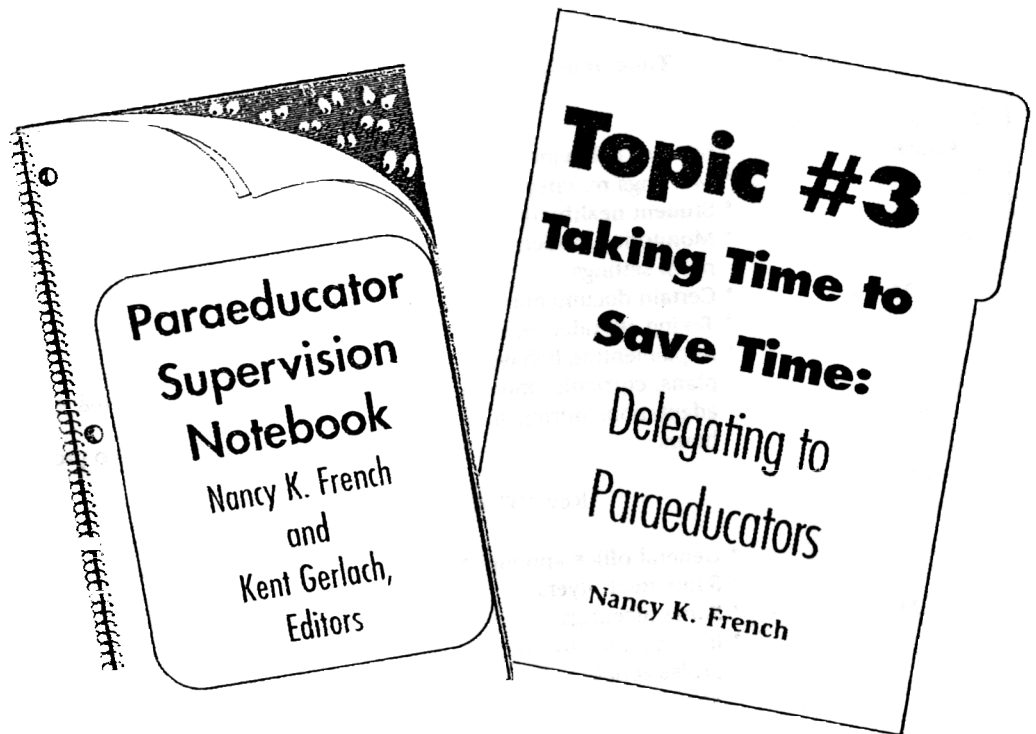


Delegation means getting things done through others who have been trained to handle them. When you delegate to a paraeducator you give that person the authority to get the task done without giving up your responsibility. Maintaining responsibility while delegating is the key to your effectiveness as a school professional. Responsibility means that you take time to save time.



This third installation of the *Paraeducator Supervision Notebook* focuses on practical ways you can make decisions about which classroom tasks to delegate to a paraeducator. Sometimes these decisions can be complex, as several examples in this article show.

Effective Delegators Are Effective Time Managers

Delegation requires effective time management. To manage your time well, you need to consider every task in terms of two factors: how time sensitive it is and the consequences of doing or not doing the task.

First, a task is *time sensitive* if you are being pushed to attend to it or to complete it immediately. It may be your policy to avoid interrupting your instructional time, but if an upset parent comes to your door, you will probably make an exception and respond to the urgency of the situation.

Second, you can measure the *consequences* of a task by how much the task contributes to your overall purposes. Consequences may be major or minor. You decide whether doing a particular job yourself, or doing it now, helps you get what you want in the end.

Do Soon

Considering those two factors, you may then place tasks into one of four quad-

Communication

How do you communicate with a paraeducator about your delegation plans? Unless the plan is communicated in a format that both parties understand in the same way, it is difficult to know that students are achieving their outcomes. Good planning formats are easy to use and user-friendly. If you take the time to create a planning form or format that is handy, simple, but has all the major topics on it, you will improve your communication and minimize the amount of time you spend doing it. How can you be sure the paraeducator knows how to carry out the plan? You may also need to check for understanding about the plan. Asking, "What questions do you have?" is one way to open the opportunity for clarification.

Hints? Focus on results, not necessarily the methods, and allow for mistakes. Thus, you provide guidance without being overbearing. Specify the outcomes you expect, the time-frame, and how much authority you'll support, but realize that the paraeducator may not do things in exactly the same way you would.

Table 1. "D"elegation "D"ecision Matrix for School Professionals

Time →	Time Sensitive	Not Time Sensitive
Consequences ↓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Student behavior crises * Meetings re: crises * Student health crises * Monitoring students in nonclassroom settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Designing individual behavior plans/health plans/curricular modifications/adaptations * Assessment of students' progress * Assessment of students for program eligibility * Long-range planning of instruction * Curriculum development/revision * Building relationships among professionals, paraeducators * Co-planning of behavioral interventions/instruction * Meeting to provide supervision to paraeducators
Major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Certain documentation/paperwork * Taking attendance, lunch counts * Implementing behavior plans, health plans, curricular modifications and adaptations during student contact hours 	
	Key "D" Word: Do Now	Key "D" Word: Do Soon
Minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * General office announcements * Some mail, flyers * Some meetings * Interruptions by students, other professionals * Some parent visits * Grading some daily student work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Some copy work, filing * Some mail * Some phone calls * Some teachers' lounge conversations * Some classroom decorating activities * Some recordkeeping/filing/cleaning up
	Key "D" Words: Delegate/Defer	Key "D" Words: Defer/Discard

rants on the "D"elegation "D"ecision table (French, 1997) (see Table 1). Notice that the tasks located in the upper right-hand quadrant, such as designing individual behavior plans and long-range planning of instruction, are tasks you probably want to do yourself. Tasks in the "Do" quadrant are not appropriately delegated to a paraeducator. You may find that these tasks are difficult to get to because they are not so pressing. Yet each of these tasks makes a major contribution to your overall effectiveness as a teacher. Deferring and delegating these tasks are both bad choices if you want to be effective.

.....
 Consider every task in terms of how time sensitive it is and the consequences of doing or not doing it.

Do Now

Although school professionals may also choose to do the tasks that fall into the upper left-hand quadrant themselves, such as tending to a student's behavior crisis or implementing a curriculum modification, many of these tasks are appropriate for delegation to a paraeducator. School professionals who delegate tasks appropriately take these factors into account along with the skills, preferences, program needs, and the job description of the paraeducator.

Delegate/Defer

The lower left-hand quadrant contains tasks that are appropriately delegated to a paraeducator, such as making general announcements and going on some parent visits, but may also be deferred until more pressing issues are completed.

You may want to keep two in-baskets for the paraeducator, labeled "Deadlines" and "No Deadlines." A paraeducator first finishes the tasks in the dead-

lines basket, but when unexpected "down" times occur, or when he or she has an odd moment, tasks from the "No deadline" basket can be addressed.

Defer/Discard

The lower right-hand quadrant contains tasks that are not particularly pressing nor do they result in consequences of major significance. Those tasks may be delegated to a paraeducator, but for the most part, they are tasks that should simply be discarded—not done by anyone. The key words for the lower right-hand quadrant are "Defer" and "Discard."

Be Kind to Yourself

Have you ever failed to delegate when you might have? Take a moment to ask yourself why you have failed to delegate when you could have? First, jot your thoughts down, then compare them to the reasons listed in Figure 1 (French, 1997). Once you understand your own reasons—such as not being able to tol-

erate less-than-perfect results—you can begin to think about how you can use your time more wisely through delegation.

Figure 1. Some Reasons School Professionals Fail to Delegate

They:

- * Believe they can do the job faster and are unwilling to wait.
- * Recognize that it takes time to train the paraeducator.
- * Lack confidence in the paraeducator's work.
- * Cannot tolerate less than perfect results.
- * Fear being disliked by someone who may expect them to do the task themselves, or by the person to whom they delegate an unpleasant task.
- * Fear that they will lose control.
- * Think it is easier to do it themselves than to tell others how to do it.
- * Are convinced that delegation burdens the other person more than it benefits him or her.
- * Lack the skill to delegate well.
- * Lack the skills to work well with adults.
- * Fear that delegation reveals incompetence or feel insecure when depending on others.
- * Want to account only for themselves and do not want to be indebted to others.
- * Believe that "teaching is for teachers" and are unwilling to give the necessary authority.

But be kind to yourself. Few of us were prepared to supervise other adults (French & Pickett, 1997). You may have never thought of yourself as a manager of other adults. You probably began your career believing that you, and you alone, would have to do it all. You are not alone. For years, other school professionals, like you, have had little preparation to manage a schedule that includes collaborative planning, co-teaching, and supervision of paraeducators despite the fact that paraeducators have been working in schools since the 1950s (Gartner, 1971; Pickett, 1986, 1994).

Six Steps to Delegation

Delegation works best if you take it step by step. Figure 2 provides a list of steps

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 If you decide to delegate the task, break it apart and identify the smaller steps.

that you can follow as you decide what and how to delegate to paraeducators.

1. *Analyze the Task.* This step has three parts. The first is time management. Consider the task in terms of time sensitivity and consequences. If you decide to delegate the task, break it apart and identify the smaller steps. Consider the skills of the person who will perform the task while you do this task analysis. Your breakdown may be more or less detailed depending on the skills of the person with whom you work.

Figure 2. Steps for Delegation to Paraeducators

1. Analyze the Task

- * Assess task in terms of urgency and importance.
- * Decide whether you have to do it or whether it could be performed by someone else.
- * Identify component parts of the larger task.

2. Decide What to Delegate

- * Consider programmatic and student needs, preferences of professionals and paraeducators, and paraeducator skills.
- * Decide what training/coaching the paraeducator needs to perform the tasks.

3. Create the Plan

- * Review all essential components of the task.
- * Clarify appropriate limits of authority.
- * Establish performance standards.
- * Determine how you will direct and monitor.
- * Determine when/how you will train/coach.

4. Select the Right Person

- * Consider interests, preferences, and abilities.
- * Consider the degree of challenge it presents.
- * Balance and rotate unpleasant tasks.

5. Direct the Task

- * Clarify the objectives and purposes.
- * Clarify degree of authority.
- * Clarify the importance/urgency of the task.
- * Communicate effectively.

6. Monitor Performance

- * Create system for ongoing/timely feedback.
- * Act promptly/appropriately on feedback.
- * Insist on achievement of objectives, but not perfection.
- * Encourage independence.
- * Tolerate/manage style differences.
- * Don't short-circuit paraeducator effort by taking tasks back prematurely.
- * Document and reward good performance.

Peer or Paraeducator Delegation?

Mr. Wright, the special education teacher, makes decisions regarding whether he will delegate a particular task to a peer or to a paraeducator. A situation that developed in music class exemplifies this type of decision. Laura, a special education student, had become infatuated with one of her classmates and insisted on standing next to him in the choir. Ms. Myers, the vocal music teacher, had her hands full with the 105 students in her choir and requested help from the special education team. Mr. Wright came to the choir room to assess the situation. Once he understood the problem Laura was having, he decided that he should assign a paraeducator to the situation on a temporary basis (3 weeks) rather than trying to employ the services of a peer. He had to instruct the paraeducator as to how she should help the student stay in her place and attend to the teacher. He also specifically told her how to begin to "fade" her help as soon as Laura began to do what she was asked.

2. *Decide What to Delegate.* Think about the skills as well as the preferences of the people involved, and consider whether it is ethical and legal for the paraprofessional to do the task (Heller, 1997).

3. *Create the Plan.* Good plans are brief, easy to read at a glance, and easy to write. They also contain certain key components. A good plan tells how to do the task, the purposes of the task or lesson, the specific student needs to be

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 Don't forget: Even if a person is very good at an unpleasant duty, that duty should be rotated and shared by others.

addressed, and the criteria for successful completion. It also helps when the paraeducator understands how the task fits into the broader goals and outcomes for the student. For example, Eric, a student with severe and multiple disabilities, has been learning to raise and lower his left arm. If Maizy, the paraeducator who works with him, understands that Eric is preparing for a communication device that depends on this skill, she will be sure that he practices many times a day and that he practices correctly.

4. *Select the Right Person.* This step is useful if more than one paraeducator works with you or if you have other human resources (e.g., volunteers, peer tutors, peer coaches). At Mason High School, for example, a schoolwide peer support program prepares students without disabilities to assist special education students. Sometimes a student may take notes for another student. Sometimes a peer may redirect a student who has difficulty attending to tasks. Sometimes peers can be seen helping a student regain composure during a stressful moment.

The corollary to selecting the right person is using the skills or talents one person has to their best advantage. If a paraeducator is particularly skillful in a particular area, it may make sense to delegate those tasks to the person regularly. For example, Ivory, an experienced paraeducator, is a particularly gifted storyteller. The school professionals with whom she works all recognize and value her accomplishments in storytelling. They frequently find opportunities to take advantage of this unique contribution that Ivory makes to their school.

On the other hand, paraeducators grow and develop as they are assigned challenging work and they learn to do it. Edee was reluctant at first to use the computer in the special education program, but when the team urged her to gradually take on some computer-based recordkeeping, she found that her fear of the technology dissipated as her skills grew.

You may also recognize that some tasks are more unpleasant than others. Even if a person is very good at an

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 You may want to keep two in-baskets for the paraeducator, labeled "Deadlines" and "No Deadlines."

unpleasant duty, that duty should be rotated and shared by others. For example, diaper changing is sometimes necessary. It is a task that no one really likes to do. Yet it is important and often time sensitive. It also has a tremendous effect on the student. The student's privacy is at stake, and his or her dignity must be preserved during such an intimate procedure. You will want to ensure student privacy and dignity while fairly rotating unpleasant tasks. Suzanna, a third-grade teacher at Thatcher Elementary School, works with Vada, a paraeducator assigned to her classroom. Vada is assigned to the third-grade classroom on behalf of Melinda, a child with significant support needs. Melinda needs "freshening" (as they like to call it) every few hours. Sometimes Suzanna takes Melinda to the "private corner" to do the "freshening" while Vada continues working with students on math skills. At most other times, Vada takes Melinda while Suzanna continues with the class. Neither one likes diaper changing, but Suzanna understands the fairness of sharing the task.

5. *Direct the Task.* This step is an extension of good planning. If you have made the purposes of the task or lesson clear and have specified the amount of authority the paraeducator needs to make on-the-spot decisions, directing is easy. For example, Barbara, a paraeducator at Porter Elementary School, was

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 Maintaining responsibility while delegating is the key to your effectiveness as a school professional.

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 Educators who delegate tasks appropriately consider many factors, such as urgency of the task; program needs; and the skills, preferences, and the job description of the paraeducator.

given a plan to work one-to-one with Javier to reinforce the two-digit multiplication his class had been working on but he didn't seem to understand yet. Barbara unexpectedly finds that Javier remembers exactly how to perform the function and is able to complete all the assigned problems in a few minutes. The teacher who supervises Barbara is not in the room, and Barbara has to decide what to do next. Does she have the authority to determine whether she should go on with a more advanced skill, make Javier continue to practice the same skill, or stop and reward him with a pleasant but unrelated activity?

Like the teacher with whom Barbara works, you may not be around when your plans are carried out. Your direction often happens at a distance. So what do you do? You consider the possibilities and direct the paraeducator to make certain kinds of on-the-spot decisions in certain situations. Your communication skills are important here.

6. *Monitor Performance.* Monitoring is essential to ensure that all is going well. Of course, the amount and intensity of monitoring depend on the history of the working relationship. The longer you have known the paraeducator and the more skillful that person is, the less direct monitoring you'll do. Shorter histories or fewer skills mean that more intensive, direct observation is neces-

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 Paraeducators grow and develop as they are assigned challenging work and they learn to do it.

sary. Managing your time well means that you have built time into your schedule for monitoring and feedback to paraeducators. The general rule of thumb in monitoring is to focus on the objectives, rather than the perfect execution of prescribed actions. At times, however, *precise execution of a technique is necessary.* Identifying such times is easier when precision and perfection are not constant demands.

Although monitoring the paraeducator's work is necessary for ethical practice, it is not necessary to hover over the paraeducator during every instructional episode (Heller, 1997). In fact, this would be a waste of everybody's time. In addition, many paraeducators lose self-confidence if you monitor too closely. Communication style and work style differences sometimes result in tasks being performed differently from the way the planner had envisioned. The professional who delegates tasks should clearly differentiate between idiosyncrasies of style and incorrect performance of a task.

Sometimes professionals who are concerned with perfection err by taking a task from a paraeducator too soon. It is a mistake to short-circuit paraeducator effort before the paraeducator has a chance to improve his or her skills. If you've chosen the right person and are clear about your expectations, then remind yourself to be patient enough to allow the paraeducator to reach your standards. In the end, this will save time because the paraeducator will be able to do the task alone.

Finally, you will want to document and reward good performance. Everyone enjoys a bit of praise now and then, but the issue of documenting and rewarding good performance goes beyond the level of "niceness." Documentation of performance should be specific to the objectives of the task and the specifications of the plan. Even when paraeducator performance is not yet perfect, recognizing improvement gives the motivation to continue to grow and improve.

Final Thoughts

Delegation is a time-taker and a time-saver. It takes organization, time, and

skill to delegate well. The investment of time and energy into effective delegation pays off on a day-to-day basis, however, because it frees you to do the things that only a professional can and should do. Your effectiveness grows as your delegation skills grow. Your efficiency at delegation allows you to be the highly ethical, effective professional you want to be.

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