

Education assistant's role in education

[Education](#)



Significant reforms have been made to the education system due to the demands of a fast changing and increasingly competitive global economy. The need to provide quality education that maximizes the potential of every child and raise standards of pupil performance has increased the demand for education assistants and broadened the range of responsibilities they perform. In the past, an education assistant's role involved preparing materials for the classroom, childcare and pastoral care.

However in today's teaching environment, an education assistant is also required to support students with special needs, implement lesson plans, assess pupil progress, manage challenging behaviours and much more. It is important to note that many of these challenging responsibilities vary and would depend on the requirements of individual schools and classes. Accordingly, Kay (2005) states that an education assistant can only be successful in their role if they understand and clarify their individual responsibilities as they move from class to class.

The essay discusses the importance of the role of an education assistant and the challenges they face. It also explores the skills they require to not only problem solve issues faced in the position but to achieve success in their roles. Education assistants play an important role in providing support for the student, teacher, curriculum and the school (Morgan, 2007).

The Centre for Educational Needs, at the University of Manchester, (DfEE 1999), states that education assistants play the most important role in providing support to students with learning delays and special needs who might otherwise find it difficult to perform the tasks requested of them. Educational assistants work with these students on an individual basis or in

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small groups. The targeted help provided can range from assisting pupils with social skills, staying on task, understanding complex instructions, to assisting a student with physical mobility and emotional and behavioural difficulties (Morgan, 2007).

Educational assistants allow teachers to concentrate on their core teaching role in the classroom and enable them to manage their own diverse workloads (Tyrer, Gunn, Lee, Parker, Pittman and Townsend, 2004). They may help implement lesson plans and observe how pupils perform, assess and evaluate progress and provide feedback to teachers (Kay 2005). Their organisational responsibilities include maintaining resources and equipment and ensuring that the classroom is clean, organized and equipped (Kay, 2005).

It is important for education assistants to be familiar with the National Curriculum and associated literacy and numeracy frameworks so that they can help simplify and deliver what is being taught in the classroom to students with differing abilities under the supervision of the class teacher (Morgan, 2007). Once these students have grasped key concepts by working in a smaller group, the education assistant helps to intergrate them back into the mainstream curriculum. Lessons can be delivered in a variety of ways, for example innovative computer software packages can help students with particular difficulties such as dyslexia (Kay, 2005).

Education assistants will have to familiarise themselves with these packages and have the knowledge to operate them. An education assistant's role in supporting the school includes communicating and working collaboratively as a team to provide a safe and secure learning environment for all students

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and to promote the school's ethos (Morgan, 2007). Education assistants play a critical role in working with parents, teachers and external professionals, ensuring that the student receives the best quality assistance and guidance (Richards, Armstrong, 2008).

For some students, the input provided by external specialists is crucial and the education assistant can play an important role in liaising and supporting their work. The educational assistant is in a unique position to communicate to the school and provide valuable thoughts on what works for the student, what obstacles to learning they encounter and the effectiveness of classroom processes and organisation (Richards, Armstrong, 2008). A lack of communication can present as a key challenge that educational assistants encounter in their position.

Poorly defined job descriptions can lead to teachers and education assistants having disagreements over individual responsibilities (Chopra & French, 2004; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Successful educational assistants must take the initiative, when in doubt, to communicate and clarify with the supervising teacher and promptly resolve disputes that might occur. Clearly differentiated roles between the education assistants and teachers continue to remain an issue that is difficult to resolve as the role of an education assistant cannot be examined in isolation.

It should include the examination of the interrelated and distinct roles of the teacher and special-education teachers as well in best meeting student needs (Giangreco, Suter, Jesse & Doyle, 2010). At best, a successful educational assistant has to keep an open mind and remain adaptable to meet the variety of needs and demands while working with different

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teachers and students (Kay, 2005). Another challenge that education assistants encounter is the inability of teachers to allocate time to address issues that require urgent attention. Teachers and education assistants may only have limited time to discuss pertinent issues.

A way to resolve this issue according to Tyrer, et al (2004), is to have informal and formal meetings. Informal meetings can be used to have spontaneous discussions about immediate issues that need to be resolved and formal meetings can be scheduled at a later time and may involve a collaboration of ideas from a team of staff members covering a range of teaching issues (Tyrer et al.) The lack of adequate training and skills to deal with students with special needs and behavioural issues (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002b; Tillery, Werts, Roark, & Harris, 2003) is another challenge education assistants face.

It is very troubling to note that the least qualified personnel are often expected to manage and instruct the most challenging and needy students (Broer et al 2005, Giangreco & Broer, 2005). As a result, schools must endeavour to ensure that they implement high quality processes and systems for the recruitment and on-going training of education assistants. Accordingly, a successful education assistant must be proactive and use their initiative to continually extend their qualifications and training in relevant areas.

Kay (2005) states that an education assistant can also develop their skills by actively observing the teacher in the classroom or by reading books that can offer a wealth of knowledge on a variety of topics. In addition, school policy makers also need to allocate planned and perhaps even paid time set aside

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for the training and upgrading of education assistants to meet student needs. Education assistants perform a wide range of responsibilities which differ within classes and schools. The role is significant but complex and therefore education assistants must maintain a flexible and adaptable approach to their position.

This ensures success in coping with the variable demands that can be made on them. Most importantly, education assistants must have the ability to communicate and work collaboratively with students, parents, teachers and external professionals to help students achieve their educational goals and outcomes. By communicating effectively with their supervising teacher, education assistants can understand what is expected from them and discuss any pertinent issues that may arise in their daily work routine.

Successful education assistants also need to be reflective and constantly re-evaluate their skills. As their roles diversify to meet the complex needs of a range of students in schools, the need for professional development is critical. To be successful, it is important that education assistants are committed, patient and understanding and possess a genuine desire to want to help students from a diverse range of family backgrounds and learning challenges. Education assistants contribute significantly to the success of a learning environment and play a critical role in the education process.