

# Enhancing Paraprofessionals' Implementation of Communication-promoting Strategies with Professional Development and Feedback



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## Introduction

### Significance

- Paraprofessionals who work in inclusive early childhood classrooms are facing increasing responsibilities in supporting teachers and children with diverse learning needs (Deardorff, Glasenapp, Schalock, & Udell, 2007; Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002).
- Paraprofessionals are now expected to assist in the implementation of positive learning environments and experiences, particularly in the area of communication and language development.
- Many paraprofessionals enter the field with minimal experience and training (Deardorff et al., 2007; Wood et al., 2007), especially training on how to adequately work with children who have developmental delays or disabilities (Deardorff et al., 2007; Gallagher, Malone, Cleghorne, & Helms, 1997; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2003; Wischnowski, Yates, & McCollum, 1996).
- To address the problem of inadequate training, professional development efforts have been targeted towards early childhood education professionals to increase their levels of competence in providing quality educational experiences for children.
- Professional development in the form of one-shot workshops or isolated training sessions, in which the learner has a passive role, has been shown to be ineffective in supporting the transfer of learning into the settings in which the knowledge will be used (Deardorff et al., 2007; Dunst & Raab, 2010; Hall, Grundon, Pope, & Romero, 2010).

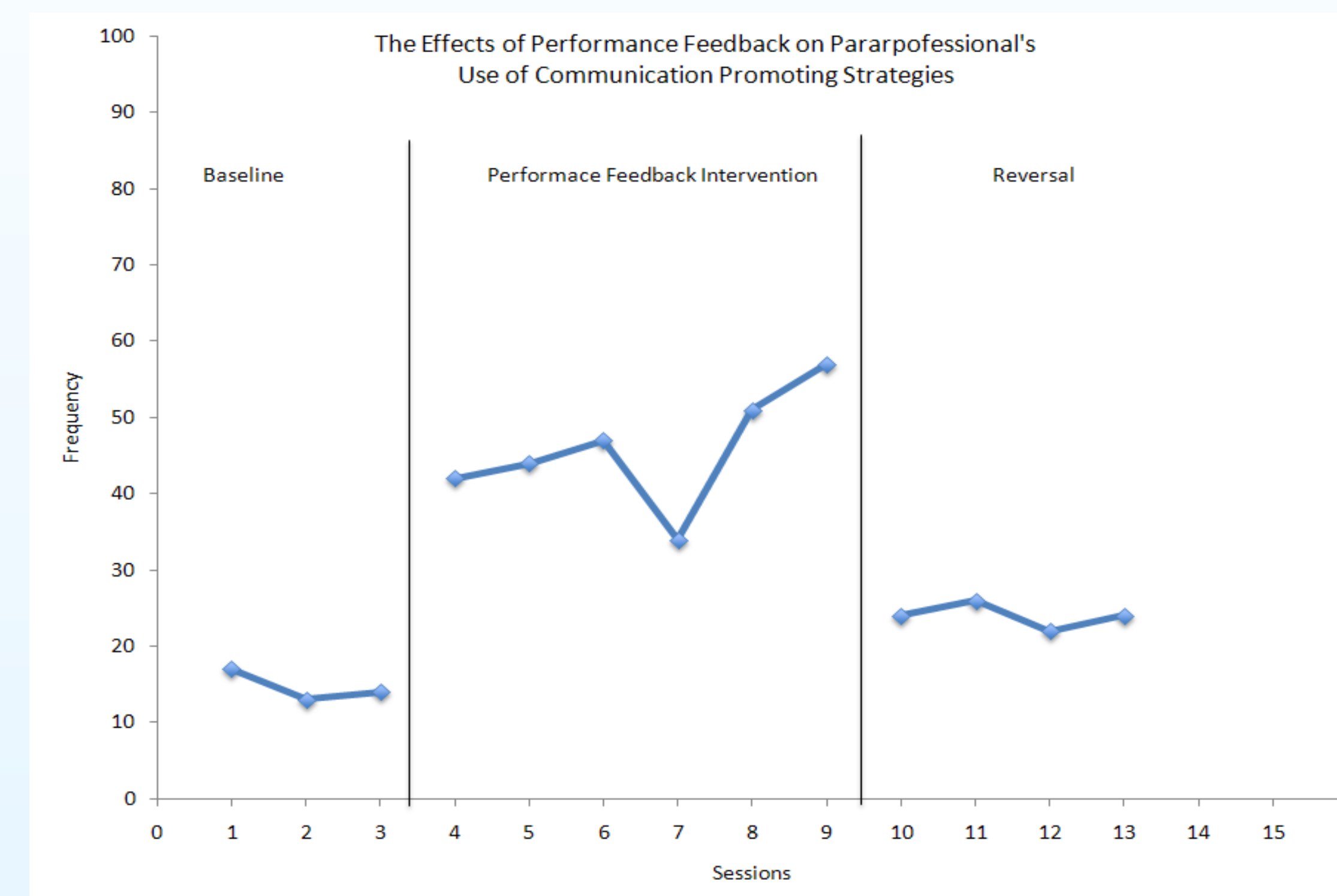
### Previous Research

- Researchers have focused on investigating the components of high-quality professional development within the education field to increase the effectiveness of preservice and inservice training.
- Studies have examined the effects of data-based performance feedback as a method of providing ongoing support to educators and promoting meaningful change in teacher practices (Barton & Wolery, 2007; Boat et al., 2009a; Boat et al., 2009b; Brown & Woods, 2011; Casey & McWilliam, 2008; Downs, Downs, & Rau, 2008; Hall et al., 2010; Hemmeter, Snyder, Kinder, & Artman, 2010).

### Research Question

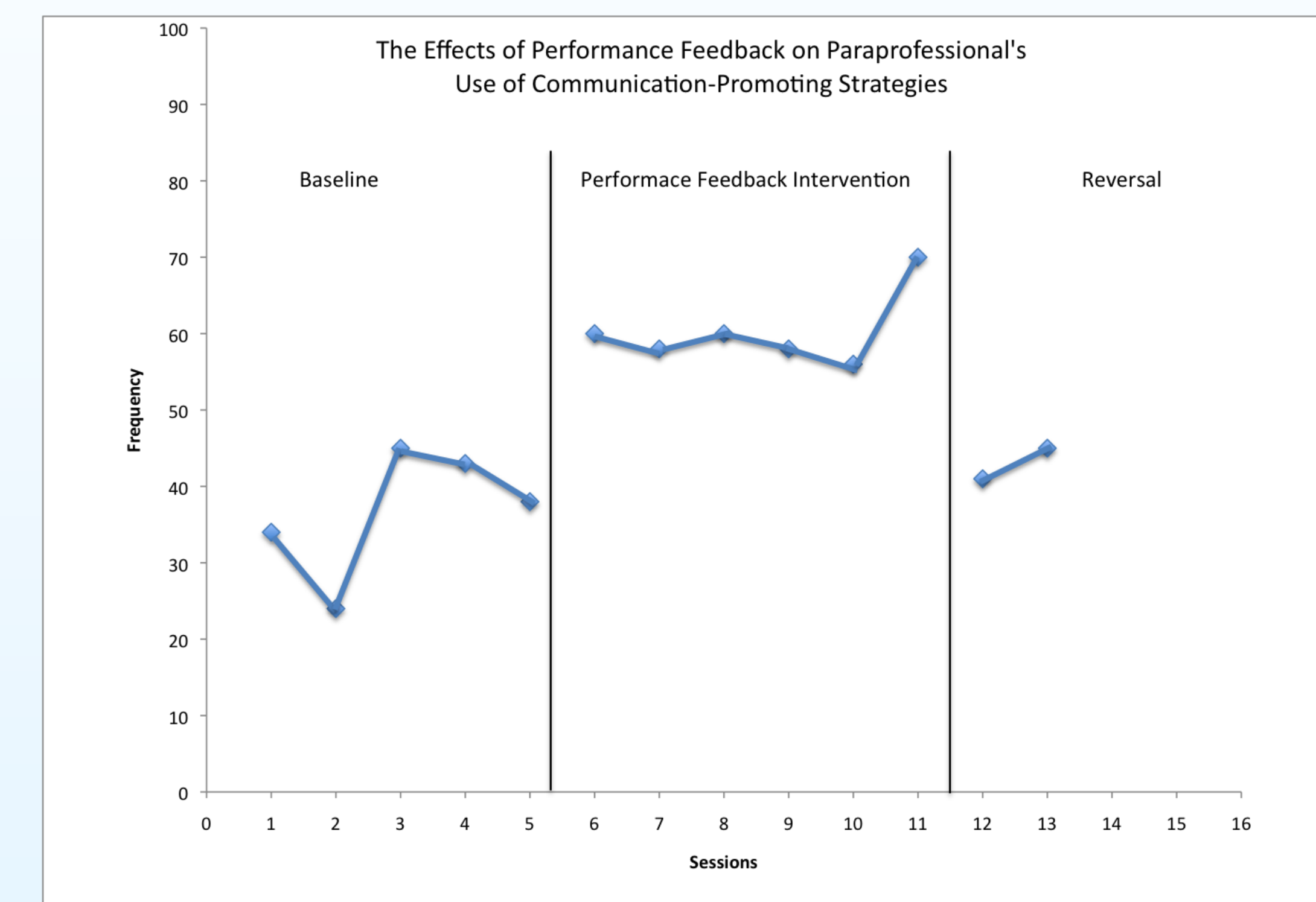
What are the effects of individualized performance feedback on paraprofessionals' frequency of use of naturalistic communication-promoting strategies in inclusive early childhood classrooms?

## Paraprofessional A



Strategy	Baseline		Feedback		Withdrawal	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Comments/Labels	8	8-9	21.2	17-23	10.8	9-12
Open-ended questions	5	4-6	15.7	12-24	10.3	9-11
Imitates	.6	0-2	4.7	3-9	1	0-2
Expands	0	0-0	1.3	0-3	.5	0-1
Provides choices	.33	0-1	3	1-7	1.5	1-2

## Paraprofessional B



Strategy	Baseline		Feedback		Withdrawal	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Comments/Labels	19	14-23	24.1	16-30	22	21-23
Open-ended questions	13.2	8-17	20.5	15-24	15	14-16
Imitates	3.6	2-6	6.83	3-11	3	2-4
Expands	1.2	0-2	4.3	1-7	2	1-3
Provides choices	2.6	1-6	10	1-12	1	0-1

## Results

- Paraprofessionals showed an immediate and significant positive change in the frequency of the communication promoting strategies from baseline to intervention
- Frequency dropped during the withdrawal observation sessions when feedback was no longer provided, indicating a functional relationship between the intervention and the target behavior
- Although the behavior did not return to baseline levels when feedback was withdrawn, an immediate decrease was still detected.

## Implications

- Knowledge only does not translate into effective practices.
- In order for the educators maintain newly acquired skills as part of the classroom practices--it is essential that a level of support be provided and maintained.
- Innovative systems for data driven professional development, and systems for ongoing support are needed to truly impact the classroom level

## Methods

### Participants

- Paraprofessional A: Woman, Age 47, Education-Master of Engineering
- Paraprofessional B: Woman, Age 47, Education-Associates Degree in Early Childhood Education

### Setting

- Half-day, afternoon, Urban Elementary School in Northeast Ohio
- Paraprofessional A:
  - 1 Intervention Specialist and 2 Assistants
  - Integrated special education preschool class
- Paraprofessional B:
  - 1 Preschool teacher and 1 assistant
  - Early Childhood Education Entitlement Class

### Independent Variables

The teacher training package included the following components: communication promoting strategies manual, ongoing support meetings, and ongoing performance feedback.

### Dependent Variables

Strategy	Definitions/Examples
Comments, labels	Describing the actions in which a child is involved Naming or describing the actions/materials the child is playing with Talking about activities or objects in which the child has shown interest. Talking about activities in which the caregiver and child are mutually engaged. Describing what you are already doing with the child during routines.
Asks open-ended questions	Questions asked in a way that allows children to respond in multiple ways rather than simply answering yes/no or nodding their heads. Questions that begin with what, who, where, how, or why.
Imitates	Repeating a child's vocalizations or words back to the child.
Expands	Repeating what a child has just said AND adding new information; imitating + using additional words
Provides choices verbally	Verbally offering 2 or more objects or activities for a child to choose from means the child will need to communicate which toy or activity he/she prefers

### Data Collection

- 30-minute observation
- Counted the number of the paraprofessional's use of the naturalistic communication strategies used within the classroom routine during each 30-second interval.
- Number was then added for the total number of naturalistic communication strategies used during the 30-minute session. Data was also collected on the type of communicative behavior used by the paraprofessional, for discussion and goal setting purposes during the feedback phase.