While paraprofessionals (paras) may have different job titles, they all work under the direction of at least one teacher. Teachers in inclusive schools sometimes rely on paras to provide extended support for students with disabilities in general education classrooms and other settings. Paras can also play an important role in the problem-solving and instructional planning process.

Not every student with a disability needs the assistance of a para. Some students with disabilities get the support they need from teachers working together in general education classrooms. Others may only need para support for part of the day or week. But for students with more extensive disabilities, paras can provide daily support for learning, physical, communication, behavioral, and social/emotional needs. The many roles performed by paras clearly result in positive outcomes for students with disabilities in general education environments.

Fulfilling these varied roles can be a complex balancing act for paras. Because they are required to work closely with individual students, a para can be:

A BARRIER to learning and social development and a symbol of the student’s disability.

OR . . .

A POWERFUL FACILITATOR of learning and social relationships.

One way that we can guide paras in the delicate balance between support and facilitation is by asking:

How can you provide support in a way that brings students with and without disabilities together for learning and social interaction?
Facilitating student learning and involvement in inclusive settings:

Help students without disabilities understand what students with disabilities can do.

Help students with disabilities learn how to initiate communication and social interactions with adults and peers.

Which way is better? You decide!

For more ideas on how paraprofessionals can help make inclusion work in your school, contact your FIN facilitator by visiting our Web site: www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com

References and recommended reading:

