The Golden Rule of Providing Support in Inclusive Classrooms: Support Others as You Would Wish to Be Supported

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TEACHING Exceptional Children, Vol. 42, No. 2, pp. 36-43. Copyright 2009 CEC.

Consider for a moment that the school system paid someone to be with you—supporting you 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. Now, imagine that you had no say over who that support person was or how she or he supported you. Or imagine that someone regularly stopped into your place of employment to provide you with one-on-one support. This person was present for all your interactions, escorted you to the restroom, and at times supported you by touching your back or shoulder or by manipulating your hands, head, or other parts of your body. This support person might also give you oral directions for upcoming tasks.

- *Would you become more independent or more dependent?*
- *How would this support change your relationships with your peers?*
- *Would you notice a loss of privacy or freedom?*
- *Would this person's presence affect your creativity?*
- *At times, would you feel self-conscious about having someone supporting you?*
- *What if you asked him or her to move away from you and he or she did not?*
- *What would happen if you did not want him or her to touch you?*
- *What would you do?*
- *Do you think that you might develop negative behaviors?*

Now consider how your presence affects the students whom you support.

Inclusion and Adult Support

Inclusion is a way of thinking—a deeply held belief that all children, regardless of ability or disability, are valued members of the school and classroom community. Inclusive classrooms are places where all students "are integral members of classrooms, feel a connection to their peers, have access to rigorous and meaningful general education curricula and receive the collaborative support to succeed" (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008, p. 26). One purpose of including students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, as opposed to segregating them in special education classrooms, is to help all students (students with and without disabilities) learn to live, work, and play together so that eventually they can successfully live, work, and be together in the community as adults. For students with disabilities, inclusive schooling should promote intellectual growth, independence, and interaction with peers.

Inclusion is also a practice that puts the preceding ideals into place for all students. What are these ideas in practice? How can educators help a student feel like an integral member of the classroom? How can students develop authentic connections with their peers? What does access to meaningful general education curricula mean? And most important, what are the most effective ways to support students to help them reach these goals?

Because 54% of the 6 million students with disabilities spend more than 80% of their school day in general education classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), a common support strategy is one-on-one support. The current ratio is 1 special education paraprofessional for every 17 students with disabilities (Giangreco, Hurley, & Suter, 2009). But as schools integrate more services into the classroom, adult support will also involve a special educator, a speech and language clinician, an occupational therapist, and physical therapists or a school psychologist. In this article, the term *adult support* refers to any professional who supports a student with a disability in an inclusive classroom.

There is an art to "doing" inclusion well. Effective adult support requires finesse, subtlety, and elegance. It requires the most nuanced and careful action and—at times—inaction. Effective classroom support means that students with disabilities are integral members of the classroom and that educators allow them to be their full selves. Their membership is a given, and everyone in the classroom works together in visible and invisible ways to make the dance appear effortless. The opposite is also true. When inclusion is done poorly, it can be choppy and unnatural.

I increasingly witness adults who are furnishing support to students with disabilities but who unnecessarily draw attention to that support or to the need for support that the adult perceives. Their actions are frequently too intensive and invasive. Too often, educators cluster students with disabilities together at one table, awkwardly flank them with a paraprofessional, and seat them by the door; or an adult physically manipulates them to correct their behavior. Adults are often unnecessarily close to students during lectures, or they give oral prompts at an overwhelming rate. This invasive support invariably draws undue attention to the student who is receiving support and at the same time interferes with the natural flow of the classroom, student interaction, and community membership (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005; Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005). When support becomes invasive, it undermines the purposes of inclusion.

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The Golden Rule of Adult Support

Adult help can be seamless and effective—and thereby fully support the purposes of inclusion. The golden rule for adult support in inclusive classrooms is to support others as you would wish to be supported. Adequately applying the golden rule requires knowledge and imagination. Educators need to know the effect of their actions on students.

Rationale for Fading Support

This article next discusses the need for fading support, as reflected in the liter-

ature. Fading assistance means systematically reducing the type and level of support given to a student. Fading support can reduce the negative impact of adult support and allow for more natural supports to occur. The research in fading support is clear. Invasive adult support has had inadvertent detrimental effects on students with disabilities. Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, and MacFarland (1997) listed the following detrimental effects of paraprofessional proximity:

- Separation from classmates.
- Unnecessary dependence on adults.
- Interference with peer interactions.
- Insular relationships between the paraprofessional and the student.
- A feeling of being stigmatized.
- Limited access to competent instruction.
- Interference with teacher engagement.
- Loss of personal control.
- Loss of gender identity.
- Provocation of behavior problems.

Subsequent research has also found that other key detrimental impacts of adult support are interference with creativity (Causton-Theoharis, & Burdick, 2008) and interference with teacher contact and instruction.

Unnecessary Dependence on Adults

When adult support is consistently present, is overbearing, and does not fade appropriately, the student learns to expect adult support. Psychologists have called this phenomenon *learned helplessness*; that is, behavior resulting from a perceived absence of control over the outcome of a situation (Seligman, 1975). Students quickly perceive their own lack of control and learn to wait for cues, direction, or prompting from an adult before engaging with the material. Giangreco et al. (2005) call this phenomenon *unnecessary dependence* (see box, "Case Study: Adam" for an example of unnecessary dependence). Alternatives to having a paraprofessional open a student's book include asking a peer to help, marking the page with a sticky note, or asking all the students to check with a neighbor to verify that the neighbor is ready. Assigning an adult as the primary support too often creates dependence on that support and thereby teaches students to rely on a support that most likely will not be available in their homes or when they exit school as young adults. Support that encourages independence or interdependence during school best prepares students for life outside school.

Case Study: Adam

A teacher instructed the students to take out their books and open them to a particular page. Most students opened their books; but Adam, a student who received support from a paraprofessional, did not and instead looked around the room. He was looking for the paraprofessional assigned to him. She came over to him, placed her hand on his shoulder, took his book from his desk, placed the book on his desk, repeated the page number, and opened the book to the correct page.

Interference With Peer Interactions

An adult support person can create a physical or symbolic barrier that interferes with interactions between the student and his or her classmates (Giangreco et al., 2005). In a study that the author of this article conducted with Malmgren (Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006), the authors observed a second-grade student named Gary working in his classroom and playing with his friends. A paraprofessional supported Gary throughout his day. During a 4-week period, Gary participated in only 32 interactions with his peers; 29 of those interactions occurred when the paraprofessional was absent, but only 3 occurred when the paraprofessional was present. The paraprofessional ended 2 of those 3 interactions by asking Gary to get back to work. The presence of the paraprofessional clearly had a significant impact on Gary's ability or willingness to connect with other students. That study underscores the negative impact that invasive support by a paraprofessional can have on peer interactions.

Jamie, a high school student with autism, described the impact that adult support had on his social interactions. He emphasized that such support should be subtle and should not interfere with his desire for a social life: "We are willing and ready to connect with other kids, and adults must quietly step into the background, camouflaging their help as a tiger who may hide in full view" (Tashie, Shapiro-Barnard, & Rossetti, 2006). When appropriate, fading of support can alleviate the stigma associated with invasive supports. In the 2005 study by Broer et al., adolescents who had paraprofessional support expressed relief when support was appropriately withdrawn.

Interference With Creativity

Learning in school often takes the form of creative expression. Causton-Theoharis & Burdick (2008) found that paraprofessional support created barriers to authentic art production and creativity. Their study involved 18 students (from 10 schools) who received paraprofessional support in the art classroom. Paraprofessionals sometimes interfered with physical access (e.g., by bringing students to class late or not at all or by removing students from class); caused interrupted authenticity (e.g., by limiting materials or suggesting ideas that the student then carried out); and caused altered art production entirely (e.g., by changing the art project or expectations for the student). If the goal of inclusion is to allow students meaningful access to the curriculum and instruction, educa-

Support that encourages independence or interdependence during school best prepares students for life outside school.

tors must examine invasive adult supports that interfere with the creative process of learning.

Interference With Teacher Contact and Instruction

Students with the most challenging learning needs deserve more contact time with the most trained teachers in a school. Unfortunately, when a paraprofessional works with a particular student and the paraprofessional remains close to the student, less teacher-to-student interaction occurs (Young, Simpson, Mylers, & Kamps, 1997). Teachers tend to be less involved and assume less responsibility for the student who has a disability because of the presence of another adult (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2001). Research confirms that although paraprofessionals play a prominent role in both planning and implementing instruction for students with disabilities, they are largely untrained to perform this important work (Minondo, Meyer, & Xin, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Because paraprofessionals often do not receive training in teaching methods, they at times do the work for students instead of carefully scaffolding each step of the learning process.

Another important study examined the perspectives of high school students with disabilities who attended general education classes with paraprofessional support. These students described their paraprofessionals' roles in four ways: (a) mother, (b) friend, (c) protector, and (d) primary teacher (Broer et al., 2005). Most of the students "expressed powerful messages of disenfranchisement, embarrassment, loneliness, rejection, fear, and stigmatization" (Broer et al., p. 427) because of adult support.

To address the problem of the potential damage of invasive supports, educators must put themselves in the shoes of students with disabilities. The students' feelings of embarrassment, loneliness, rejection, fear, and stigmatization are not what educators would want their own day-to-day experiences to include. Educators should definitely support students in ways that are humanistic, respectful, and gentle—in ways that adults would wish to be supported.

How to Fade Adult Support

In following the golden rule of adult support, you must first imagine yourself in the student's place. How would you want the support that you required to look and feel? Many people would first and foremost want to direct their support and have a say over how and when someone provided them with support. Second, people would want the support to be discreet. They would prefer unhindered access to their peers and would want the support to have a specific purpose and to fade away when unnecessary. Four distinct steps related to how to support are the following:

- Plan to include.
- Ask and listen.
- Step back.
- Plan to fade your support.

Plan to Include

One reason that educators rely on side-by-side support is that they have not planned anything else. They have not planned to ensure that the student has access to the curriculum, have not modified the materials, and do not have alternative adult roles. In French's (2001) study of 321 special educators, 81% reported that they had not done any planning for their paraprofessionals. Of the 19% who did plan, the planning was primarily oral rather than written. In all probability, few, if any, of the special educators provided modeling of specific instructional approaches. Several basic classroom decisions support the idea of fading. These include the following:

- Rearrange the furniture.
- Relinquish traditional adult roles.
- Modify the work.
- Encourage peer support.

Rearrange the Furniture. Have you ever seen a classroom in which a chair is permanently placed next to a particular student? That chair's very presence indicates to everyone in the room that the student needs help and needs so much help that the educators have permanently arranged the furniture to support him or her. However, a student very rarely needs side-by-side support. Educators can support even students who have significant disabilities by using other methods that do not require a permanent chair (Kluth, 2005). In line with previous research about the negative repercussions of invasive adult proximity, the easiest thing to do is to remove the chair. Do not sit or place a chair meant for adult support next to a student. Where you position yourself during instruction is also very important. Even when students need close support because of behavior difficulties or physical needs, educators should use temporary or intermittent supports rather than permanent supports. Determine when side-by-side support is necessary and when it can be faded (see box, "Alternatives to Side-by-Side Support").

Alternatives to Side-by-Side Support

1. Modify the material so that the student can do the work independently.
2. Modify the expectations so that the student can complete the task without support.
3. Pair everyone in the class with a partner.
4. Model written notes for everyone on the overhead projector.
5. Check in on students periodically—walk around the room and support all students.
6. Stand in the front of the room, and write main ideas on the chalkboard for all students.
7. Sit at a side table to create modifications for an upcoming lesson while keeping an eye on a particular student.
8. Arrange for peer support.
9. Go to the library to find visual materials to support an upcoming lesson.
10. Create a to-do list on a student's desk instead of providing verbal reminders.

Case Study: Kathy and June

Kathy and June both work in a fourth-grade classroom. Kathy is technically the general educator, and June is the special educator. Both plan instruction together and team teach the class in a way that guessing who has which title would probably be difficult. June is as likely to teach in front of the whole class as Kathy is to help a student use the restroom. They have completely transcended their traditional roles and share responsibilities equally.

Relinquish Traditional Adult Roles. Building the capacity for all adults to work together instead of assigning specific personnel to support certain students is a much more useful way to think about inclusion (see box, "Case Study: Kathy and June" for an example of two teachers who have relinquished their traditional adult roles). Classrooms based on shared responsibility supports can benefit a wider range of students with and without disabilities. The teachers can plan differentiated instruction together, modify the materials and expectations, and invariably negate the need for side-by-side support.

Modify the Work. Educators should frequently modify materials, content, or instruction to ensure access instead of relying solely on adult support. Some examples of modified materials include enlarged handouts, adaptive paper, a word bank, or a simple piece of masking tape to hold a paper still while a student writes. Modifying content might include reducing the number of problems that the student performs independently. For instance, a middle school student might only have to draw and solve four math problems while his or her classmates solve six; reducing the number of required problems can enable the student to independently complete all his or her work in the allotted time. See box, "Case Study: Kirsten" for another example of modifying the work.

Encourage Peer Support. What alternative can replace a paraprofessional sitting next to a particular student? Peer support is a well-researched evidence-based practice (Carter, Cushing, Clark, & Kennedy, 2005). Set up partnerships during instructional time. Have all students work together. Set up play partners, transition partners (partners for walking to and from classes), choice-time partners, lunchtime partners, math partners, and so forth. Make sure that the student has a choice about whom he or she selects as a partner and whether she or he wants support. When a student requests help, redirect the student to ask a peer. Asking a peer should be the norm for all students. One useful way to set up a peer-support system is to tell all students to follow the rule, "Ask three before me." Having students seek peer support is a valid and important lifelong skill. For example, a third-grade teacher uses "ask me" hats. When he gives out directions, he designates three students to be "ask me students." Then if students need help or support, they first contact the students wearing the hats.

Ask and Listen

Educators often look to the individualized education program (IEP) or to past or present teachers to determine how to best support students. These resources are not always helpful for understanding the type of support that a student needs. The best way to learn about a student's needs is to ask the student. Students with disabilities should decide about their own supports. Furthermore, educators should examine students' behavior and other nonverbal messages to learn what students want.

Ask the Student. Asking students how they would like educators to support them communicates respect and value for their choices. Jane, a middle school art teacher, offers one example for learning about a student's preferred type of support. She works with the student to determine the necessity of support on the basis of a given activity instead of assuming that the student needs paraprofessional support at all times. She consults the student and the paraprofessional before each project to decide how much support is necessary:

> After I give instructions and before letting Sarah [the student] get started on a project, I ask her, would you like any support with this project? If she says yes, I let her choose if she wants my help, Mrs. Little's [the paraprofessional] help, or the help of a friend. I then listen to her . . . if she says I don't need help on this project, I let her go it alone.

Educators should ask students some questions:

- During this assignment, what do you need?
- When we work on the computer, how do you want me to support you?
- Would you prefer that I remind you or that I write you a to-do list?
- Where do you want me to sit during the film?
- When you get angry like that again, what can I do to help you?

If the student's specific choice does not work initially, ask again with the objective of learning ways that do work. The educator may need to specifically teach students the self-advocacy skills necessary for them to receive comfortable supports. If a stu-

Case Study: Kirsten

Kirsten, a student with Asperger's syndrome, preferred to process information orally. Therefore, her art teacher used a turn-and-talk strategy during a lesson demonstration. Rather than have students raise their hands, she asked all students to turn to a neighbor to briefly discuss key parts of the lesson. During this time, the paraprofessional set up the art stations in the back of the room. This method not only ensured Kirsten's involvement in the lesson but also provided her with an opportunity for natural peer interaction and exchange of ideas. This strategy engaged all students in the lesson, and everyone benefited—not only Kirsten.

Case Study: Michael

Michael was a student who had been in trouble several times for pinching the paraprofessional assigned to work with him. The paraprofessional had bruises on her arm and rightfully became quite frustrated with the situation. When the teacher observed Michael and the paraprofessional interact, however, she noticed that the paraprofessional was giving Michael verbal cues in a loud, shrill voice at a rate of more than 10 cues a minute. Michael, who had autism and sound sensitivities, was reacting to the verbal cues. When the teacher asked the paraprofessional to instead provide intermittent (stop-by) silent support (that is, supporting the student without words, just by using drawings and lists), Michael completely stopped pinching.

dent does not use oral communication, the teacher can observe him or her to learn what works. Allow the student to make choices in ways that are not verbal (e.g., eye pointing or finger pointing). For example, write on one index card the word *friend* and write your name on another index card, and then ask whether the student prefers to have your help carrying his or her books or have a friend's help. Students are the most powerful resources in determining how to provide helpful support.

Listen to More Than Words. Students often communicate that they do not want invasive adult support, but adults frequently do not respond to that communication (see box, "Case Study: Michael" for an example of a student who attempted to communicate that he did not want adult support in the way that educators furnished it). Some students will ask an adult to please move away from them; however, other students communicate this desire in less socially appropriate ways, such as through pinching, biting, hitting, or swearing. When students engage in behavior that is challenging, they are often trying to communicate something (e.g., I am angry, upset, scared, frustrated, or bored), or they have an unmet need (e.g., independence, control, power, or self-regulation). The best response is to recognize the behavior as communication and try to determine the unmet need. Then respond to the student's request, especially when the student wants the adult to step back to allow engagement with peers without an adult near him or her.

The best way to learn about a student's needs is to ask the student.

Step Back

Fade Your Cues. One of the simplest yet most effective ways to increase interaction is to fade the assistance of paraprofessionals. Fading assistance means deliberately reducing the type and level of support systematically given to a student. Reducing support promotes independence, interdependence, and interaction with peers (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006; Malmgren, Causton-Theoharis, & Trezek, 2005). If a student can complete a task in your presence without adult support, have him or her complete the task without supervision the next time (see box, "Case Study: Andrea" for an example).

Continuously ask what next step will enable a student to become more independent and less dependent on adult support. If a student still needs assistance, consider having interdependence (or completing the task with other students) be the goal. Providing support in natural ways helps reduce dependence on support personnel. The suggestions in this article can help you follow the golden rule, maximize student independence and interdependence with peers, and minimize the negative impact of overly intensive adult supports. Look at the cueing structure list shown in Table 1. The objective is always to move away from the most intrusive supports toward the least intrusive supports (Doyle, 2008).

Case Study: Andrea

Andrea was having difficulty moving her lunch tray to the lunch table, so the paraprofessional carried it to the table for her. The paraprofessional soon realized that Andrea's problem was the weight of the tray and the drink, so she took the drink off the tray. Andrea was then able to carry her tray to her table independently. Andrea then decided she would take two trips (one with her tray and one with the beverage) without the paraprofessional's help. By the end of the year, Andrea's friend Tim often carried her drink, so she arrived at the table in one trip with the support of a friend.

Plan to Fade Your Support

Create a Fading Plan. The following questions will help your team fade support more effectively:

1. When is it necessary to be next to this student (e.g., when providing medical assistance, lifting or transferring a student, or furnishing personal care)?
2. For this skill or time period, is the goal independence (done by the student himself or herself) or interdependence (done with the support of a peer)?
3. What types of cues are educators using with this student (see the cueing structures in Table 1)?
4. What next step will reduce the type and level of support given to this student?
5. Can anyone else provide more natural supports to this student?
6. What materials or content should educators modify to allow the student to experience more independence?

Don't Just Sit There. Adults often use the phrase, "try to work yourself out of a job." This article does not suggest that goal; it also does not suggest

Table 1. A Range of Supports (Listed From Most Intrusive to Least Intrusive)

Type of Support	Definition	Example
Full physical	Direct and physical assistance used to support a student	Hand-over-hand assistance while a student writes his or her name
Partial physical	Physical assistance provided for some of the total movement required for the activity	Putting a zipper into the bottom portion and beginning to pull it up; the student then pulls the zipper up the rest of the way
Modeling	A demonstration of what the student is to do	The paraprofessional does an art project; the student uses the art project as a model
Direct oral	Oral information provided directly to the student	"Josh, stand up now."
Indirect verbal	A verbal reminder that prompts the student to attend to or think about what is expected	"Josh, what should happen next?"
Gestural	A physical movement to communicate or accentuate a cue (e.g., head nod, thumbs up, pointing).	Paraprofessional points to the agenda written on the board
Natural	Providing no cue; allowing the ordinary cues that exist in the environment help the student know what to do	The bell rings for class. The teacher asks students to move to the rug. A message on the chalkboard reads "Turn to page 74."

Note. Adapted from *The Paraprofessional's Guide to the Inclusive Classroom: Working as a Team* (3rd ed.) by M. B. Doyle, 2008, Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes. Copyright 2008 by Paul H. Brookes. Adapted with permission.

Table 2. Co-supporting Structures

If the Teacher Is Doing This:	You Can Be Doing This:
Lecturing	Model note taking on the board, draw the ideas on the board, take notes on the overhead.
Taking attendance	Collect and review homework.
Giving directions	Write the directions on the board so that all students have a place to look for the visual cues.
Providing large-group instruction	Collect data on student behavior or engagement or make modifications for an upcoming lesson.
Giving a test	Read the test to students who prefer to have the test read to them.
Facilitating stations or small groups	Also facilitate stations or groups.
Facilitating sustained silent reading	Read aloud quietly with a small group.
Teaching a new concept	Provide visuals or models to enhance the understanding of the whole group.
Reteaching or preteaching with a small group	Monitor the large group while it works independently.

Note. Adapted from "Tips and Strategies for Co-Teaching at the Secondary Level" by W. Murawski and L. Deiker, 2004. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 36(5)*, 52–58. Copyright 2004 by the Council for Exceptional Children. Adapted with permission.

that instead of supporting a student, educators should just sit there. Several strategies can make student support more seamless. For example, instead of sitting next to a student while the teacher takes attendance, the paraprofessional can take attendance while the general education teacher floats around the room checking in with everyone. When the student does not require direct support, the paraprofessional can prepare instructional materials for the class or individual students. Table 2 lists several co-support strategies that actively support the classroom of learners (Murawski & Dieker, 2004).

Final Thoughts

Inclusion is a way of thinking, a way of being, and a way of making decisions about helping everyone belong. Educators must provide supports that align with that vision. To enact the golden rule of adult support, educators need to imagine themselves receiving support from others. Educators need to think about how they would wish to be supported. They then need to give support that is planned and responsive to students' wishes, in addition to being discreet and unobtrusive. With knowledge, imagination, and the golden rule, educators can furnish adult support that embodies the true philosophy of inclusion.

Inclusion is a way of thinking, a way of being, and a way of making decisions about helping everyone belong.

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