

A third-grade teacher reported that the paraeducator assigned to her classroom on behalf of a child with significant cognitive and health needs usually helps the child with adapted lessons. But sometimes the paraeducator gives a spelling test, or assists the entire class with math assignments while the teacher works one-to-one or in a small group with the special education student (French & Chopra, 1999).

A high school biology teacher explained that a student with cerebral palsy would be unable to participate in either the lecture or the lab portions of his advanced biology class without help. Whereas the student relies on assistance from his classmates during cooperative activities, there are times when it is inappropriate for students to provide assistance. Then, the paraeducator becomes essential for the student to participate in the meaningful work of the class.

These are two examples of the changing roles of both teachers and paraeducators, particularly in inclusive classrooms. This article explores these roles, delineates responsibilities, and offers practical suggestions for educators and paraeducators in inclusive programs.

What Are Some Changes in Paraeducators' Roles?

Paraeducator roles have changed rather dramatically over time. Originally, schools employed nonprofessional personnel to perform clerical and routine tasks in classrooms or school offices (e.g., taking attendance, handling paperwork and money, correcting papers). A book entitled *Secretaries for Teachers* advocated freeing teachers from routine and repetitive tasks, so they could spend more time with students—teaching (Turney, 1962). During the 1970s, many schools employed playground, hall, lunchroom, and bus loading zone supervisors to free teachers from “duties” that interfered with their planning time. Sometimes the same individual would work in clerical or instructional roles between duties.

By the mid-1990s, paraeducator roles had shifted dramatically. Now, paraeducators spend most of their working hours with small groups of students or individuals (French, 1998). They read to students and listen to students read.

Paraeducators assist students with health care, personal needs, assignments, projects, and small-group work; and they assist entire classes in which students with disabilities are included.

Teachers, families, and paraeducators all reported that paraeducators are really “teachers” because what they do is, in fact, instruction (French & Chopra, 1999).

How Have Teachers' Roles Changed?

It is undeniable. The presence of a paraeducator who provides instructional support to students *changes the role of the teacher*. Some teachers welcome the changes. They recognize that it would be impossible for special education students to thrive in general education classes without personal assistance. Teachers also recognize that a full caseload of students means that they, working alone, cannot possibly provide an appropriate amount of personal assis-

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tance to each student. Teachers have described their reasons for having paraeducator assistance as follows:

- To help me out as much as possible.
- To help me meet my students' needs.
- To help the teacher in any way.
- To teach the kids exactly the way I want them to be taught, to be patient.
- To be able to fill in all the gaps.

Clearly, teachers regard the work that paraeducators do as necessary to their success and to the success of their students (French, 1998).

Teachers also know that the assistance they receive from paraeducators has its price. It means that they lose some of the personalized one-to-one contact with certain of their students. Sometimes, this loss of contact also means sacrificing some control. One teacher said wistfully, "Sometimes she does more individual instruction with the kids than I do. She is the teacher when I'm not there. She's teaching where I left off" (French, 1998).

Figure 1 shows a continuum of control and influence that illustrates the inclusive classroom today, going from the traditional individualistic approach to teaching to a more collaborative approach. As control decreases, however, a teacher's influence increases through the collaborative and consultative relationships the teacher develops. Supervising and directing the work of paraeducators represents a maximum increase of influence on large numbers of students' educational experiences, but a significant loss of control over the specific daily events (French, in press).

Even though teachers are no longer solely responsible for providing instruction, they remain wholly accountable for the outcomes of the instructional process (French, 1997; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). When paraeducators assist in instruction, the teacher *must*

take on the associated roles of *delegator, planner, director, monitor, coach, and program manager* to ensure the quality of students' programs, as well as their own professional integrity.

This shift in teachers' roles is not always welcomed. Many teachers began their career expecting to work primarily with children, to have a separate room in which to do their work, and to be responsible and accountable only for their own actions in relationship to their students' goals. Although teachers rarely turn down a helping hand, they report little preparation for the responsibilities associated with the assistance of paraeducators; and many teachers feel very uncomfortable telling other adults what to do (French, 1998). Teachers who have more education and specific preparation to supervise paraeducators, however, report that they are more comfortable and self-assured in these roles (Morgan, 1997). "Permission" to change roles combined with preparation for supervision responsibilities seems to change teachers' minds (French & Chopra, 1999).

Even when teachers haven't had appropriate training and aren't comfortable with the roles associated with supervision, it is student needs, not teacher preferences, that drive the staffing decisions in special education programs. Thus, special education

teachers sometimes are compelled to provide supervision to paraeducators because of the needs of the students in their programs.

What If I Don't Have Time to Take on These New Roles?

The lack of time is a major problem in the work lives of teachers. At every opportunity, teachers report that the demands of large caseloads, combined with schedules that permit little planning time during the school day, are a source of great stress for them. Unfortunately, the solution to this problem is apparent but not affordable. The financial means of schools do not currently support smaller caseloads, more teachers, more planning hours, or fewer class responsibilities. So, teachers must make adjustments in their use of time to maximize their effectiveness without "burning out." The fact is, it takes time to supervise and direct the work of paraeducators. Yet, paraeducators can do many tasks during the school day to support students while freeing teachers' time to think, plan, direct, monitor, and coach the paraeducator.

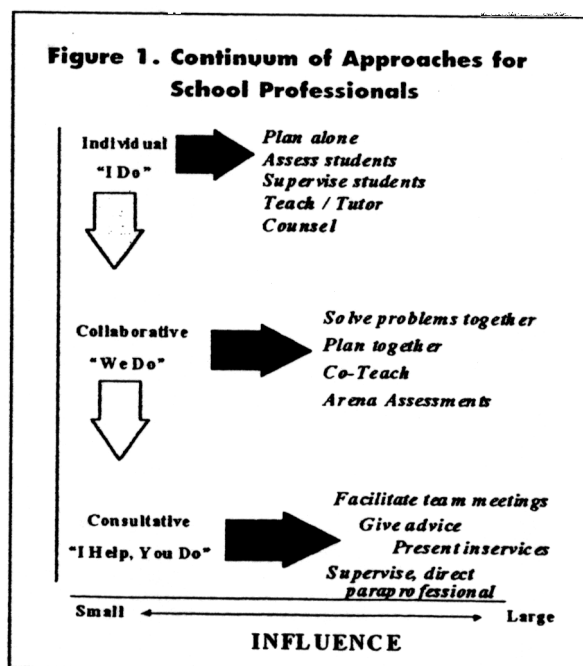
A word of warning to teachers is warranted. Teachers cannot expect to continue to do all the same things and add more to the list. Those who try find themselves working under undue stress, and they start thinking about leaving (Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999).

Working harder is not a feasible solution for most special education teachers. Working smarter is. Teachers must give up some tasks in order to perform others.

What Do I Give Up?

The answer to this question requires a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities and knowledge of the legal, liability, and ethical issues associated with the assignment of tasks to paraeducators. Thus, three sets of considerations guide the judgment

Figure 1. Continuum of Approaches for School Professionals



of teachers in deciding what tasks to assign to paraeducators.

First Consideration: Legislation

Teachers must know and consider the state laws governing who teaches, pertinent policies of their state board of education, and any local district policies or procedures. Although the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specify that "Paraprofessionals who are adequately trained and supervised may assist in the delivery of special education and related services" (Part B, Section 612 (a) (15)), states may impose different restrictions or standards. The state's statutory authority for employing teachers and paraeducators often provides the final word on what teachers and paraeducators may or may not do. For example, Colorado Revised Statutes (CRS) specify that school districts may employ paraprofessionals to "assist certificated personnel in the provision of services related to instruction or super-

vision of children" (CRS 22-32-110 (1) (ee)). The Iowa Administrative Code (IAD) authorizes the employment of paraprofessionals, other special education assistants, educational aides, and Title I instructional aides. The IAD also requires newly hired paraeducators to complete an inservice training program during the first year of employment.

Teachers may want to request information about the laws and rules of their state that pertain to the employment of paraeducators from district or state education agency personnel.

Second Consideration: Risks

Risks to students and to personnel comprise the second set of considerations. Risks that may be tolerated are often defined by liability guidelines that vary by district and are usually recommended to the local school board or school committee by the school district's attorney or risk manager. Generally, there are three levels of responsibility for limiting the risks for students and personnel that

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are consistent across districts and states. Table 1 shows how those responsibilities may be delineated.

Third Consideration: Ethics

Ethically, teachers cannot assign instructional tasks to a person who has no preparation to do them (Heller, 1997). In practice, this means that teachers must seriously consider the competencies and skills of each paraeducator before assigning a task. It also implies that teachers have the responsibility to train and coach the paraeducator to perform certain tasks when those

Table 1. Responsibilities for Risks Taken by Students and Personnel

Administrator Responsibilities	Professional Service Delivery Team Member Responsibilities	Paraeducator Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Develop and disseminate written safety procedures and policies for all types of instructional programming * Provide appropriate inservice training regarding risks to all those who carry out the instructional program * Provide an environment in which effective communication among team members may occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provide access to all written and nonwritten procedures and policies that guide student safety and welfare * Decide/prescribe appropriate risks, as well as limitations for each student * Provide written instructional plans, based on the student's individualized education program (IEP), to the paraeducator * Establish/maintain a recordkeeping system where all team members contribute to and have access to relevant information about the students with whom they work * Communicate all decisions, plans, policies, and prescriptions to paraeducators * Review with the paraeducator all the needs or circumstances of students that may affect their safety or welfare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Fully understand and apply written safety procedures of the administrative unit * Exercise prudent judgment relative to the safety and welfare of students * Adhere to the written instructional plan * Take data as directed, keep appropriate records and documentation relative to student performance and behavior * Communicate all relevant observations, insights, or information about students to professional team members * Be aware of and heed the physical, behavioral, emotional, and educational needs of students that may affect their safety and welfare

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tasks are essential to the student or the program.

Teachers must consider the formal or informal *training* the paraeducator has to perform every specific task they assign. Few paraeducators have preservice preparation, and only a handful of places have begun to require orientation for newly employed paraeducators.

Teachers must consistently remember that the person to whom they are assigning instructional responsibilities may have little preparation to teach, manage behavior, understand the developmental level, communication needs, or health concerns of students.

Even with training, there are a few responsibilities that, ethically speaking,

Table 2. Responsibilities of Teachers and Paraeducators

Sole Responsibility of Teacher or Other Professional Service Delivery Team Member

Responsibility Shared with Paraeducators

In collaboration with parents, families, students, and related service providers, teachers:

1. Determine student eligibility for special education programs
2. Decide on long-term goals and objectives for the individualized education program (IEP)
3. Determine the amount of specific services to students
4. Prescribe behavioral supports

- * Plan short-term objectives and lessons that address IEP goals
- * Prescribe the types of daily activities, materials, and interactions necessary for the student to meet his or her IEP goals
- * Assess/evaluate the progress of students
- * Set daily, weekly, monthly schedules and assign tasks and duties
- * Delegate tasks to paraeducators and others who carry out the plans made by the teacher
- * Monitor task performance
- * Train and coach paraeducators and others in the skills required to perform assigned tasks
- * Ensure the delivery of student's program, as specified on the IEP
- * Manage team communication, problems, and conflicts in the workplace

- * Locate, arrange, or construct instructional materials
- * Assist students with eating, dressing, personal care, and bathroom use
- * Instruct the special education student individually, in small or large groups, and with peers as specified in the IEP or by professionals on the service delivery team
- * Collect student data to contribute to professional team members regarding student progress toward goals
- * Score tests and certain papers using a key
- * Maintain files or records about students
- * Supervise playgrounds, halls, lunchrooms, busses, and loading zones
- * Provide specific health needs (e.g., suction tracheotomy tubes, as delegated and trained by school nurse)
- * Assist and facilitate appropriate peer interactions
- * Assist students using adaptive equipment or devices
- * Support student behavior and social needs according to plans
- * Participate positively in evaluative or feedback sessions for the improvement of skills
- * Participate in training and coaching sessions to improve skills associated with all duties and tasks assigned
- * Communicate with professionals about their work and students' progress on assigned tasks
- * Move students from one place to another, assisting students with mobility
- * Contribute to the effectiveness of the team by using appropriate communication, problem-solving, and conflict management

Note that paraeducators share responsibilities, rather than having sole responsibility in any area.

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should never be assigned to paraeducators. Certain tasks remain the sole responsibility of the person with the professional license or certificate, with the caveat that some professional responsibilities are shared with the parents and families of students with disabilities. Paraeducators may contribute information to IEP decisions, goals, and objectives; but decisions about health, academic, communication, and behavioral supports are made by teams of professionals in partnership with parents, students, and family members. Table 2 demonstrates that there are no responsibilities that are held solely by the paraeducator.

When Do I Fit It In?

The key is to consider *when* the supervisory responsibilities are performed. Most teachers report that they spend time outside the student-contact day to plan the schedule, to design or prescribe appropriate learning activities for the paraeducator to use with students, and to meet with the paraeducator for on-the-job training, coaching, and feedback. In return for the investment of time outside of the students' school day, the presence of a paraeducator doubles the amount of instructional time available during school hours. Teachers who fail to spend the outside time to do such planning, training, coaching, and feedback with paraeducators report that they are dissatisfied with the performance of the paraeducators with whom they work (French, 1998).

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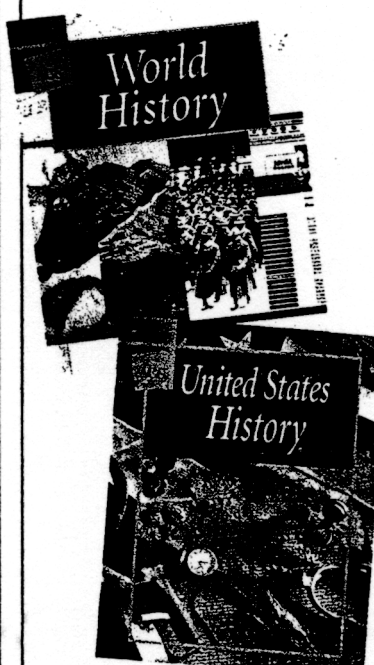
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