

Table 1. Inadvertent Detrimental Effects of Excessive or Unnecessary Paraprofessional Proximity

Category of Effect	Description
Separation from Classmates	

that students with disabilities learn more or better with paraprofessional support (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001). Recent research indicates that not only are special education paraprofessionals playing a prominent role instructing students with disabilities, they are engaging in roles for which they are questionably prepared (French, 1998; Minondo, Meyer & Xin, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). In some cases, individual paraprofessionals are left to fend for themselves, functioning as the primary teachers for students with disabilities and making the majority of day-to-day instructional and curricular decisions (Downing, Ryndak & Clark, 2000; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997; Marks, Schrader & Levine, 1999). Having paraprofessionals assume such high levels of responsibility presents a double standard that likely would be considered unacceptable if it was applied to students without disabilities.

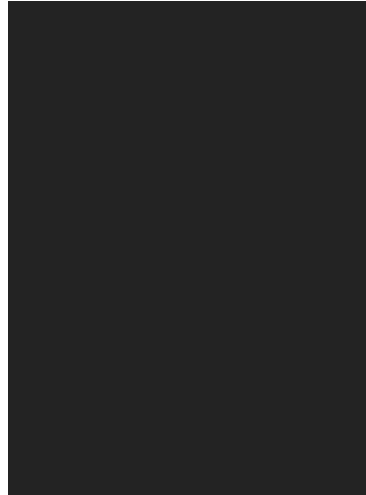
Reason 2: Paraprofessional supports are linked with inadvertent detrimental effects.

Although paraprofessional supports are undoubtedly offered with benevolent

intentions, recent studies have linked excessive or unnecessary paraprofes-

sional proximity with inadvertent detrimental effects, such as unnecessary

dependence and interference with peer interactions (see Table 1; Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2001; Giangreco et al., 1997; Hemmingsson, Borell, & Gustavsson, 2003; Skar & Tamm, 2001). Even studies that have reported positive aspects of close proximity (Werts, Zigmond, & Leeper, 2001) or mixed data on the effects of proximity (Young, Simpson, Myles, & Kamps, 1997) have raised concerns about whether students are unnecessarily dependent on individual paraprofessionals.



Reason 3: Individual paraprofessional supports are linked with lower levels of teacher involvement.

The attitude of a classroom teacher toward, and level of involvement with, his or her students who have disabilities is arguably one of the single most crucial variables affecting the success of inclusive placements. An observational study of three primary grade children with autism in inclusive classrooms reported teacher initiations with those students were more frequent when their individually assigned paraprofessionals were not in close proximity to them (Young et al., 1997).

Understandably, busy teachers tend to work with other students when they know the student with a disability already has individual attention. Recent research has documented that the assignment of an individual paraprofessional to a student with a disability often co-occurs with lower levels of teacher engagement, whereas the use of a classroom paraprofessional, under the direction of the teacher, more often co-occurs with higher levels of teacher engagement (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2001).

Reason 4: Teachers, parents, and students may not be getting what they deserve and expect.

Are classroom teachers, parents, and students getting what they deserve and expect? Do they have access to parapro-W

frequently as their perceived impor-

need to better support students in general education classrooms (e.g., narrowing the range of grades supported, attention to caseload issues, assistance with paperwork). Ask both constituencies who should be supervising paraprofessionals and how. This conversation can occur informally among colleagues or more formally at faculty or community meetings, through teacher study groups, or by establishing a cross-constituent schoolwide task force.

2. Scrutinize current roles and practices of paraprofessionals, and consider whether they are truly appropriate. This examination can be accomplished by having teachers, special educators, and paraprofessionals (a) analyze the tasks they engage in, (b) determine whether their respective training and/or skills match the tasks, and (c) make a plan for addressing any discrepancies between their skills and the tasks. In some instances this scrutiny may result in additional training for any of the team members or may lead to a shifting of responsibilities. In considering any shifts in responsibilities, teams are encouraged to limit the utilization of paraprofessional supports to only those specific situations in which, after exhausting more natural possibilities, it makes the most sense. For example, if providing homework support or being accompanied between classes can be appropriately accomplished with peer supports, it should not be delegated to a paraprofessional. Individualization and accounting for unpredictable events will require ongoing teamwork. In reference to existing practices, ask the following question to help identify double standards: Would the practice be acceptable if the students did not

