CHAPTER

10 Directing Paraprofessional Work

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As a general or special educator there is no doubt that you will encounter paraprofessionals in the classrooms where you serve students with and without disabilities. Although paraprofessionals have been working in American schools for decades, particularly within remedial and special education programs, their presence in general education classrooms has increased dramatically over the past decade in response to a variety of factors. Some of these factors include shortages of certified educators, increasing requests for support services, and the increasing severity of needs presented by students with disabilities being included in general education classrooms. After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- Define the similarities and differences between teachers and paraprofessionals
- Describe different ways in which paraprofessionals can be effectively utilized in general education settings
- Suggest specific strategies that paraprofessionals can be taught to use to improve the quality of inclusive education
- Describe ways in which teachers can effectively monitor and provide feedback to paraprofessionals

The increase in paraprofessional support for students with disabilities and their changing roles within general education classrooms represents a significant change for many general educators who have been accustomed to working in relative isolation as the only adult in the classroom. It is also a change for special educators who may be used to having paraprofessionals work alongside them in special classes or resource rooms. Yet, for the most part, personnel preparation of both general and special educators at our colleges and universities has not accounted for this very significant change in service delivery that has accompanied the expansion of inclusive opportunities for students with severe disabilities (French & Pickett, 1997).

Given the scope and volume of new information, ideas, and skills that educators are asked to learn and apply, those related to directing the work of paraprofessionals often have taken a back seat. Only recently has there been an increased emphasis on this topic (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Salzberg & Morgan, 1995; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). In this chapter we begin by offering a brief overview explaining why it is important for educators to assume a leadership role to direct the work of paraprofessionals. Next, the majority of the chapter is devoted to describing four foundational aspects of directing the work of paraprofessionals: (1) welcoming and acknowledging the work of paraprofessionals, (2) orienting paraprofessionals to their roles in the school, classroom, and with assigned students; (3) planning for paraprofessionals, and (4) communicating with and providing feedback to paraprofessionals. Next we offer suggestions of where to look for online resources about paraprofessionals. The chapter concludes by considering criteria to determine whether your efforts to direct the work of paraprofessionals have been successful.

Why Is It Important to Learn about Directing the Work of Paraprofessionals?

The overarching reasons are quite straightforward. First, as a certified educator it is your professional responsibility to provide leadership in your classroom, which includes directing the work of paraprofessionals who will be working with the students for whom you share accountability. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 allow for paraprofessionals to assist in the provision of special education and related services, but require that they be appropriately trained and supervised. Second, what you do (or don't do) to direct the work of paraprofessionals *will* have an impact on your students with and without disabilities. Consider the following information from the professional literature about the utilization of paraprofessionals in inclusive schools.

When educators are asked what supports they need to successfully include a student with a severe disability in a general education classroom, invariably access to paraprofessional supports is high on the list (Werts, Wolery, Snyder, Caldwell, & Salisbury, 1996). In many schools, having a one-on-one paraprofessional accompany a student with a severe disability to class has become the primary mechanism to operationalize inclusive education (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 1999). Paraprofessionals in inclusive classrooms are playing an increasingly prominent role in providing instruction for students with severe disabilities (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002; Minondo, Meyer, & Xin, 2001).

Recent literature has challenged the heavy reliance on the use of one-on-one paraprofessionals because it relegates to the least qualified staff the tasks of making decisions and implementing instruction for students with the most complex needs (Brown, Farrington, Ziegler, Knight, & Ross, 1999). Ironically, despite the proliferation of paraprofessional supports and a shift in their roles toward instruction, two comprehensive reviews of the literature indicate that there is no body of research data attesting to the efficacy of providing paraprofessional supports (Jones & Bender, 1993; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001).

Although many paraprofessionals obviously perform vital functions in schools and do valued work, it remains questionable whether what they *should* be doing is different than what they have been *asked* to do. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1999) made their position on this issue clear when they stated, "The intent of using paraprofessionals is to supplement, not supplant, the work of the teacher/service provider" (p. 37). It is vital to remember that *you* are the trained professional educator. It is your responsibility to be the teacher of all the students in your classroom. Therefore, with your team, you should closely scrutinize the tasks you are asking paraprofessionals to perform to ensure that they are supplementing, not supplanting, roles that are appropriately those of qualified educators, special educators, or related services providers. Once appropriate roles are identified, paraprofessionals must be appropriately trained to carry out their roles given professionally prepared plans, sufficiently supported and supervised.

When paraprofessionals are left to fend for themselves without strong teacher leadership, as the literature suggests they frequently are, it can result in detrimental albeit unintended effects (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997; Marks, Shrader, & Levine, 1999; Young, Simpson, Myles, & Kamps, 1997). Paraprofessional supports that are not well designed can interfere with peer relationships, gender identity, and appropriate personal control. Inappropriate or excessive reliance on paraprofessionals can isolate the student within the classroom, establish insular paraprofessional-student relationships, and create unhealthy dependencies. Most notably, when a paraprofessional's role is allowed to become too prominent or exclusive it can interfere with educators getting directly involved with their students who have disabilities, which in turn can limit a student's access to competent instruction (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2001). Taken together, the impact of ill-conceived paraprofessional supports potentially can have a detrimental impact on a host of academic, functional, social, and personal student outcomes. The good news is that as a professional educator you can play a critical role in designing paraprofessional supports in such a manner that ensures that all the students in your classroom, including those with severe disabilities, are included meaningfully, socially and instructionally, and supported in appropriate ways. Your efforts can contribute to improving the capacity of paraprofessionals to be of assistance in the classroom while simultaneously contributing to their productivity and job satisfaction.

Directing the Work of Paraprofessionals

The following four sections are offered to assist general and special educators engage in leadership activities to direct the work of paraprofessionals. The categories of content reflected in these four sections—(1) welcoming and acknowledging paraprofessionals, (2) orienting paraprofessionals, (3) planning for paraprofessionals, and (4) communicating

with and providing feedback to paraprofessionals—are based on a set of training materials titled, *Teacher Leadership: Working with Paraeducators* (Giangreco, 2001). These training materials, designed for general and special educators, are specifically geared toward directing the work of paraprofessionals in inclusive classrooms. They emphasize the roles of paraprofessionals *assisting* in the provision of special education given professionally prepared plans and under the direction and supervision of a qualified educator. These materials include some overlapping content with other contemporary sources. For example, Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, and Stahl (2001) recently studied knowledge and skill competencies for teachers directing the work of paraprofessionals across seven areas:

- Communication with paraprofessionals
- Planning and scheduling
- Instructional support
- Modeling for paraprofessionals
- Public relations
- Training
- Management of paraprofessionals

Responses from 569 administrators, educators, and paraprofessionals indicated that competencies within these seven categories were considered important, but that they were not demonstrated at a level commensurate with their reported importance. Teachers who did not demonstrate these important competencies cited lack of preservice preparation or professional staff development opportunities as primary reasons (Wallace et al., 2001). This finding is consistent with an earlier study by French (1998b) that indicated some teachers were reluctant to supervise paraprofessionals and reported that they were not trained to do so.

Perhaps more than any single leadership attribute of an effective professional is the ability to critically self-assess and utilize the insights gained through such reflection to take constructive actions toward personal and programmatic improvement. Toward that end, the *Self-Assessment Preview* (Giangreco, 2001) (see Figure 10.1, pp. 190–191), consisting of a 12-item rubric, provides a simple format for educators to reflect upon some of their own leadership activities in directing the work of paraprofessionals. Before reading the next four subsections, please take a few minutes to consider your own status in reference to the 12 items in the *Self-Assessment Preview*.

Welcoming and Acknowledging Paraprofessionals

As educators, part of our role is to create welcoming environments that are conducive to learning, both for students and adults who are part of the classroom community. You can begin to foster a sense of welcome through simple acts of kindness. Put the paraprofessional's name on the door with yours. Be certain the paraprofessional has a place of his or her own in the classroom (e.g., desk, table). You might even put a coffee cup or a plant on this desk at the beginning of the year. Not only can such gestures go a long way toward establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with the paraprofessional, they can serve as models of genuine thoughtfulness that will be observed by your students.

An initial step to acknowledge the important role of the paraprofessional is to establish routines that communicate to the students that the teachers and paraprofessionals are operating together to support the work of the classroom. For example, at the beginning and end of the day have the paraprofessional join you in greeting students and be included in some aspect of the daily classroom meeting or participate in an end of class routine.

Another way to acknowledge the work, skills, and experiences of the paraprofessional is to create formal or informal opportunities to provide suggestions and input. For example, when planning a new unit you might say, "Here are the goals of this unit. Here are Sarah's goals [a student with severe disabilities] within this unit. Do you have any thoughts about her participation?" Even though it will be the responsibility of the general and special educators to plan the curriculum, instruction, and data collection, often paraprofessionals will bring insights and ideas that can contribute to improving program quality.

Remember to say "Thank you" regularly. Be specific in your thanks so that paraprofessionals can easily see the value of their work and its connection to the overall program. For example, "Thank you for doing hall duty and photocopying today; it allowed me to spend extra time helping Sam with his reading," or "I appreciate how respectful you are when you take care of John's personal needs. It is so important to provide those supports with the level of dignity John deserves. I think he really appreciates it—I know I do." Modeling acknowledgment and value for the full range of instructional and noninstructional classroom tasks, big and small, can help create a classroom culture where acknowledgment is the norm. As a result, you might be surprised at how much of that is observed, and hopefully applied, by your students!

Although symbolic forms of welcome and acknowledgment are appreciated by many paraprofessionals, these gestures are received more favorably when the paraprofessionals' roles are clarified and appropriate, they are adequately oriented to their jobs, and professionals take the time to provide initial and ongoing training (Giangreco et al., 2001). The following sections discuss these and others topics in more detail.

Orienting Paraprofessionals

Part of teacher leadership involves orienting paraprofessionals to the school, the classroom, and the students with whom they will be working (Doyle & Lee, 1997). Recent research suggests that too many paraprofessionals are inadequately oriented and report feeling "thrown into things" (Giangreco et al., 2001, p. 492). Providing multifaceted orientation sends a message of value to paraprofessionals that their work is important. It is also a logical first step toward establishing collaborative relationships with paraprofessionals. The term *orientation* is used broadly in this context to include both initial orientation to the school and classroom (e.g., routines, policies) as well as orientation to the students the paraprofessional will assist in supporting. This includes initial and ongoing training and role clarification.

School and classroom. Start by introducing the paraprofessional to other members of the school community (e.g., office personnel, teachers, school nurse, librarian, other paraprofessionals, maintenance personnel). This could be done in conjunction with a tour of the school building, highlighting places that you or your students use frequently (e.g., library,

FIGURE 10.1   Self-Assessment Preview.

Name:	Job Title:	Years of Experience:
Date:	Course Instructor:	Course Site:

PURPOSE: This Self-Assessment Preview is designed to assist course participants in considering their own work with paraeducators at the outset of the mini-course titled "Teacher Leadership: Working with Paraeducators." The self-assessment helps identify areas of strength and need. It is related directly to course content and practicum activities. At the completion of the mini-course, participants will be asked to self-assess again to reflect on changes that may have occurred as a result of course participation.

DIRECTIONS: For each item circle the number that most closely reflects your status at this time. Respond based on what you do personally. If you work with more than one paraeducator, provide a response considering your overall situation.

#	Content	I don't do this, and I don't know enough about it.		I know it's important, but I just don't get to it.		I'm doing it, but not enough.		I'm doing it and feel it's going well.	
1	Paraeducators with whom I work are welcomed in class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2	Paraeducators with whom I work are well oriented to the school (e.g., places, people, policies, philosophy, practices, procedures).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
3	Paraeducators with whom I work are well oriented to the classroom (e.g., routines, practices, instructional programs).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
4	Paraeducators with whom I work are well oriented to the students with whom they work (e.g., knowledgeable about: IEP goals, participation in general education curriculum, supports needed, aspects of disability that affect learning, motivations, interests).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

#	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
5	The roles of the paraeducators with whom I work are explicitly stated and match their knowledge and skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
6	My role and the roles of the other professional staff in relation to the paraeducators are clear and well understood by all team members.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
7	Paraeducators with whom I work have a daily written schedule of duties to follow.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
8	Paraeducators with whom I work have written plans to follow when implementing teacher-planned instruction and other duties.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	Paraeducators with whom I work receive initial and ongoing training to carry out their assigned duties.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
10	Paraeducators with whom I work have mechanisms to communicate with me on an ongoing basis.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
11	Paraeducators with whom I work receive ongoing feedback on their job performance, both formally and informally.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
12	Paraeducators with whom I work have a thorough understanding of appropriate confidentiality practices and school policies on the topic.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

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faculty room, lunchroom, gymnasium). Be certain that the paraprofessional is familiar with any associated policies (e.g., photocopying, media/technology lab, tutoring center). Given the expanding use of technology, it is important to establish clear expectations regarding the use of the Internet and e-mail during school hours.

In the classroom, share things as basic as showing the paraprofessional where the classroom supplies are kept. Provide an orientation regarding the instructional technology that is used in the classroom, paying particular attention to the hardware and software that are used frequently. This time together may highlight additional training needs. Review classroom routines and expectations, classroom management, class rules, and code of conduct for the students. Provide the paraprofessional with the school handbook of schoolwide policies and procedures.

Members of the educational team, including the paraprofessional, will have access to sensitive and confidential information about students (e.g., health information, educational goals, progress reports, family information). So be certain to review the school policy on confidentiality as it applies to students with and without disabilities. Check for understanding by posing several situations for the two of you to discuss using the following questions:

1. Is it okay for several professionals to discuss a student's educational program while they are in the break room?
2. Is it okay for a paraprofessional to discuss a student's educational program with a parent at the grocery store?
3. Do all school personnel have access to student files?
4. Are confidentiality rules applied differently to written versus spoken information?
5. Is it a breech of confidentiality to discuss a student's family situation while in the community?

Maintaining confidentiality is an important aspect of building trusting partnerships with families. Once that trust is compromised, the partnership and subsequent team functioning can be adversely affected. Stress the importance of confidentiality and share the following tips with the paraprofessional:

1. Never discuss a student's educational plans in public places (e.g., faculty room, playground, hallway, community park, grocery store).
2. When meeting to discuss a student's educational plan, only discuss information that is directly relevant to the issues at hand.
3. If someone approaches you and begins to breech the confidentiality of a student provide a kind but clear response. For example, "I'm not on that student's educational team, so I don't think it is appropriate for me to be involved in discussing his educational program."
4. When you or the paraprofessional are no longer on the student's team, you must continue to maintain confidentiality about any the information that you have learned about the student and/or family.
5. When in doubt, put yourself in the shoes of the parents or student and ask yourself: "Would it be okay for people to be talking about me or my family in this manner, in this same location, and for the same purposes?"

As the classroom teacher you have an opportunity to model professionalism and respect for students and their families by adhering to high standards of confidentiality. You may want to utilize other resources designed to assist paraprofessionals in understanding the issues, importance, and intricacies of confidentiality (Doyle, 2002; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).

Students the paraprofessional will support. At the heart of the paraprofessional's orientation is learning about students. This means gaining some general knowledge about the population of students to be served as well as information specifically about those students with whom the paraprofessional will be working. This calls for initial and ongoing training that is both generic and student-specific.

Initial generic training may include taking a course or a series of staff development workshops to learn essential information about being a paraprofessional. For example, CichoskiKelly, Backus, Giangreco, and Sherman-Tucker (2000) developed training materials designed to provide entry-level information to prepare paraprofessionals to assist in the provision of special education within inclusive classrooms. These training materials are designed to be taught in six three-hour sessions covering the following topics:

Unit 1: Collaborative Teamwork
Unit 2: Inclusive Education
Unit 3: Families and Cultural Sensitivity
Unit 4: Characteristics of Children and Youth with Various Disabilities
Unit 5: Roles and Responsibilities of Paraeducators and Other Team Members
Unit 6: Paraeducators Implementing Teacher-Planned Instruction

Similarly, the Institute on Community Integration (1999) at the University of Minnesota has developed training materials and approaches for paraprofessionals, as have others (French, 1998a; Parsons & Reid, 1999; Salzberg, Morgan, Gassman, Pickett, & Merrill, 1993; Steckelberg & Vasa, 1998). All training tools have their pros and cons. Some are specifically geared toward inclusive settings, while others were designed for use across general and special class settings. Each has its own emphasis in terms of what is considered important and appropriate. Therefore, as a teacher leader who is considering using existing training materials, be sure to review them closely to ensure that you are selecting materials that are consistent with your school and classroom philosophy, needs, and practices.

It is preferable, though still uncommon, for paraprofessionals to receive this sort of initial, generic training prior to beginning their employment. Since most paraprofessionals typically are offered training after they begin working, it is vital to provide it as soon as possible. It can go a long way toward demonstrating respect for paraprofessionals to offer the training during their scheduled work hours or to pay them for time they spend outside their contracted work day.

After initial entry-level training is completed, it is part of your job to develop a training plan with the paraprofessional to identify future courses, workshops, or other training opportunities that will support their professional development and meet needs identified in the classroom. For example, Backus and CichoskiKelly (2001) developed training materials to assist paraprofessionals in supporting students with challenging behaviors (see Box

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BOX **10.1**

Paraprofessional Training to Support a Student with Challenging Behaviors in a High School

John has been a paraprofessional for one year at Kennedy High School. During his first year he took a six-week entry-level paraprofessional training course that covered a variety of units (e.g., collaborative teamwork, inclusive education, characteristics of students with disabilities, implementing teacher-planned instruction). Although this generic training was helpful, John found himself being asked to support students with severe disabilities who also exhibited challenging behaviors. It was clear to him that he needed more training in this area, both in general and specifically related to the students he was supporting. At a meeting he and Ms. Brennan, his special educator colleague, planned out a series of training activities. From a generic perspective the plan called for John to attend a four-session mini-course designed for paraprofessionals who were supporting students with challenging behaviors. This mini-course would extend what he learned in the entry-level course and would address such considerations as: (a) understanding student behavior (e.g., communicative intent of behaviors), (b) gathering information about challenging behaviors, (c) preventing challenging behaviors and teaching replacement behaviors, and (d) responding to challenging behaviors. This mini-course included a series of practicum requirements that would give John an opportunity to apply what he was learning under Ms. Brennan's supervision. From a student-specific perspective, John was especially concerned about a series of behaviors that were regularly exhibited by Terry, a 16-year-old with severe disabilities. When walking through halls between class changes, Terry would often grab or pinch other students. In health class, Terry would frequently make loud vocalizations that led to his removal from the class. Finally, in a series of other classes (e.g., science, English, social studies), if Terry was asked to sit for more than five minutes he would start body rocking. If left unchecked for more than a couple of minutes, this often escalated to head banging on nearby people or furniture. The combination of these behaviors was interfering with Terry's school experience, academically, functionally, and socially. In an effort to understand Terry's behaviors, Ms. Brennan taught John how to collect data that was used to help conduct an A-B-C (antecedent-behavior-consequence) analysis in each of the settings where Terry was exhibiting challenging behaviors. The data and the input of other team members were used to develop a positive behavior support plan for Terry. Ms. Brennan then provided ongoing training for John on how to implement Terry's plan. She observed John and Terry together at least weekly to give John feedback on his implementation and ongoing data collection. Terry's behaviors haven't been eliminated, but they have improved noticeably, and John is feeling good about his paraprofessional role supporting Terry's behavior needs in positive ways.

10.1). These materials are designed to be used after paraprofessionals have completed generic entry-level training.

The challenge with any generic training materials for paraprofessionals is that while they can offer valuable information, they are not specific to the students with whom the paraprofessional will be working. Therefore, generic forms of staff development must be augmented with training that is student-specific. The level of specificity may range from training on a commercial reading program being used in the classroom to learning about instructional strategies that are unique to an individual student.

Orientation and training pertaining to individual students includes information such as student characteristics (e.g., physical, sensory, cognitive), interests, and needs. The paraprofessional should become familiar with the student's communication skills, educational goals, special equipment, and support needs and with instructional strategies that are known to be effective with the student. For students with severe disabilities the IEP (Individual Education Program) is usually a primary source of such information. Unfortunately, not all IEPs are written with sufficient specificity to be helpful to paraprofessionals. Sometimes IEPs are quite long and contain educational or medical jargon that is unknown to the paraprofessional. Therefore, while providing paraprofessionals access to the information contained in the IEP, it may be more helpful to provide it in a more friendly and concise format, such as a Program-at-a-Glance (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1998). This is a one- or two-page summary that includes vital information about a student's goals and supports and can be readily adapted to include whatever information the team finds most helpful. You might also have a meeting and ask the parents or other faculty members to supply some student-specific information. Consider developing a personal photo-essay booklet about the student's interests, friends, family, characteristics, supports, and educational goals. The photo-essay booklet can be shared by the student with the new paraprofessional or others (Doyle, 2000). This highly personalized and interactive approach can be an excellent first step in having the paraprofessional learn about the student and assist in developing a positive student–paraprofessional rapport.

Role clarification is a critical aspect of orientation. This includes both identifying appropriate roles for paraprofessionals and differentiating between the paraprofessional's roles and yours. For example, paraprofessionals are increasingly involved in providing instruction to students with disabilities. There is general consensus in the field that any such instruction provided by paraprofessionals should be based on professionally prepared plans given appropriate training and supervision. That is nice rhetoric, but too often it does not match reality. This highlights some important areas of differentiation between the roles of educators and paraprofessionals. It is the responsibility of the teacher and special educator to assess students' educational needs and progress; make decisions about curriculum; develop lesson plans that reflect individually determined adaptations, instructional methods, and data collection systems; and be the primary liaison with the family. These are responsibilities that many paraprofessionals are not trained in or qualified to undertake. In cases where they are qualified (e.g., a certified teacher hired in a paraprofessional role), they are not compensated to do teacher-level work and as a paraprofessional are not accountable for the educational program in the same way you are as an educator.

When considering the paraprofessional's role in implementing teacher-planned instruction, it can be helpful to establish parameters around the teaching of new concepts and skills versus reviewing or practicing concepts and skills that have already been introduced. For example, many teachers find it beneficial to introduce new concepts and skills themselves before asking a paraprofessional to provide ongoing teaching and practice with the student. This teacher-first approach allows an opportunity for the educator to model instructional approaches for the paraprofessional and gain firsthand assessment information that will be used to adjust future lessons.

When the paraprofessional begins his or her instructional involvement, the teacher's instructional role should continue (see Box 10.2, p. 196). Be sure to schedule times when

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BOX **10.2**

Helping a Paraprofessional Understand Individualized Curriculum in an Elementary Classroom

Sandy, a paraprofessional in Ms. Kegan's second-grade classroom, has been accustomed to supporting a few students with mild disabilities as well as their classmates without disability labels who needed some extra help in reading, spelling, writing, and math. Sandy expressed concerns that she felt unprepared for an incoming student, Joey, who has severe disabilities. According to his first-grade teacher and parents, Joey likes active environments but tires easily. He enjoys music, being around other kids, and playing with his dog. Joey uses a wheelchair for mobility and has limited use of legs, arms, and hands. Although Joey communicates with vocalizations and facial expressions, he currently does not have a consistent way to express himself more formally. Joey functions at a severe level of intellectual impairment, but no one wants such labeling to limit his possibilities. As his mom said, "Given his physical and communication challenges, we really don't know for sure how much he is understanding. Because of this we think he should have access to all the same things as other kids his age." Sandy doesn't understand what she will be expected to help him learn because it sounds to her like he has different learning needs than the rest of the class. To address Sandy's concerns, Ms. Kegan arranged a meeting with Sandy, Ms. Phillips (the special educator), and Joey's parents. Ms. Kegan and Ms. Phillips facilitated a team discussion to review Joey's IEP goals and compare them to the typical class activities (e.g., morning circle, journal writing, reading group, math group). For each curriculum area or activity period they reached consensus about whether Joey would pursue the same learning outcomes as his peers, different learning outcomes within the same curriculum, or different learning outcomes from different curriculum areas than those being pursued by his classmates. By the end of the meeting they had decided what Joey would be trying to learn during different parts of the day. For example, during art class he would have the same learning outcomes as his classmates, but would need assistance and adaptations to participate. During morning circle the initial focus would be on greeting others and answering "Yes/No" questions using eye gaze (both IEP goals). During journal writing he would be trying to develop a consistent response mode using an adapted switch to operate a page-turning device and single-response software on a computer. During science, he would be part of a four-student group. His goals within those activities would not be geared toward science; rather the science activities would be used as a vehicle for him to practice his "Yes/No" responding, making choices when presented with options, and practicing his switch use (to help record work being completed by the team). By clarifying the learning expectations for Joey his parents felt comfortable that the IEP goals were being addressed, and the paraprofessional had a way to think about her instructional role with Joey that made sense to her.

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you are providing instruction for the student with a disability in large groups, small groups, and individually. This way you can ensure that you are the teacher for all of the students in your classroom and are highly knowledgeable about each of your students. In doing so you can avoid the trap of establishing a double standard whereby students with disabilities receive most of their instruction from paraprofessionals while those without disabilities have more regular access to certified educators. Equally as important, recent research has suggested that the level of teacher engagement, which is critical to successful inclusive edu-

cation, can be significantly affected by the manner in which paraprofessional supports are utilized (Giangreco et al., 2001).

In addition to assisting in the implementation of teacher-planned instruction, paraprofessionals can also provide vital supports by supervising students (e.g., playground, cafeteria), engaging in clerical and general duties, providing social/behavior supports, and providing personal care needs to students (e.g., eating support, dressing, personal hygiene). By engaging in this range of roles, paraprofessionals assist students directly and create opportunities for general and special educators to work directly with students. That is why it is key to acknowledge the value of the noninstructional tasks as well as the instructional tasks. Lastly, part of your leadership role with paraprofessionals is to establish congruence between the paraprofessional's expectations, roles, training, support, and supervision.

Planning for Paraprofessionals

One of the keys to good teaching is good planning. Start with something as simple as providing the paraprofessional with a daily and weekly schedule of activities indicating basic information (e.g., what, when, who, where). The paraprofessional's schedule should be linked to the classroom schedule. For example, it should be clear to the paraprofessional what to do when you are teaching a whole-class lesson. Sometimes paraprofessional support to individual students is not required during those times when the teacher is interacting with all students or when peers might reasonably provide natural supports. When paraprofessionals are unsure what to do during such times of the day, they may unnecessarily be in close proximity to students with disabilities and inadvertently interfere with their participation. At such times you may plan some alternative tasks for paraprofessionals (e.g., materials preparation) or they may need to simply listen to the lesson so that they are in a better position to provide support to students during follow-up small group or individual activities.

Typically educators develop plans for their own use. This allows most educators to have written plans that are brief and provide set of reminders about a lesson's purpose, materials, sequence, and main points. A plan that may work well for experienced educators to use for themselves may not provide the level of specificity required for another person, such as a paraprofessional or substitute, to implement the plan. This is why it is so important to develop plans that provide the content and level of information required for paraprofessionals to effectively carry out a plan devised by a general or special educator.

Since general and special educators utilize a wide range and combination of teaching philosophies and strategies, our purpose here is not to suggest any one particular instructional approach over another. Rather, given whatever approach you use, we encourage you to address some generic planning issues for paraprofessionals. Additionally, your own organizational and management style, as well as the experience and previous training of the paraprofessional, will have an impact on the level of specificity your plans for paraprofessionals include. Consider the following questions:

1. How much information does the paraprofessional need to implement the teacher-planned lesson or activity?
2. What is the essential information?

3. What makes the most sense?
4. How can planned information be provided in ways that do not create unnecessary paperwork?

When considering these questions, paraprofessionals will need to know about, understand, and apply this basic set of components of an instructional plan:

- Purpose of the lesson/activity
- Objectives within the lesson/activity that may differ by student
- Materials needed for the lesson/activity
- How to arrange the learning environment (e.g., how students are positioned)
- How to get and sustain student attention
- How to introduce the lesson/activity (e.g., explanation, demonstration)
- How to encourage student participation
- How to relate the lesson/activity to previous learning
- What desired responses look or sound like (e.g., operational definitions)
- How and what feedback to provide when students give desired responses
- What to do when students are nonresponsive
- What to do when students give incorrect responses
- What data to collect and how it should be recorded
- How to end the lesson/activity
- What to do if the plan does not seem to be working

In addition to instructional plans for lessons and activities, paraprofessionals will also need plans for noninstructional aspects of their work. For example, some students with severe disabilities require knowledge of specialized support procedures or personal care supports such as how they are tube fed, properly positioned in their wheelchair, or transferred between specialized equipment. Some of these noninstructional tasks lend themselves well to being presented through a series of photographs in addition to brief written instructions.

Whether your plan for a paraprofessional is instructional or noninstructional, merely handing over a paper plan (even one with photos) is not enough. Part of your teacher leadership should include how and when you will review your plans with the paraprofessional, provide demonstration, observe the paraprofessional's implementation, review collected data, provide feedback, and provide opportunities for the paraprofessional to offer input to plan adjustments. Although it may seem like a lot of paperwork, planning of this sort can help you think through important aspects of a student's program, provide a starting point to direct the work of the paraprofessional, and have utility when substitute teachers or paraprofessionals are in the classroom. Look for formats that work for you!

Communicating with and Providing Feedback to Paraprofessionals

An ongoing and key aspect of teacher leadership with paraprofessionals is to communicate with them effectively and provide constructive feedback (Doyle, 2002). As the general or special educator, you are responsible for the immediate supervision of the paraprofessional,

even though formal evaluation may be the responsibility of an administrator. Develop a system and schedule to provide the paraprofessional with feedback on instructional and noninstructional responsibilities based on your direct observations of his or her work. This system and schedule should be one that works for you and your team and results in action planning for continuous program improvement.

Communicating your feedback to paraprofessionals is something most educators are not trained to do and may even find uncomfortable. Lee (1999) highlights six important aspects of effective communication that can facilitate teacher leadership as you develop and extend your collaborative working relationships with paraprofessionals: (1) developing expectations, (2) preparing ahead, (3) understanding perspectives, (4) asking questions, (5) listening, and (6) speaking clearly. As you read through the following subsections you will notice the interrelationships among these various aspects of communication. These connections point out the reciprocal nature of communication and highlight its power to enhance our work with students and one another.

Developing expectations. First, as a team, create mechanisms for communication. Decide when, where, and how often you will engage in formal communication (e.g., team meetings, daily check-in, team logbook) and identify informal opportunities for communication. Establish ground rules and expectations for formal meetings (e.g., read reports in advance, follow an agenda, rotate roles, maintain timelines, speak to each other respectfully, ensure opportunities for all members to participate, keep records of team discussions and decisions).

It is also advisable to establish a "chain of command" so that the paraprofessional knows who to approach when concerns arise. For example, if an issue arises in the cafeteria or library, who should the paraprofessional go to first? Developing expectations pertaining to communication and teamwork are foundational to your leadership role with paraprofessionals.

Preparing ahead. Preparing ahead refers to both class work (e.g., lessons, activities, supports) as well as formal communication (e.g., team meetings). Through your own example, model for the paraprofessional the value and importance of preparation. Explain that lack of preparation wastes valuable instructional time for students as well as for colleagues. In terms of class work prepare your plan, materials, equipment, and physical setup. Be sure you and the paraprofessional are familiar with the lesson or activity in advance.

In preparation for meetings, be certain that team members are aware of the date, time, and location of the meeting. Make sure that members are aware of agenda items in advance so they can arrive prepared and that the necessary tools are available to facilitate the meeting (e.g., markers, chart paper, laptop computer, snacks). Preparation is a sign of mutual respect among members of a team.

Understanding perspectives. It is not only common for individuals to bring different perspectives to the team, it is desirable. Let the paraprofessional know that different perspectives are welcomed. As a team, seek to understand each other's perspectives—even if you do not always agree with one another. This will require team members to express themselves, listen, accept different communication styles, be observant, defer judgment, and

occasionally be silent. Be certain to adopt or develop constructive approaches to resolve differences (e.g., applying a specific problem-solving approach).

Asking questions.   One of the best ways to understand the perspectives of others is to ask questions. Asking questions actively demonstrates an interest in understanding and conveys open-mindedness. Posing questions rather than immediately offering a counter perspective can assist teams in generating creative ideas that join together two or more divergent perspectives. As Lee (1999) stated, "People feel empowered when others show their interest by asking questions." So ask questions, and encourage the paraprofessional to ask questions about curriculum, instruction, student characteristics, and classroom functioning.

Listening.   As a teacher leader you probably have a lot to say, but do not underestimate the power of listening. Active listening calls for concentration and attentiveness, and requires that you seek to understand what the paraprofessional is saying before you think about what your response might be; it is more difficult than it sounds. This means that as a listener you will not be conjuring up a response until after you are certain that you understand what the paraprofessional has said and he has finished speaking. Good listeners may ask for clarification or try to extend their understanding by asking questions like, "I'm not certain that I understood what you meant. Can you say it another way?" Or "Will you tell me more about that idea?" Or "Can you give me a few examples?" When we listen well we are more likely to understand one another's perspectives and ideas. Listening affords each of us with an opportunity to grow and learn. So be a listener and encourage listening.

Speaking clearly.   As the educator it is your responsibility to ensure that effective communication has occurred with the paraprofessional. This means being as explicit and unambiguous as possible about what you are communicating. It may mean communicating using multiple modes (e.g., oral and written). Do not expect that your meaning will always be received in the manner in which you intended. What may seem obvious to you may not be so clear to the paraprofessional, or to any other team member for that matter. In an effort to ensure that you have delivered your communication clearly, ask for feedback that your message was understood. Be aware of your use of jargon and acronyms that may be unfamiliar to the paraprofessional. When we speak clearly we enhance the effectiveness of our communication and increase the likelihood that our message will be understood. Lee (1999) summarized many of the communication issues discussed in this chapter as "Ten Tips for Collaborating Effectively with Paraprofessionals" (see Table 10.1).

Finding Paraprofessional Resources Online

New information about paraprofessional support of students with disabilities in general education classrooms is growing constantly. If you are using a search engine on the Internet such as Altavista (http://www.altavista.com) or Google (http://www.google.com) to locate information about paraprofessionals, be aware of the differing terminology used around the country. Search under a variety of terms or phrases such as *paraprofessional, paraeducator,*

TABLE 10.1   Ten Tips for Collaborating Effectively with Paraprofessionals

- Start and end each day with the paraprofessional.
- Provide the paraprofessional with constructive feedback ASAP.
- Say thank you frequently for specific acts.
- Ask the paraprofessional how *you* can help.
- Demonstrate what you mean.
- Recognize the individual and unique contributions of each paraprofessional.
- Occasionally meet together away from the school or work area.
- Encourage the paraprofessional to keep a daily journal of activities, thoughts, and feelings.
- Ask the paraprofessional what he or she would like to learn.
- Advocate for the paraprofessional's professional growth.

Source: Adapted from Lee (1999).

teacher assistant, teacher aide, instructional assistant, or other variations you are aware of. Another free source to search the professional literature is Ask ERIC, which provides online access to the ERIC database. We suggest using the advanced search option (http://www.ericir.syr.edu/Eric/adv_search.shtml).

With the full recognition that websites come and go, here is a list of a few noncommercial websites devoted to paraprofessional issues:

Minnesota Paraprofessional Consortium
    http://www.ici2.coled.umn.edu/para/default.html
National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services
    http://www.nrcpara.org/
National Clearinghouse of Paraeducator Resources: Paraeducator Pathways into Teaching
    http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/Clearinghouse.html
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory: Paraeducator Resources
    http://www.nwrac.org/links/paraed.html
Paraeducator Issues: Paraeducators Helping Kids Shine—The Washington Education Association
    http://www.wa.nea.org/Prf_Dv/PARA_ED/PARA.HTM
Paraeducator Support of Students with Disabilities in General Education Classrooms
    http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/parasupport/
Paraeducator and Supervisor Training Designed to Meet the Needs of Students with Disabilities in General Education Classrooms
    http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/paraprep/
Project PARA: University of Nebraska, Lincoln
    http://www.para.unl.edu/

Conclusion

How will you know if you have been successful as an educator directing the work of a paraprofessional? There are four primary indicators of your success in this arena. First, gauge the job satisfaction of the paraprofessional. If the paraprofessional's job satisfaction is high, it is likely that your leadership is a positive contributing factor. Not only is job satisfaction positively correlated with work productivity, it can assist the school in retaining qualified paraprofessionals, who are increasingly in short supply. This maximizes the training and supervision resources that are dedicated to paraprofessionals and builds a school's capacity.

Second, as the educator, do you feel satisfied with the work of the paraprofessional? Is he or she assisting you in ways that are vital to the functioning of your classroom and allow you to do a better job with your students? When the paraprofessional is providing supports that allow you to devote more energy to other aspects of your teaching responsibilities it is a sign that your teacher leadership is being effective. The work of the paraprofessional should allow you to know as much or more about the student with a disability as the paraprofessional and should afford you time to be directly involved with teaching that student. If you sense that under your direction the paraprofessional is helping you in these areas, he or she probably is—so trust your instincts.

Third, you will know that you have been effective in directing the work of the paraprofessional when you can link it to positive student outcomes. These may include academic and functional outcomes such as acquiring a new skill, as well as personal and social outcomes such as developing confidence and new friends. Making the connection between the support provided by paraprofessionals and student outcomes will require an analysis of student data, direct observation, and reports of team members.

Finally, consider the perspectives of your students with disabilities regarding paraprofessional supports. If possible, ask the student's opinion directly. If the student has expressive language difficulties, you will need to look for nonsymbolic forms of communication by observing the student's reactions and considering how classmates are reacting to the presence of the paraprofessional. Every effort should be made to provide paraprofessional supports in a manner that is respectful toward the student with a disability and is as normalized as possible.

As an educator you can improve your own teaching effectiveness and student outcomes by exhibiting leadership in directing the work of paraprofessionals. By welcoming, acknowledging, orienting, and training paraprofessionals within a team context that relies on effective communication and feedback, you can establish productive and collaborative relationships. These relationships are the bedrock upon which exemplary educational programs and services are built.

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