

# Examining the Roles, Training, and Characteristics of Paraprofessionals in Parenting Education

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Parenting education and support services are intended to build confidence and competence of parents to care for children and increase their capacity to prevent and respond effectively to family life issues and problems as they arise (Jones, Stranik, Hart, McClintic, & Wolf, 2013). Sponsors of parenting education are many and varied. They include community agencies, religious organizations, courts, public and private schools, mental health, public health, Departments of Social Services, Cooperative Extension, hospitals, senior centers, family resource centers, businesses and employers, and professional affiliate groups (Bryan, DeBord, & Schrader, 2006; Darling, Cassidy, & Powell, 2014). Practitioners representing these disciplines provide a range of parenting education services. With such a sundry of sponsors and services there will be diverse practitioners. Professionals most often deliver parenting education; however, paraprofessionals and peer educators also provide services to families (Heath & Palm, 2006) and little is known about these providers or their roles.

The role of paraprofessionals and peer educators was discussed at the 2011 National Parenting Educators Network (NPEN) - Professional Development Systems for Parenting Education Forum. The national leaders in parenting education gathered in Oregon to share information and discuss ways to promote parenting education and advancement of the profession (Bowman, Rennekamp, & Wolfe, 2012). One outcome of the meeting was the decision to develop core competencies for professionals in parenting education. Some parenting education professionals achieve competency through degrees and/or credentialing through the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) and others through American Association for Family and Consumer Sciences with the Human Development and Family Studies (CFCS-HDFS) credential. However, many parenting educators enter the field through other professions and/or through experiences related to parenting education with various qualifications or lack of qualifications. Core competencies developed by NPEN would provide proficiencies specific to the field of parenting education.

The second outcome of the 2011 Forum resulted from the discussion about the roles of paraprofessionals and peer educators in the field. Representatives from several states remarked that paraprofessionals and peer educators played vital roles in parenting programs in their communities. The discussion at this national forum prompted the National Parenting Education Network (NPEN) to investigate the diverse roles of practitioners in parenting education. The first phase of study was the NPEN white paper, *A Closer Look at Diverse Roles of Practitioners in Parenting Education: Peer Educators, Paraprofessionals, and Professionals*, with an emphasis on the paraprofessionals and peer educators (Jones et al., 2013). The white paper examined the similarities and differences

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among all parenting education practitioners. It provided an overview of the current status of paraprofessionals and peer educators in the field of parenting education.

### **Purpose**

The NPEN white paper provided foundational information about practitioners in parenting education (Jones et al., 2013). However, the authors wanted to find out more from the practitioners. A research study was undertaken to establish who the non-professional practitioners are and what roles they carry out. A survey was designed to solicit input from paraprofessionals and peer educators about their work in the parenting education field. Some of the information obtained included their roles, level of education, training, and if they were supervised.

The purpose of the survey was to provide a “voice” for paraprofessionals and peers in parenting education as well as to provide awareness of the different roles in parenting education and to promote and make recommendations for the field including interest in a national parenting education credential. All parenting education practitioners will be discussed; however, for the purpose of this article the focus will be on the paraprofessionals and peer educators in parenting education. The NPEN Peer Educator and Paraprofessional Survey did not include a category for professionals.

### **Professionals, Paraprofessionals, and Peer Educators**

In order to research this amalgamation of parenting educators it is necessary to define the practitioners. Defining practitioners is difficult to establish due to the variety of backgrounds from which parent educators originate (DeBord & Matta, 2002). Stolz, Bradon, and Wallace (2009) broadly defined a parent educator as “individuals who consider helping parents with parenting a central part of their work” (p. 35). Curran (1989) stated a parenting education professional would have experience in “one of the caregiving professions” and be a skilled teacher of adults (p. 113). Carter and Kahn (1996) further undertook the task when they described three types of practitioners in parenting education: professionals, paraprofessionals, and volunteers. They described professionals as providers in a professional role when parenting education was part of their job but not their sole focus. They stated that paraprofessionals, individuals with no academic credential, are the largest grouping among the parenting education workforce. They are described as *natural helpers* who have mastered a body of knowledge and natural skills. Carter and Kahn’s (1996) appraisal corresponds with Curran’s (1989) assessment which states that, many who teach parenting education do not hold a degree or a credential in parenting education. Many parenting educators enter into the field due to a common life experience with other parents or the opportunity arises to teach or facilitate as a volunteer. With regards to volunteers, Carter & Kahn (1996) described them as *friendly visitors* who targeted low income minority families. Much has evolved in the parenting education field and the changed landscape warrants a closer look as little is known about the practitioners and their roles in this field. Looking beyond the field of parenting education, there are no universally accepted definitions of *professional*, *paraprofessional*, and *peer educator*.

#### ***Professionals***

A professional, according to Businessdictionary.com (n.d), is someone who is formally certified by a professional body belonging to a specific profession by virtue of having completed a required course of study and/or practice. Their competency can usually be measured against an established set of standards; e.g. CFLE or CFCS-HDFS. Formal education in parenting education or a related field is often used to designate individuals as professionals in parenting education. It is generally

recognized that professionals have a minimum of a bachelor's degree, although many have master's and doctorate degrees (Curran, 1989; Darling et al., 2014). Their education and training is comprehensive and covers instruction and coursework in many, if not all, of the 10 competency areas in parenting education (NPEN, 2011a). Given their level of education and training, professionals generally possess versatile skills and assume diverse roles, while using a variety of methodologies. Consequentially, they tend to use a variety of approaches in their work with parents and families which coincide with Duncan and Goddard's eclectic approach (Duncan & Goddard, 2011). Professionals often develop curricula and educational materials for parents, or modify existing materials to suit a specific audience.

Professional development is generally required or highly encouraged of professionals. It is usually formal and structured, consisting of for-credit classes or workshops to gain or maintain certification, or in some instances licensure. Professionals often choose learning opportunities to improve their competence based on their personal interests and their self-identified professional development needs. Professionals in parenting education are mostly paid for their work with families, although they may volunteer their services (Jones et al., 2013). Their work can be full or part-time, but their chosen career includes working with parents and families (Curran, 1989). Professionals are likely concerned with professional/career advancement.

### ***Paraprofessionals***

According to Darling et al. (2014) a paraprofessional assists a professional. They can carry out many tasks and possess substantial knowledge of the field, and may be able to work independent of direct supervision, but they do not meet the requirements to be recognized as a professional in the field. Similarly, Oxford dictionary (2013) states that a paraprofessional is generally trained to assist professionals, but are not themselves licensed or credentialed at a professional level.

Paraprofessionals' motivation to work with parents is thought to be mixed. They may be driven by altruistic, economic, or other reasons. They may or may not have shared experiences in common with the parents with whom they work. Typically, paraprofessionals have completed high school or an equivalency program and may have obtained formal education beyond high school. It is not uncommon for them to have completed formal educational coursework in parenting education and related fields, yet not obtained a degree. Other paraprofessionals may have degrees, but in unrelated fields. Preparation for working with parents may include paraprofessionals engaging in self-directed study or informal learning such as Internet research, reading parenting magazines and books, and participating in parenting education. If it applies, life experience may be relevant to paraprofessionals' work with parents. Formal pre-service training targeting specific roles and tasks with parents is common (Jones et al., 2013).

The more extensive the education and training, the more equipped paraprofessionals are to use semi-diverse support and teaching methods (Jones et al., 2013). As a result, they are typically able to perform more diverse roles and tasks than peer educators. However, their repertoire of approaches may still be limited as compared to professionals. As a result, they may favor one or several approaches, tending toward Duncan and Goddard's collaborator and expert approaches (Duncan & Goddard, 2011).

Paraprofessionals are knowledgeable and skilled in some tasks with parents such as sharing information and teaching. Tasks paraprofessionals perform are likely to be directed by a professional with whom they work or by a curriculum they are trained to deliver (Darling et al., 2014). Supervision of paraprofessionals is typical, but may not include critical reflection (Jones et al.,

2013). Evaluation of work by a supervisor is common. Formal evaluation of work by parents is also common, especially if it is built into a program that is being delivered by a paraprofessional.

Paraprofessionals are more likely than peer educators to be paid. Their work may be full or part-time, and the terms of their employment can be short or long. Paid employment typically means more institutional or organizational support for professional development, which for paraprofessionals consists of informal and formal training. Access to professional development, however, may be tied to funding. Paraprofessionals may or may not be concerned with professional advancement in the field. However, some opportunities within an organization and the community may exist for paraprofessional's advancement; but job performance is likely to impact opportunities for advancement within an organization. Also, life experiences can limit opportunities for paraprofessionals both within organizations and the community if an audience match is required. Despite there being some opportunities for advancement these opportunities are few, as the field is currently structured, without the attainment of formal education and degrees. With the necessary guidance and support, paraprofessionals can develop themselves personally and professionally in ways that prepare them for work within the field and in other fields (Jones et al., 2013).

### ***Peer Educators***

According to Darling et al. (2014) peer educators' share mutual life experiences with the parents with whom they work. This match is essential to their role and is often used when selecting peers to work with a given parent population. They may or may not have formal education (e.g. immigrants). However, many have a high school diploma or the equivalent. They typically do not have degrees in parenting education or a related field. Peer educators who do have degrees usually have them in unrelated fields. Subsequently, peer educators emphatically form connections that are often used as a foundation for later education and support (Mead, 2003).

Peer educators' motivation to work with parents is thought to be primarily altruistic, particularly if they are unpaid volunteers. Prior to working with families, many peer educators became interested in parenting. They typically learned on their own using the Internet, books, and magazines, or informally have been trained by others. They may have participated in parenting education programs (Jones et al., 2013).

Formal training in parenting education is typical but varied in preparation of peer educators performing specific roles and tasks with families. These trainings often present a narrowly defined repertoire of approaches and methods leading to limited or low versatility of roles. For this reason, peer educators may tend to favor Duncan and Goddard's facilitator and expert approaches (Duncan & Goddard, 2011). Peer educators may be knowledgeable and skilled in some tasks (e.g. share information, mentor, and advocate) with parents. Tasks they perform with parents may be parent or issue driven, or curriculum directed/guided. Tasks with colleagues are varied but may relate primarily to other peer educators, unless they are working with a supervisor to collaborate or make referrals (Jones et al., 2013).

Although advisable, supervision may not include critical reflection. Formal evaluation of peer educators' work is unlikely unless it is built into the program and done by a supervisor. Supervisors may require peer educators to obtain some professional development, which can consist of informal and formal training activities. Professional development activities are usually dependent on role, tasks, and the program or curriculum with which they are associated. Opportunities for professional development can be limited by funding and budgetary constraints. Peer educators' work with parents may be volunteer or paid; it is likely part-time versus full-time and may be short- or long-term (Jones et al., 2013).

Advancement in the field of parenting education may or may not be a priority for peer educators. Peer educators may be able to advance within an organization; however, it is unlikely without formal education and advanced training. Although advancement is limited, it could include working with other less experienced peer educators. They may find that the experiences they garner working with parents in parenting education prepares them for opportunities within their community. Suitability for such opportunities may depend on an audience match, knowledge and experience, job performance, as well as interest (Jones et al., 2013).

In applying these definitions to parenting education there is overlap of titles and roles, particularly between paraprofessionals and peer educators (Jones et al., 2013). For example, many paraprofessionals are also peers, and many peer educators have job titles that name them as paraprofessionals. It is worth noting that in the white paper *peer educator* was used to describe a specific role in parenting education. (Chart 1: Similarities and Differences of Practitioners)

## **Methodology**

### ***Procedure***

The purpose of the national survey was to provide input from the practitioners, paraprofessionals and peer educators, to further inform, confirm, and/or challenge issues addressed in the white paper. Some of the issues included: a) job title clarity; b) pre-service, in-service requirements; c) supervision of paraprofessionals and peer educators; d) wage information, and e) interest in a national credential.

First, a pilot survey was submitted to paraprofessionals and peer educators in mid-2013 to the regions represented by the NPEN work group, Arkansas, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, and Texas. After receiving feedback from the pilot survey, edits were made to the *PsychData* survey. The anonymous, national online survey for paraprofessionals and peer educators was related to the white paper. The 23-question survey subheadings included, My Work with Parents, My Education, My Pre-service Training, My Supervision, My Continuing Education, and A National Credential. The survey was publicized using the NPEN listserv; in addition, NPEN members promoted and sent the survey to various parenting educator groups as well as individuals across the United States. Professional educators who received the email announcement about the survey were encouraged to forward the notice to paraprofessional and peer parenting educators. The survey was open for six weeks in late 2013 and provided a “voice” for paraprofessional and peer practitioners. The results supported and in some cases refuted statements made in the white paper, e.g., that most paraprofessionals and peer educators would be part-time workers and that they would not have degrees (bachelor’s and higher). However, the survey revealed that almost 40% did in fact have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

### ***Sample***

Initially, 241 practitioners responded to the survey with 218 completions (90% completion rate). However, some practitioners were identified as being professionals and were eliminated from the data. Review of the data revealed that 25% of the respondents have Bachelor’s, Master’s or higher degree in a field related to parenting education which would indicate the role of a professional as defined in the white paper. After elimination, 163 participants were identified as paraprofessionals and peer educator practitioners in parenting education. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze survey data. Each question was analyzed for descriptive statistics.

**Chart I: Similarities and Differences of Practitioners in Parenting Education:  
Overview of Peer Educators, Paraprofessionals, and Professionals**

Descriptors	"Peer Educators"	"Paraprofessional"	Professional
<b>Motivation and Match</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivation primarily altruistic</li> <li>Population match is essential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivation mixed</li> <li>Population match not required but match may be important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivation mixed</li> <li>Population match not required but may be helpful</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May or may not have formal education</li> <li>Preparation may include self-directed learning and/or participation in parenting education</li> <li>Parenting education formal pre-service training typical but varied</li> <li>Ed/training is role and task specific</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May have formal education (and even degrees) in an unrelated field or some formal education in PE and/or a related field</li> <li>Preparation may include self-directed learning and/or participation in parenting education classes</li> <li>Formal pre-service training likely</li> <li>Formal ed/training is role and task specific</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formal education related to PE or a *related field required - minimum of bachelor's degree</li> <li>Ed/training comprehensive</li> <li>Preparation consists primarily of formal education but some self-directed learning or participation in parenting education may occur</li> <li>Pre-service job training less likely</li> </ul>
<b>Role Capabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited or low versatility of methods and roles</li> <li>Narrowly defined approach/es</li> <li>Knowledgeable and skilled in some tasks (e.g. share info, mentor, advocate) with parents</li> <li>May tend to favor Duncan and Goddard's Facilitator or Expert approaches</li> <li>Tasks with parents are typically parent/issue driven or curriculum directed</li> <li>Works w/professional and under supervision</li> <li>Tasks with colleagues are varied</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Semi-versatile methods and roles</li> <li>Limited versatility of approaches</li> <li>May tend to favor Duncan and Goddard's Collaborator or Expert approaches</li> <li>Knowledgeable and skilled in some tasks (e.g. share info and teach/instruct) with parents</li> <li>Tasks with parents are typically program driven</li> <li>Works w/professional who supervises and directs work</li> <li>Tasks with colleagues vary but may relate primarily to other paraprofessionals, with the exception of making referrals and collaborating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly versatile methods and roles</li> <li>Uses a variety of methodologies</li> <li>May tend to favor Duncan and Goddard's <i>Eclectic</i> approach depending on situation</li> <li>Develops or adapts materials</li> <li>Knowledgeable and skilled in a variety of tasks with parents and colleagues</li> <li>Works independently or collaboratively</li> <li>Tasks with parents and colleagues are goal oriented</li> </ul>
<b>Aspects of Work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May not have quality supervision</li> <li>Formal evaluation of work is unlikely unless it is built into program, may be done by a supervisor</li> <li>Professional development (PD) dependent on program, role, and funding</li> <li>PD consists of informal or formal training</li> <li>Short or long-term work</li> <li>Volunteer or paid (more likely part-time)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supervision is typical but may not be reflective</li> <li>Formal evaluation of work by supervisor is typical</li> <li>Formal evaluation by parents is common</li> <li>PD supported</li> <li>PD consists of informal and formal training</li> <li>Paid</li> <li>Full or part-time</li> <li>Short or long term work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PD required or encouraged</li> <li>PD usually formal, structured and for credit</li> <li>May or may not have reflective supervision depending on employment (self or other)</li> <li>Self-evaluation (reflection)</li> <li>Formal evaluation by parents and possibly by a supervisor is common</li> <li>Paid</li> <li>Full or part-time</li> <li>Short or long term work</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities Advancement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advancement may or may not be a priority</li> <li>Few opportunities within the field</li> <li>Limited opportunities within an organization</li> <li>Potential for opportunities within the community</li> <li>Opportunities based on audience match, knowledge and experience, performance, and desire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advancement may or may not be a priority</li> <li>Limited opportunities within the field</li> <li>Some opportunities within an organization and the community</li> <li>Opportunities based mostly on experience but formal education and training are considered</li> <li>Audience match may or may not effect opportunities</li> <li>Performance is likely to impact opportunities for advancement within an organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advancement is likely to be a high priority</li> <li>Opportunities for advancement within the field and an organization are diverse but depend on availability</li> <li>Opportunities within the local community may depend on receptiveness of community members to professionals</li> <li>Opportunities in the field and an organization are influenced by formal education, training, field experience, performance</li> </ul>

## Results

The NPEN national online survey revealed that 80% (N=131) of paraprofessionals and peer educators were paid and approximately half (53%) were employed full-time. With regard to educational level, almost 40% had a bachelor's degree or higher; the complete break-down of education level is shown in Table 1. Additionally, more than 41% had worked directly with families for 10 or more years. Other roles that paraprofessionals and peer educators perform included networking with other agencies and recruiting program participants as shown in Table 2.

Table 1 *Peer Educators and Paraprofessionals Education Level* (N=161)

Education	%	n
Master's degree or higher in unrelated field	16	26
Bachelor's degree	23.3	38
Associate degree	20.2	33
Some college	26.4	43
High school diploma	9.2	15
GED	3.1	5
Some high school courses	.6	1

Table 2 *Peer Educators and Paraprofessionals Roles with Parents* (N=163)

Roles with parents	%	n
Delivering group parenting education	63	103
Making home visits	53	86
Parenting education for individuals other than in the home	42	69
Recruiting program participants	61.3	100
Networking with other agencies and organizations	61.3	100
Referring parents/families to other agencies/community organizations	75	122
Supervising the work of others	22	36
Developing parenting workshops	42	68
Developing educational materials for parents	47	76

### ***Supervision***

This study revealed that 90% of participants have a supervisor. Volunteers (M = 3.44) have a significantly higher rate of supervision compared to paid employees (M = 3.13), and part-time employees (M = 3.29) had significantly higher supervision compared to full-time employees (M = 3.09). Participants with some college/associate's degree (M = 3.28) had significantly higher supervision scores compared to those with a Bachelor's or advanced degree in another field (M = 3.06). Twenty-two percent reported that they supervised others.

### ***Pre-service Training***

Thirty-seven percent of participants reported having 24+ pre-service training hours while 17% received no pre-service training. The delivery of curriculum received the largest amount of pre-service training (77%) which concurred with results of strongly agree (42%) and agree (35 %) that they used parenting education curricula to guide most of their work. Therefore, if most participants are using curricula to guide their work it stands to reason that they would also need to be trained on how to deliver the curricula. The category of job responsibilities, which primarily consisted of administrative duties, received the second largest of amount of pre-service

training at 76%. Other areas of pre-service training the survey examined included, how to work with families (68%), parenting education (63%), and how to work with professionals (41%), which received the least amount of pre-service training at (41%). The complete breakdown of pre-service training sessions can be found in table 3.

Table 3 *Pre-Service Training Sessions* (N=163)

Sessions	%	n
How to deliver curriculum	76.7	125
How to work with families	68.1	111
How to work with professionals	40.5	66
Responsibilities of my job (routines, reports, administrative tasks)	76.1	124
The organization I work for	68.7	112
Parenting education	62.6	102

### ***Continuing Education***

In order to remain current with new concepts and findings in the field it is important that paraprofessionals and peer educators have continuing education opportunities. This study disclosed that 71% of the participants are required to participate in continuing education training; however, 93% opted to participate in continuing education. Of the 93% who received continuing education training, 60% receive 12+ hours annually and 13% received 1-6 hours annually.

Table 4 *Required Participation in Continuing Education* (N=161)

Continuing Education	%	n
Yes	71.2	116
No	20.2	33
I do not know	7.4	12

Table 5 *Amount of Hours Spent in Continuing Education Training Annually* (N=163)

Hours Spent in Training	%	n
1-6 hours	12.9	21
7-12 hours	20.2	33
More than 12 hours	59.5	97
Total that participated in training	92.6	151

Their most recent training sessions were primarily related to parenting (72%) and issues related to children (74%). Participants were asked to rank on a scale of one to five, with one being the least and 5 being the most, where they received most of their continuing education training. The results revealed that 16% received most of their training from their supervisor and 24% in face-to-face trainings. The complete breakdown of the data regarding continuing education training sessions and where participants received most of their training can be found in tables 6 and 7.

Table 6 *Most Recent Continuing Education Training Sessions* (N=150)

Most Recent Sessions	%	n
Specific parent education program curricula	58.3	95
Issues related to children	74.2	121
Issues related to parenting	72.4	118
Issues related to ethical work with families	34.4	56
Assessment and evaluation	35	57
Facilitation skills	33.1	54
Community resources	43.6	71

Table 7 *Where Participants Received most of their Continuing Education Training* (N=163)

	%	n
Webinar	17.2	28
Supervisor	16	26
Print materials	12.9	21
Other professionals, such as colleagues or mentors	11	18
Face to face trainings	24.5	40

### ***National Credential***

The final survey question asked participants about their interest in a national parenting education credential. The initial response of over 240 practitioners is a good indication of the interest in a national credential for parenting educators as 83% were in favor of a credential. There was a statistically significant difference for interest in the parenting educator credential and the number of years participants were planning to stay in the parenting education field. The greatest proportion of participants planning to stay in the field more than 10 years were also very interested in a national parenting educator credential (79.3%). Further investigation through national focus groups will help to distinguish the interest and support for a parenting education credential in the U.S.

### **Discussion and Implications**

As society has changed and become more complex so have the challenges of parenting. Parenting education can help build parenting skills. Paraprofessionals and peer educators are needed to meet the demands of intervening, educating, and supporting parents. Parenting education paraprofessionals and peer educators play a significant role in the parenting education field as most are paid and about half work full time. The researchers were surprised that many paraprofessionals worked full-time as parenting education classes are typically offered in the evenings and on Saturdays. This type of schedule lends itself to part-time positions.

Most paraprofessionals and peer educators (77%) have received pre-service training and training in how to use parenting education curricula. However, more than a third did not receive pre-service training. Paraprofessionals and peer educators who do not receive pre-service training could negatively impact the services offered and/or the parents themselves. As a result, the development of core competencies in parenting education would standardize specific roles and tasks as well as provide opportunities for growth and promotion.

Overall, 93% of paraprofessionals and peer educators are participating in some form of continuing education, although only 71% are required to do so. This is significant because it shows that despite not being required to participate in continuing education; approximately 21% of participants took the time to invest in continuing education. This could be an indication of their dedication to their profession and to the field of parenting education. Their most recent training sessions were primarily related to parenting (72%) and issues related to children (74%). This is an indication that most paraprofessionals and peer educators are interested in furthering their knowledge and skills as it relates to parenting education.

Most paraprofessionals and peer educators are interested in a national parenting education credential that would include levels for them. National organizations that offer credentials are designed for professionals, however, a few state organizations offer credentials for paraprofessionals and peer educators; e.g., New York State Parenting Education Partnership (NYSPEP) and North Carolina Parenting Education Network (NCPEN). The state organizations and/or networks provide an avenue for promoting knowledge and skills for all parenting educators. At this point in time there is not a national credential that includes all parenting educators.

The success of paraprofessionals is dependent upon the quality of supervision they receive. This study revealed that 90% of participants have a supervisor; however, further investigation of the type and quality of the supervision needs to be explored. On the other hand, 22% of the paraprofessionals and peer educators reported that they supervised others! Paraprofessionals and peer educators lack the comprehensive education and training in parenting education supervision, making supervision of others very challenging. After appropriate screening and pre-service training, paraprofessionals should receive on-going supervision by a professional parenting educator (Jones et al., 2013).

An implication of this study is the title of “paraprofessional” as it appears to best describe the non-professionals in parenting education. The use of paraprofessionals and peer educators may cause confusion in a field of study that is in early stages of development. As the intent of this study is to discover who the non-professionals are who are delivering parenting education, it would be advantageous to simplify the terms used to describe them. The public and professionals alike would benefit from greater job title clarity. It is worth noting that during a discussion at the annual NPEN Council meeting in April 2013, there was division on whether *peer* is a general descriptor or a specific role in parenting education.

Regarding the use of the title *paraprofessional*, a recent search of parenting education articles provided reinforcement of the use of *paraprofessional* to describe all non-professionals. An article search, for research published within the last ten years, demonstrated how parenting educators are described or named in such articles. The results revealed that most authors used the term paraprofessionals rather than peer educator. For example, “paraprofessional home visitors of the same racial-ethnic backgrounds” (Katz, et al., 2011, p. 76); “paraprofessionals...familiarity with the community and their ability to win the confidence of clients” (De la Rose, Perry, Dalton, & Johnson, 2005, p.329); “paraprofessionals who may more easily identify with, recruit, and engage community members” (Calzada, et al., 2005, p.389) and “Paraprofessionals were often reported as being an essential component...” (Conroy, 2012, p. 6). If a national credential is to be pursued the use of the term *paraprofessional* would be beneficial for those seeking the credential as well as to further the branding of the credential.

This study advocates for a greater inclusion and acceptance of diverse practitioners in parenting education. However, alignment with competencies is needed so as to promote unity

and continuity in the field. NPEN has also undertaken the task of defining Competencies in Parenting Education and will continue to develop and refine McDermott's (2011) original work identifying core competencies for parenting educators. Levels of competencies identifying novice or beginner levels will also be developed (Jones et al., 2013). Professionals, children and families, sponsors and funders of parenting education programs and services would benefit from a greater consistency of competencies. The greatest benefit could be to paraprofessionals themselves who currently do not have a national credential to validate their role.

### **Conclusion**

Parenting education is an effective intervention for addressing multiple social problems in a fast-paced and challenging society. This article is an effort to bring more awareness to the parenting education field along with advocating for professional development and recognition for the non-professionals that provide these services. The study provided basic, descriptive information about an obscure group of educators, paraprofessionals and peer educators, in parenting education. However, it left speculation about the meaning behind some of the information received, such as, the extent and depth of the supervision, job title clarity, and specific training and/or continuing education. As a result, NPEN is now in the process of initiating regional focus groups across the U.S. The face-to-face focus groups will provide more in-depth information and insights related to the survey data as well as to collect additional data not covered in the survey, such as challenges experienced when working with parents. The final NPEN goal is to create a manual for organizations employing peers and paraprofessionals for parenting education. The manual will summarize all of the works mentioned above. The intent is to raise the level of training, to provide information regarding job descriptions and supervision of these workers and promote effective parenting education practice.

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