

Making the Most of Job Coach Training: Important Topics & Preferred Formats

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Introduction

- Students with disabilities often participate in community-based work experiences (CBWEs) with the support of a paraprofessional
- In this role, paraprofessionals are providing job coach supports – a central component of supported employment for people with disabilities
- Many paraprofessionals receive limited training on job coaching for students with disabilities
- Effective job coach supports are essential to helping students acquire meaningful employment skills during CBWEs
- Currently, few resources exist that are appropriate for training paraprofessional job coaches

What did we want to know?

- 1. What do paraprofessional job coaches and job coach supervisors believe are the most important topics to include in job coach training?**
- 2. What formats of job coach training do paraprofessional job coaches and job coach supervisors prefer?**
3. What is the relationship between paraprofessional job coach ratings of important training topics and the percentage of time spent job coaching?
- 4. Do perceptions of important training topics and preferred training format vary by role, school size, and school type?**

Method

- Two participant groups
 - Job coaches (*a paraprofessional or teaching assistant employed by the school who supports students with disabilities to learn work skills at businesses in the community; n = 115*)
 - Supervisors of paraprofessional job coaches (e.g., special educators, vocational coordinators; *n = 93*)
- Anonymous, online survey with two versions (slight variations in wording and demographic questions)
- First round of analysis included descriptive statistics
 - Percentages, Means, Standard deviations, Ranges

Paraprofessional Job Coach Demographics

- Paraprofessional License
 - 86.1% Yes
 - 9.6% No
- Job Coach Certification from Outside Organization
 - 7.8% Yes
 - 88.7% No
- Highest Level of Education
 - 0.9% Some high school
 - 18.3% High school diploma or GED
 - 27.8% Associate's degree or 2 years college coursework
 - 53.1% Bachelors degree or higher
- Setting
 - 35.7% Regular high school
 - 14.8% Special education school
 - 36.5% Transition center
 - 12.2% Community-based setting
- Years of Experience as Job Coach
 - 47.8% 5 years or less
 - 28.7% 6-10 years
 - 10.4% 11-15 years
 - 13.1% 16+ years
- Time at CBWEs Each Week
 - 27.8% - Less than 25% of week
 - 24.3% - 26-50% of week
 - 18.3% - 51-75% of week
 - 28.7% - 76-100% of week

Supervisor Demographics

- Position
 - 53.7% Special education teacher
 - 44.2% Vocational/transition coordinator
 - 9.5% Special education administrator
 - 3.2% Related Services (OT, Psych)
- Setting
 - 55.9% Regular high school
 - 19.4% Special education school
 - 20.4% Transition center
 - 3.2% Community-based setting
- Highest Level of Education
 - 21.5% Bachelors degree
 - 68.8% Masters degree
 - 6.5% Doctoral degree
- School Size
 - 54.8% 500 or less students
 - 43% More than 500 students
 - 2.2% Prefer not to respond
- School Location
 - 14.0% Urban
 - 68.8% Suburban
 - 16.1% Rural
- Years of Experience Supervising Para Job Coaches
 - 24.4% 5 years or less
 - 18.5% 6-10 years
 - 9.6% 11-15 years
 - 17.7% 16+ years

Results: Training Topics

Survey Categories for Training Topics

1. Background & foundations of job coaching
2. Career exploration and job development
3. Job coaching strategies
4. Navigating social and behavioral demands of a worksite

Background & Foundations of Job Coaching

Training Topics

- Special education laws (e.g., IDEA)
- Employment laws impacting students with disabilities (e.g., Fair Labor Standards Act, Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA])
- Models of employment (e.g., supported, customized)
- Core values of job coaching (e.g., inclusion, informed choice)
- Job coach responsibilities
- Professionalism when job coaching
- Work readiness skills (e.g., travel, personal hygiene)

Background & Foundations of Job Coaching

Paraprofessional Job Coaches

Most important:

1. Job coach responsibilities
2. Professionalism while job coaching

Least important:

1. Special education laws
2. Models of employment

Job Coach Supervisors

Most important:

1. Job coach responsibilities
2. Professionalism while job coaching

Least important:

1. Special education laws
2. Employment laws impacting SWD

Background & Foundations of Job Coaching

Noteworthy Findings

- Similar ratings of importance across participant groups
- Job coaches and supervisors rated *Job coach responsibilities* and *Professionalism while job coaching* highest across **all** items in the survey
- Both groups seem to believe that understanding special education and employment laws is not as important for job coaches
 - *Special education laws* was among bottom 2 (least important) for supervisors across **all** survey items

Group Discussion

How does this relate
to your
experiences?

**Would you rate the
same items
highest/lowest?**

Career Exploration & Job Development Training Topics

- Identifying job sites in the community
- Networking with businesses
- Conducting vocational assessments with students
- Conducting job analyses (i.e., breaking a position into its parts and identifying the requirements)
- Job carving (i.e., customizing duties or creating new jobs for people with disabilities)

Career Exploration & Job Development

Paraprofessional Job Coaches

Most important:

1. Conducting job analyses
2. Job carving

Least important:

1. Identifying job sites in the community
2. Networking with businesses

Job Coach Supervisors

Most important:

1. Conducting job analyses
2. Job carving

Least important:

1. Identifying job sites in the community
2. Networking with businesses

Career Exploration & Job Development

Noteworthy Findings

- Only category where top 2 and bottom 2 were the same across both participant groups
- Consistently lower ratings across each item than items in previous category (*Background and Foundations of Job Coaching*)
 - Participants may believe that items within this category fall within the purview of a teacher/coordinator therefore are less important to include in job coach training
- Job coaches rated *Identifying job sites in the community* and *Networking with businesses* lowest across **all** items in the survey

Group Discussion

How does this relate
to your
experiences?

**Would you rate the
same items
highest/lowest?**



Job Coach Strategies Training Topics

- Prompting (i.e., gestural, verbal)
- Fading (i.e., gradually decreasing prompts as student learns a skill)
- Task analysis (i.e., breaking tasks into smaller steps)
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Assistive technology
- Accommodations/modifications
- Reinforcement
- Error correction
- Maintenance (i.e., retaining skills over time)
- Generalization (i.e., using skills in different settings or with different people)
- Identifying natural supports (i.e., supports available to all employees within a workplace)

Job Coach Strategies

Paraprofessional Job Coaches

Most important:

1. Prompting
2. Task analysis
3. Reinforcement

Least important:

1. Data analysis
2. Assistive technology

Job Coach Supervisors

Most important:

1. Fading
2. Prompting

Least important:

1. Data analysis
2. Assistive technology
3. Data Collection

Job Coach Strategies

Noteworthy Findings

- Paraprofessional job coaches and supervisors both rated data analysis lower; may indicate this is perceived as role of teachers
 - *Data analysis* was among bottom 2 (least important) for supervisors across **all** survey items
- Lower rating of *Data collection* by supervisors warrants further exploration
 - Data collection is considered a crucial competency in workplace supports for individuals with disabilities
- Paraprofessionals generally rated job coaching strategies as less important than supervisors

Group Discussion

How does this relate
to your
experiences?

**Would you rate the
same items
highest/lowest?**

Navigating Social & Behavioral Demands Training Topics

- Analyzing the function of behavior
- Implementing behavior interventions
- Social skills needed in the workplace
- Fostering student motivation
- Facilitating interactions between students and employees at the business
- Advising employees on supporting students with disabilities

Navigating Social & Behavioral Demands

Paraprofessional Job Coaches

Most important:

All items were essentially seen as equally important by job coaches

Least important:

All items were essentially seen as equally important by job coaches

Job Coach Supervisors

Most important:

1. Social skills needed in the workplace
2. Facilitating interactions between students and employees at the business

Least important:

1. Analyzing the function of a behavior
2. Advising employees on supporting students with disabilities

Navigating Social & Behavioral Demands

Noteworthy Findings

- Distinct similarities across ratings of what is less important
 - May be another indication of what is perceived as the role of a teacher vs. paraprofessional (e.g., functional behavior analysis)
- Less variation in job coach responses compared to other categories
 - Job coaches seem to believe all items in this section are relatively important

Group Discussion

How does this relate
to your
experiences?

**Would you rate the
same items
highest/lowest?**

Results: Training Format/Characteristics



Method of Delivery

Paraprofessional Job Coaches

Highest rated:

- In-person training (54.8%)
- Blended in-person/online (27%)

Job Coach Supervisors

Highest rated:

- In-person training (58.1%)
- Blended in-person/online (36.6%)



Timing of Delivery

Paraprofessional Job Coaches

Highest rated:

- Professional Development (PD) days (82.6%)

Job Coach Supervisors

Highest rated:

- Professional Development (PD) days (86%)



Frequency of Training

Paraprofessional Job Coaches

Highest rated:

- Twice a year (39.1%)
- Monthly (35.7%)

Job Coach Supervisors

Highest rated:

- Monthly (50.5%)
- Twice a year (33.3%)



Length of Training

Paraprofessional Job Coaches

Highest rated:

- 30-60 minutes (38.3%)
- 1-2 hours (38.3%)

Job Coach Supervisors

Highest rated:

- 30-60 minutes (44.1%)
- 1-2 hours (31.2%)



Effective Methods for In-Person Training

Paraprofessional Job Coaches

Highest rated:

- Demonstrations (63.5%)
- Real-life experiences (62.6%)
- Opportunities to practice (56.5%)

Job Coach Supervisors

Highest rated:

- Real-life experiences (84.9%)
- Opportunities to practice (82.8%)
- Demonstrations (80.6%)

Effective Methods for Online Training

Paraprofessional Job Coaches

Highest rated:

- Videos (69.6%)
- Real-life examples/case studies (53%)
- Downloadable resources (45.2%)

Job Coach Supervisors

Highest rated:

- Real-life examples/case studies (81.7%)
- Downloadable resources (65.6%)
- Videos (61.3%) & Demonstration of techniques (61.3%)

Follow-Up Support for Job Coach Training

Paraprofessional Job Coaches

Highest rated:

- Observations of veteran job coaches (53%)
- Refresher trainings throughout the year (51.3%)
- Coaching on job site (46.1%)

Job Coach Supervisors

Highest rated:

- Observations of veteran job coaches (75.3%)
- Coaching on job site (73.1%)
- Clear written procedures or step-by-step guides for job coaching tasks (62.4%)

Motivation for Participating in Job Coach Training

Paraprofessional Job Coaches

Highest rated:

- Monetary stipend (35.7%)
- Opportunity to increase knowledge and skills to better support students during CBWEs (27%)

Job Coach Supervisors

Highest rated:

- Monetary stipend (71%)
- Opportunity to increase knowledge and skills to better support students during CBWEs (9.7%)

Training Formats/Characteristics

Noteworthy Findings

- Responses are significantly more clustered around a few items for supervisors; more spread out for job coaches
 - Supervisors seem to have more agreement on what they believe is effective for training; less consensus for job coaches
- Supervisors strongly agreed that a monetary stipend was the key motivator for participating in job coach training
 - Job coaches indicated several incentives/reasons they would attend a training
- Supervisors believed that training should occur more frequently

Group Discussion

How does this relate to your experiences?

How and when do your job coaches currently receive training?

**Do you feel it is effective?
What, if anything, would you change?**

Discussion

- In general, there was consistency across ratings of important training topics between job coaches and supervisors
- Certain items that were rated lower are considered best practice in workplace supports, even if they are not viewed as important by one or both participant groups (e.g., data collection, fading)
- Increased training and professional development may impact participants' rating of importance if asked in the future
- Paraprofessional job coaches tended to have higher distribution in their responses, meaning there was less agreement amongst the group
 - Training must consider the unique needs and preferences of paraprofessional job coaches based on their specific context (e.g., school, worksite, student needs, etc.)

Implications for Practitioners

- Even in absence of comprehensive, ready-made training materials, most participants know what training their job coaches need to be successful
 - Start small and focus on a few topics; build capacity over time
- Job coach training should incorporate diverse formats/methods but prioritize opportunities for real-world demonstrations and practice sessions
- Given the distribution across paraprofessional responses, teams may want to survey their own job coaches to determine:
 - what specific types of follow-up support would be most helpful after formal training
 - what would motivate paraprofessionals to attend optional job coach trainings

A Place to Start

ICTW has pulled together a list of existing job coach trainings that can be used as-is or adapted for programs' individual needs. Visit the link below to view training options that are currently available:

<https://ictw.illinois.edu/resources/job-coach-training>

Our Next Steps

- Dig deeper into the data to determine whether differences in perceptions exist between:
 - Those who spend more/less time job coaching
 - Those from smaller/larger schools
 - Those from regular schools, special education schools, transition centers, etc.
- Begin to develop job coach training materials that can be adapted based on individual programs' unique needs and contexts

Other Questions/Discussion?

Thank you!

Other thoughts or questions? Feel free to reach out:

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