting to take care of them, and always trying to help, proved to be one of my greatest assets.

Martha, Lady Bird, Barbara, Abigail, and Hillary all had children and reported that they used their life experiences to guide them. Martha's parents were correction officers, and her home environment was somewhat strict, with more than one adult having supervised her life. She shared, "I will never forget my mother saying that it takes a whole village to raise a child." She summed up her experience: "Most children in afterschool programs need a whole village to supervise and care for them. By working in an afterschool program, I became part of that village." In Hillary's home, her parents taught her to respect others' differences, work hard, and complete a task; therefore, she said, "when I go to work, what I start, I finish."

Lady Bird was very transparent and shared what she went through with her daughter that informed her work in the afterschool program and her advocacy for her child in these programs. She told her story.

A lot of the afterschool programs wanted to kick her out because of her behaviors. I took it upon myself to share with the workers that she had certain triggers, and she did not just act out for no reason.

Lady Bird said she had to experience her child's growing pains to accommodate the children she eventually worked with in the afterschool programs.

Barbara, a single parent of two, told me that having children of her own made it easier to collaborate with those in the aftercare program. She communicated that she would often ask her children, "What do you think of this?" Barbara believed that if her children gave her the "thumbs up," she was on the right track with introducing a particular activity.

Abigail also tried hard to communicate with staff and referred to herself as compassionate. As a parent who worked outside of the home, she gave her children a lot of attention when she could. Abigail thought that most children who attended the afterschool programs had parents who worked. She shared, "If my kids needed the extra attention, then these kids needed it too." Therefore, Abigail provided each child with attention and showed each one compassion.

Summary

Three themes emerged from data analysis, paraprofessionals needed support in assisting students with special needs, training would help them with students who had special needs, and their life experiences helped guide their decisions. Because afterschool programs are intended for all students, many special needs students attend them regardless of ability or affluence. Given their student populations, the participants in this study all expressed a desire to gain skills and knowledge for working with children with special needs. All the participants I interviewed expressed a love of working with children and conveyed this and their passion in the stories they shared. They needed training to be more effective in their afterschool roles.

In Chapter 5, I explore paraprofessional workers' perceptions of the type of professional development they would like to receive. I interpret the results within the contextual framework that directed the study and the empirical literature analyzed in Chapter 2. In addition, I discuss the study's implications and limitations as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The focus of this basic qualitative study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) was to explore paraprofessional workers' perceptions of the kind of professional development that might help them in their work in an afterschool program. In this study, I sought to answer the following RQ and sub-RQs:

RQ: What are the perceptions of paraprofessional workers in afterschool programs regarding how professional development supported their work?

Sub-RQ 1: What did paraprofessional workers in afterschool programs identify as their primary learning needs?

Sub-RQ 2: What approaches to professional development supported their work?

Three themes emerged during the data analysis process. The first theme of paraprofessionals needed support in helping students with special needs applied to sub-RQ1. The second theme of training would assist them with students who had special needs pertained to sub-RQ 2, while the last theme of parenting experiences guided them addressed the main RQ. The first two themes were focused on support and training provided by the school, whereas the third theme was focused on how the paraprofessionals used their experiences to guide and support them. The three themes reflected the importance of professional development activities to assist with differences in students with special needs, especially those diagnosed with autism, and identified the need for more flexibility and training support for special needs students.

In this chapter, I present the interpretation of the findings, organized by the three themes. I also discuss the study's limitations and make recommendations for further

research. The chapter is concluded by addressing the implications these findings may have for better professional development designed by program directors and other stakeholders for adult workers without adequate training in afterschool programs.

Interpretation of Findings

The themes that emerged from the data analysis are consistent with previous research studies and theories related to adult learners and how they learn and process information, as reviewed in Chapter 2. In this study, I specifically examined adult learners who work or had worked in an afterschool program. The conceptual framework that guided this study was based on Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy and Knowles's (1970) model of andragogy. The two approaches demonstrate how adults perceive, transform, and understand information. Knowles's model of andragogy provided the context regarding how adults learn in real-life contexts and situations.

The self-efficacy component of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory provided a structure that helped me, as the researcher in this study, comprehend how workers perceived professional development and systemic support. Bandura wrote that efficacy beliefs were less applicable in a new employee's initial skill development, but they were particularly vital once activities became more relevant and routine. After a routine is created, adjustments evolve and can be applied. According to Bandura, this belief in self-efficacy impacts both the choice of action and a person's motivational level and, therefore, enables the process of knowledge acquisition in which a person establishes skills.

Knowles's (1970) model of andragogy offers a framework through which to view how adults learn from real-life contexts and situations. The essential beliefs applied in the current study of how adults learn, and process knowledge came from the andragogy model. Knowles surmised that teaching adults was not the same as teaching children and, in the model of andragogy, emphasized adults' readiness to learn, prior skills and experiences, focus and guidance, and ability to use different cognitive skills. According to Fornaciari and Lund Dean (2014), the andragogy model moves accountability and motivation away from teachers to learners and requires determining what is vital versus what students believe to be necessary.

Bandura's (1997) theory and Knowles's (1970) model provided the foundation for this study and suggested strategies for achievement and adults' readiness to learn to think and operate in a new setting. For instance, experiences of adults, including their mistakes, provide the basis for continuous learning (Knowles, 1970). Adult workers' self-perceptions helped them ascertain if they had sufficient information and experience to accomplish their assigned duties (Bandura & Knowles, 1970). If they perceived something as novel or different, adult learners were more likely to make it the center of their interest (Knowles, 1970). Social contexts also helped reinforce their perceptions.

Theme 1: They Needed Support in Helping Students With Special Needs

In this study, I found that the afterschool workers needed support in helping students with special needs. Afterschool programs typically offer support to all types of children with various needs without restrictions (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a). For example, in my study, Lady Bird, Eleanor, Michelle, and Hillary worked with children

diagnosed with autism. Martha, Barbara, and Abigail worked with children with other special needs or challenges. The participants stated that training is vital for them to work effectively because they lacked the expertise and training needed to succeed.

Many participants in the current study mentioned the need for training and knowing how to respond to specific work scenarios. Paluta et al. (2016) found that the quality of afterschool programs needed improvement along with better parent and family engagement and professional development. To discover how afterschool programs could be successful, the researchers conducted a study with 3,000 stakeholders from 300 community learning centers in the midwestern states. Their findings indicated that professional development and staffing were not perceived as vital to the development of youth, whereas the participants in the current study consider it paramount to their success on the job.

Many paraprofessional workers in the research literature reported never having any official professional development training in the classroom or other instructional approaches; however, these workers are key facilitators of the daily lessons given to youth with disabilities (Zheng, 2017). Samson et al. (2015) found that paraprofessional continuity in the classroom during the regular school day allowed children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorders to achieve their behavioral goals. Maintaining a routine schedule helped students with learning disabilities and standardized plans provided children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorders with a more comfortable transition from the classroom to afterschool programs. Only one paraprofessional in their study

worked with these students during the typical school day and also worked with them in the afterschool program, extending their usual school day routine.

The paraprofessionals I interviewed did not work with children who had special needs during the regular school day; instead, they worked with them after the typical school day ended. Therefore, these workers were not familiar with the student or their behavior, putting them at a disadvantage. When there is no formal professional development training regarding how paraprofessionals should approach their duties, they are prone to learn by participating in tasks and monitoring how they work together with students (Ramos, 2017). The training the participants received in Ramos's research was similar to what some of the participants in this study described as "not enough." Ramos suggested the workers' professional development, such as training through brief introductions, handouts, shadowing other paraprofessionals, and watching and working with teachers, helped them become more at ease in fulfilling their jobs. Suhrheinrich (2015) suggested using the train-the-trainer model, which includes professional development training to supervisors to educate others in their organization, thus reducing costs.

According to Knowles (1970), the work environment should be a place where adults learn, fulfill their job responsibilities, and feel at ease. All eight participants interviewed expressed how much they liked working with children; however, the lack of professional development made them feel uneasy, particularly regarding working with students with special needs. In a study of an elementary afterschool program in a midsized, midwestern city, McLurkin (2013) found similar unease among workers in an

afterschool program intended to strengthen students' reading skills. Without specific training, volunteers in the community who read to students with learning disabilities reported feeling stressed and overwhelmed with the task (McLurkin, 2013). As Eleanor said, "I hate to say it, but because of the lack of training and experience that I had in that program, the experiences that I'm about to discuss with you were not the best because I was inadequately equipped."

In a study by Minuti et al. (2015), the participants also reported unpreparedness in the workplace and the need for continuous professional development. Minuti et al. noted a need for a radical change in the learning culture—from learning to work to working on learning. As noted in Chapter 4, Eleanor reported she learned from a real-life situation with an autistic child who bit her on the leg and did not know how to respond. Eleanor's solution of placing the little boy in time out only escalated the situation; nevertheless, this led to a teachable moment for Eleanor and supports the need for ongoing professional development regarding what works with autistic children and what does not to improve development of behavioral and social skills (see Suhrheinrich, 2015).

To summarize Theme 1, the participants in the current study mentioned having difficulty knowing how to view and respond in specific scenarios and needed support in helping students with special needs. The workers stated that training is vital for them to work effectively because they lacked the necessary expertise and knowledge to succeed. According to Knowles's (1970) model of andragogy, a person can help another in a learning situation. It should not matter if it is a conference or a training program; learning is a shared responsibility to help one another become better prepared. The participants

described the type of training program that would help them become better prepared, leading to Theme 2.

Theme 2: Training Would Assist Them With Students Who Had Special Needs

The participants in this study articulated their learning needs (i.e., Theme 1) and their recognition that training would assist them in helping students who had special needs. Hwang et al. (2020) interviewed afterschool instructors and found that despite the multiple roles they juggled and the challenges of youth and families, they struggled but felt motivated to help and encourage their students. Yurtseven and Bademcioglu (2016) stated that while afterschool workers shared their challenges in working with students, many could not articulate the type of support they needed. However, the participants in the current study were able to communicate the kind of training they felt they needed. Training and education for these individuals may strengthen programs, improve students' knowledge and skills, and increase workers' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Knowles (1970) stated that adult learning represents a lifelong process of discovering what adults do not know and understand. As adult learners mature and accumulate a wealth of information and experiences, they move from dependence to independence; however, every adult approaches this process with a different background based on life experiences (Knowles, 1970). According to Paluta et al. (2016), afterschool program assistants who had the equivalent training of teachers added to their experiences and self-confidence through professional development training**.**

Professional development training is common when introducing something new (Yoo, 2016), although some adults come to a new job with previous experience.

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), adults entering an environment with some experience should be used as resources to assist others with their job training. Eleanor, Martha, and Barbara were in a new learning situation and needed training related to children with special needs, but there was no commonality in their responses for the format of this training. Paluta et al. (2016) and Minuti et al. (2015) opined that professional development can be viewed as a simple resource book that equips and encourages workers to discuss and collaborate with staff. Barbara suggested, as did Gaikhorst et al. (2015) and Peters-Burton et al. (2015), that collaboration would encourage professional development and conversation with staff to outline their tasks as well as help reduce adverse outcomes on the job.

Theme 3: Parenting Experiences Guided Them

Sharing their life experience and being authentic meant that the participants used everything they had learned in their past to help them in their jobs. Whatever knowledge they chose to share with coworkers added something new to their unique experience. Given the lack of professional development, several participants reported that they drew on their personal experiences of nurturing their children to assist them in their work. Those without children reflected on their parents' childrearing practices.

According to Knowles (1970), every adult enters the workforce with different experiences based on their life history. For instance, Theodore remembered adolescent songs that his mother used to teach him, and he used a similar example of making up songs to teach students how to swim. Martha's parents were correction officers, and her home environment was strict with more than one adult having supervised her life. She

summed up her experience: "I feel responsible for the children I work with, supervising and caring for them. I became the adult they looked up to until it was time for them to go home." In Hillary's home, her parents taught her to respect others' differences, work hard, and accomplish tasks. With this in mind, she reported that when she goes to work, what she begins, she finishes.

The findings in this study demonstrate that the participants, workers in an afterschool setting, relied on their unique experiences. Understanding and acknowledging these unique background experiences helped them face the challenges they encountered and navigate their various roles. Bandura's theory (1997) points to self-efficacy as a framework and a structure for individuals to gather, view, and assess knowledge to help them face the challenges they encountered. In the participants' responses, I heard that they struggled to feel a sense of self-efficacy in their work, so they drew on their personal experiences. Philp's (2019) study on afterschool programs surveyed 50 afterschool programs and found that the staff working with youth and families had minimum education and training. The workers' lack of professional development and training opportunities required them to draw on personal experiences and connections.

Limitations of the Study

The COVID-19 restrictions resulted in school closings, and quarantine protocol restricted me from recruiting participants at individual schools. The original plan was to recruit at a single school setting. Instead, I used social media and my sorority network to reach out to participants and interview them virtually. The participants were concerned with maintaining safety and indicated that they only felt comfortable with interviewing

using Zoom. The eight self-selected participants worked in various afterschool settings, which may have affected the results. Despite the diverse work experiences, the findings were similar across all participants. However, memories of previous work experiences may have been in the back of the participants' minds because their focus is now on the pandemic, shutting down school programs, and remaining safe.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should include component-specific and whole-program analysis. Component-specific research would help identify which features of afterschool programs effectively promote ongoing successful training for workers and student success for all children regardless of classification. Future research studies that explore the relationship between quality and objective outcome measures would be beneficial along with studies that examine approaches to improve afterschool programs' quality and develop data-based recommendations for what constitutes quality improvement. Further research is also needed regarding the certification of workers and whether this will enhance professionalism and outcomes. Studies that focus on training afterschool workers to assist them in working with autistic and special needs children should be explored.

Although some research supports this need, it does not go far enough to show the possible detrimental effects on student outcomes if afterschool workers have little or no training. The untrained workers and the children they serve may both suffer in this situation, muting the potential societal benefits of afterschool programs. More research may be needed with a larger number of participants across a greater diversity of settings regarding workers' perceptions of the professional development required to succeed in

their assigned tasks. Future research and practice should be focused on promising professional development tools, particularly data-based strategies, that promote everyday practice. Finally, future studies would be advantageous regarding how to train these workers to help them have the best experience in afterschool programs and help teachers and paraprofessionals in their work with students.

In addition, according to Dernbach et al. (2021), the Biden-Harris administration must overcome the adverse educational impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' learning. Therefore, it may be necessary to conduct research that explores collaborative approaches among teachers and paraprofessionals which have been disproportionately endured by low-income students and students of color, intensifying already existing inequities in education. Dernbach et al. further stated that the new administration's plan presents states and local school educational agencies with an opportunity to engage their stakeholders, including afterschool and summer school workers. The recommendation to increase funding for public schools, implement new programs, and establish limitations on charter and private schools that receive vouchers, would free up money to be spent on afterschool and summer learning programs.

Implications for Social Change

I recommend virtual training programs for paraprofessionals at the community college level with certification. The technical training would require yearly continuing education. With certification, the participants' earning power may increase, self-efficacy may improve, and desire to further their education may increase. Also, I recommend the formation of a national association for paraprofessionals that would provide a governing

body and standards for certification training, support, and benefits. Paraprofessionals should be viewed and treated formally, with respect and given assistance from professionals in the school setting.

In the study conducted by Paluta et al. (2016), workers commented that those in administration looked down on paraprofessionals and made them feel worthless. Therefore, stronger educational relationships between teachers and administrators are needed. Three participants in this current study referred to experiences from their childhood to resolve a difficult situation. The participants with children of their own described how they used these experiences to manage students in the afterschool setting.

Those in charge of professional development should include or inquire about workers' prior experiences and draw on those strengths and further develop them. Paraprofessionals who are non credentialed are providing academic and classroom instruction, behavioral assistance, and safety modifications for incapacitated and at-risk students. Paraprofessionals are frequently used as support for teaching small groups of students but do not possess the proper training to perform most responsibilities. Increasing the knowledge and skills of paraprofessionals may help them work more effectively with students, improve their self-efficacy, and enrich their personal and work experiences. Working collaboratively with professional staff may help change their beliefs about afterschool programs' qualifications, organization, and how they perceive their responsibilities.

Conclusion

The findings from this research support the need for ongoing professional development in afterschool programs, particularly for those workers who engage with students classified as having special needs. The lack of professional development presented challenges to paraprofessionals and made them feel uneasy in their work with children. Paraprofessionals play an essential role in serving students with disabilities; however, most lack training in evidence-based practice. The experience of adults, including their mistakes, provided the basis for the participants' continuous learning (see Knowles, 1970). While the participants shared their challenges in working with students, they also articulated the type of support needed.

In this study, I also concluded that the participants needed structure and available resources to help them pursue success on the job. Knowles's (1970) theory played a large role in this research in describing how adults learn and use prior experiences to acquire new knowledge. A problem for the participants that surfaced in this study was the lack of training for working with autistic students. These children need specialized assistance, and without proper training, the workers felt they were unable to help these students reach their full potential.

Afterschool workers and paraprofessionals are overlooked when it comes to professional development. Training and education for these individuals may strengthen programs, students' knowledge and skills, and workers' self-efficacy. Without suitable training and support, workers continue to be assigned to positions where they are not fully trained. Providing paraprofessionals with their desired training will assist in the

success of afterschool programs and other outside agencies to function at the highest

possible level, as suggested by this study's findings.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Paraprofessionals' Perceptions of the Need for Professional Development in an

Afterschool Program Setting

RQ: What are the perceptions of paraprofessional workers in afterschool programs

regarding how professional development might support their work?

> **Sub-RQ 1:** What do paraprofessional workers in afterschool programs identify as
>
> their primary learning needs?
>
> **Sub-RQ 2:** What approaches to professional development might support their
>
> work?

Warm-Up Question: Would you reflect and share with me how you became a

/staff/aides/team member (use the word the school uses) at the afterschool program?

> **Probes:**

- How long have you worked in an afterschool program? At this site?

- What do you bring to this work? How did you develop those strengths?

- What might you have learned from parenting that has been useful?

Interview Questions

1. Did you have a desire to learn when you came into this job?

2. If so, what did you want to learn?

3. What skills do you use now?

4. How did you learn those skills?

5. How did mentoring/coaching/modeling/PD/trainings, etc. support you in the

   workplace?

6. Have the learning opportunities led you to want to know more about something or lead to new learning? If so, what do you wish you knew more about to help you do your job?

Probes:

- Are there learning needs specific to this site? Learning needs that might be applicable elsewhere?

- Are there any other topics or foci for professional development that you would like?

7. What approaches to professional development/trainings/informal/education, learning opportunities would you like for current job and/or career advancement?

Probes:

- How would you like that professional development delivered?

- Lecture? Show and tell? Retreat? Internet?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about that I did not ask?

9. Is there anything you would like to ask me? If there are no questions, I want to thank all of you for your cooperation, time, participation, and patience. Thank-you very much.