

# CORE SKILLS ENRICHMENT

## Introduction

Both the role and image of teaching assistants have changed radically over the last few years. What they do in schools and classrooms and how they are used to raise standards has altered irrevocably. What everyone needs to accept, however, is that these changes are continuing, and implementing the National Workload Agreement means that teaching assistants must develop further skills, techniques and strategies.

In October 2000, the Government provided extra funding and guidance on how schools could use teaching assistants more effectively. *The Guide to Good Practice in the Deployment and Management of Teaching Assistants* (DfES, 2000) made it clear that the Government was financially committed to support up to 20,000 more teaching assistants by 2002. There have also been moves to develop new National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) covering the work of different levels of teaching assistants, together with skills-based courses from the Workers Education Association (WEA) and the Open University. This all points towards large-scale development and radical change.

The challenges of coming to grips with workload reform mean that teaching assistants should be able to use their skills to work more closely with teachers and begin to 'teach' groups of pupils and, possibly, whole classes.

Many schools are already making changes which allow this to happen and the number of teaching assistants seems to be growing quickly. A recent Government survey makes it clear that:

*... the use of support staff has increased in 7 out of 10 primary schools over the last three years. Ninety seven percent of headteachers said that the increase had improved teaching and learning.*

p7, *Excellence and Enjoyment: A Strategy for Primary Schools*, DfES, 2003

The challenge for most schools is to combine the two roles of reducing workload and supporting better teaching and learning. Many teaching assistants are capable of developing the necessary skills to support both roles, but one of the challenges for schools is to balance out the necessary training that teaching assistants need, with the recognition that pay is low and that currently there are very few national conditions of employment or set duties for them. All schools should be flexible and innovative about what they expect of teaching assistants. They need to do this effectively because they cannot function as successfully as they would like without the support and skills that teaching assistants bring to their job. OFSTED recognises the important roles teaching assistants play and will, during their changed inspection routines, ask more questions about how teaching assistants are used and what effect they have on educational standards. Schools will need to show how teaching assistants are used to raise standards.

## Training sessions

*Core Skills Enrichment* provides 41 fully-resourced sessions, which are closely mapped to the National Occupational Standards for Classroom/Teaching Assistants. The sessions focus on those issues which need attention most, according to national studies. The training sessions are designed to improve the skills and knowledge of teaching assistants so that they can function better with pupils in classrooms. They can be used by schools, LEAs and other

training bodies. They are designed to be relatively labour-free, in that they contain all the information a tutor needs to run each session with a group of teaching assistants. There are key sections on the following areas:

### **Teamwork**

Successful schools do not have isolated teachers working in classrooms with closed doors, or teaching assistants who do not speak to each other or discuss what they are doing. Professionals work together as productive teams. Such working groups can range from a teacher and teaching assistant planning together to a whole group of teachers and teaching assistants working closely on developing curriculum and behaviour policies. Effective schools are places where everyone works together to raise standards and improve how pupils learn. This is not always easy and there are many people who find working together difficult. It is also often the case that there are certain personal characteristics that allow for more successful teamwork, better professional relationships and far less tension, stress and conflict with colleagues.

Change in schools is inevitable and often fast moving. These changes are not just arranged to disrupt working practices – they happen because they are necessary. Teaching assistants have to be able to move with the times and work with colleagues without the fear of change. In fact, a really effective teaching assistant will be able to embrace changes that are introduced for the benefit of pupils and their learning. These sessions should help teaching assistants to develop the necessary skills to manage change and work productively alongside colleagues. However, they are not intended as a comprehensive training programme – rather a starting point for further skill development.

### **Learning process**

Teaching is a complex process that links a series of techniques across lessons and across age ranges with the personal processes that individual teachers bring to the job. Many good teachers are unable to explain what they do because the skills and techniques that they use are part of themselves. This makes teaching a very personal process. Having said that, certain skills and techniques can be learned. This is important for teaching assistants, who have the opportunity to take on more of a 'teaching' role. If teaching assistants are expected to support the teacher, working alongside individuals and groups and, in some instances, with the whole class in order to reduce the teacher's workload then their 'teaching' strategies have to be developed. If this doesn't happen, they will find their work more difficult and raising standards will be less successful.

The sessions in this area suggest various teaching and learning processes that will work some of the time and with some pupils in some situations. The more skills and strategies that are developed, the better, because it will mean that each teaching assistant will have a wider repertoire to choose from until eventually there will hardly ever be a situation that arises that hasn't been experienced before and that can't be resolved by an effective, learned technique. It should be noted that the techniques developed in these sessions could be developed in greater depth with further training.

### **Behaviour**

Inappropriate and challenging behaviour in classrooms is almost inevitable. In some schools this will be more challenging than in others, but in every classroom, there will be some bad behaviour that has to be prevented. It has to be stopped on one level because it is debilitating, stressful and exhausting for teachers and teaching assistants to be constantly challenged by poor attitudes and behaviour. On another level, it cannot be allowed to go

unchecked because it prevents pupils from learning. Preventing inappropriate behaviour is about developing consistent systems of control, having high expectations and developing pupils' own positive attitudes. It is also concerned with making sure that all pupils are part of the teaching and learning activities that are taking place, that they are all accessing the curriculum and that they all feel as positive as possible about each lesson and each activity. Teaching assistants need a whole range of control techniques and many of them are illustrated in the training sessions in this area, although this is not a comprehensive training guide.

### Learning challenges

Many pupils bring learning challenges into the classroom. These can range from understanding at a slower level than the majority of pupils, through bilingualism to severe learning difficulties such as some forms of dyslexia. It is also the case that some pupils, because of their personality, their home circumstances and attitudes to school create barriers to learning that make teaching them very difficult. Teaching assistants play a leading role in helping the teacher with the important and difficult task of supporting pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Even if there are only a small number of pupils who fall into these categories, it is an important issue because every pupil needs to learn to the limit of their potential. The role of the teaching assistant with such pupils usually involves supporting them individually or in small groups. When this happens, it is important that the teaching assistant has some knowledge of the kinds of problems faced by particular pupils. These can include areas of moderate and severe learning difficulties to complex issues of social, personality and behaviour disorders. If pupils have severe problems, outside agencies will be involved. Teaching assistants may need to liaise with the agency, attend meetings, understand their recommendations and use them with the pupils in the classroom. It is a very challenging issue and the sessions in this area are designed to help teaching assistants develop the necessary skills to be as effective as possible. If this is an area that training assistants are particularly interested in, they may find further training valuable.

### Records & resources

It may sound simplistic but teachers need to know what their pupils have achieved so far, where they should go next and what resources need to be available to help them get there. Resource management is important and ranges from what the teaching assistant as a human resource does, to how the furniture is arranged for specific lessons. Record-keeping, which covers statutory national tests to such lists as weekly spelling test results, is vital for plotting progress and measuring standards. Teaching assistants need to be able to help teachers by taking on the recording and maintenance of assessment data. This may involve significant ICT skills especially if the school runs programs such as Assessment Manager. On another level, resources have to be moved around, stored and maintained. These can include anything from expensive electrical equipment to simple things such as pencils and paints. Shared planning between teachers and teaching assistants is vital for the smooth running of any classroom. Every teaching assistant needs to know when it is Art & Design, when it is English/Numeracy or Design and Technology, or what equipment certain pupils might need for Chemistry, Physics or Biology lessons. If this planning doesn't take place, lessons will start haphazardly and be ineffective. It is also true that planning effectively, especially in such lessons as Design and Technology, means greater safety. Teaching assistants have to be aware of specific issues, such as the implications of using scissors, saws or pairs of compasses, as well as more general health and safety across the school. The training sessions in this area are an ideal starting point for teaching assistants.

## ICT in the classroom

ICT as a subject is a core part of the National Curriculum and is increasingly becoming an essential set of skills required to survive and prosper in the world. If applied appropriately, ICT can also be a very effective learning tool across the curriculum. As the use of ICT in schools increases, it becomes progressively more important that all staff involved in pupil learning have a good understanding of when and how it should be applied and when other methods are more appropriate. These sessions will provide teaching assistants with a solid understanding of the role that they can play in supporting learning using ICT and also how to make good critical judgements about the appropriateness of particular ICT resources. However, further skills training may be required.

Schools and individual teachers cannot function as effectively as they would like and as parents expect without highly-skilled teaching assistants. It is in the interest of all schools to relate the new skills and knowledge that teaching assistants need, to the effect they inevitably have on raising standards. The issues within these sessions will help to develop those skills and, by doing so, improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

## Managing the training

The aim of *Core Skills Enrichment* is to offer introductory training that sets out key principles as well as aspects of practice. Some sessions (eg those looking at the use of ICT to support learning) may lead into full courses run by the authority or others. Therefore, the content of these sessions is not intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive, merely a starting point in getting teaching assistants to think about essential issues and then consider whether they need further training.

A document which maps the training sessions to the National Occupational Standards has been provided:

- [Standards map](#) (map.pdf)

Training sessions are generally 1.5 hours in length and can stand alone or be combined to fit in with normal twilight, half-day or full-day INSET. Within the tutor's guidance for each session, there are several activities with approximate timings that do not always add up to 1.5 hours. This has been done deliberately to allow some flexibility. The interests and abilities of different groups of teaching assistants will vary, which means that some groups will want to spend more or less time on specific activities. The tutor should make use of this flexibility to personalise the activities so that they fit the needs of the group more effectively. Tutors may also wish to supplement the training sessions; a list of useful links has been provided.

The training sessions have been designed for a group of teaching assistants – enough to organise into several groups of two or three individuals. It has not been automatically assumed that the trainees all come from the same school, enabling training to take part internally or across a cluster of schools.

## Planning forms

Several planning forms to help run the training sessions have been provided.

A planning sheet for tutors to record when and with whom they have done each session has been included. This can also be used as record of progress/scheme of work and is ideal for providing evidence for OFSTED:

- [Tutor session planning sheet](#) (planning.doc)

A personal record sheet that trainees can place in their CPD portfolio:

- **Personal record sheet** (personal\_record.doc)

A 'notification form' that can be put on a noticeboard to say when and where a session is running, the title of the session and who is in the group:

- **Notification form**

A template that tutors can use to create their own handouts:

- **Handout template** (handout.dot)

Certificates that tutors can give to trainees when they have completed training sessions:

- **Certificate 1** (certificate1.pdf)
- **Certificate 2** (certificate2.pdf)

## Tutor's guidance

The tutor's role involves working through the activities in each session skilfully. They also need to be able to do the following.

- **Prepare well** – Although the sessions are fully resourced, it would be unwise to arrive at a training session not having at least read through the material.
- **Welcome and introduce members of the group to each other** – At the start of a session or series of sessions, everyone, including the tutor, should be given the opportunity to introduce themselves and, where possible, briefly outline their background and experience. The 'comfort zone' that this creates is essential if the group is going to work well together. The tutor is now in a better position to make sure that everyone is allowed to talk, answer questions, express their views and share their experiences without feeling patronised or ridiculed. The group atmosphere needs to be one where everyone's views are valued and listened to.
- **Chair discussions** – Within any group, there are bound to be colleagues who, for many reasons, don't get on. Each tutor should be aware of the various irritations that can arise and be prepared to use as many interpersonal skills as possible to make group interaction effective. When chairing group discussions or leading the activities within the sessions, tutors should be aware of the following personality types:
  - *Friendly and responsive colleagues* – They will smile, nod, use open-handed gestures and have a relaxed posture with lots of eye contact and a relaxed tone of voice.
  - *Colleagues who control and dominate* – They might point at others, lean forward when speaking or listening; they may interrupt, ignore responses, use loud rapid speech and try to establish a controlling tone of voice.
  - *Unresponsive and aggressive colleagues* – They may greet any exchange of views with a set mouth and face; they will stare, have abrupt movement or speech, keep an inappropriate distance and look beyond you while speaking in a harsh tone of voice.
  - *Timid and submissive colleagues* – They will be nervous and avoid eye contact. They will allow colleagues to interrupt them and when they do speak, will use a hesitant and soft tone of voice.
- **Be a good listener** – If you do not listen carefully, you are more likely to mishear or not hear at all and, consequently, make mistakes. Skilful listening is a major part of the tutor's role as a facilitating chairperson. This means understanding and appreciating what each speaker is saying before beginning to interpret and analyse the information that is being shared.

Some of the rules for being an effective listener and, by definition, a better chairperson or group leader are as follows:

- Allow the speaker to finish talking; avoid completing their sentences or making it obvious that you are burning to say something.
- Try not to think about the next point you wish to make or you will miss what is being said.
- Use your memory to recognise key points and important pieces of relevant information. It is often useful if you begin your reply by restating the key points that have been made.
- Be objective rather than subjective and try not to let your interpretation of what is being said be distorted by any adverse feelings you have about the speaker's clothes, appearance or manner.
- **Use specific techniques** – Many of the activities within the sessions that use presentations and handouts rely on the teaching assistants in the group sharing their experiences together with new ideas, discussing the material and expressing their opinions. Two techniques that tutors can use over and over again to help this process are 'brainstorms' and 'buzz groups'. These are described below in more detail.

## Brainstorms

There are usually two stages:

- **Brainstorm** – This lasts for a few minutes. It is important that the tutor has a whiteboard or flip chart and the appropriate writing materials. The whole group needs to be able to see and read what is on the flip chart/whiteboard:
  - Write the title of the topic on the flip chart/whiteboard. This is better done in the form of a question, eg 'How many ways of getting pupils' attention do you use?'
  - Ask for the group's responses. Remind them to give them to you quickly. The tutor should stand with their back to the group writing down their suggestions.
  - Don't allow anyone to comment on any of the suggestions.
  - Include all suggestions and don't censor or reject any ideas at this stage.
  - Write as fast and as legibly as possible, encouraging more responses.
  - Stop when you feel you have enough material or when it is obvious that contributions are slowing down and becoming hesitant.
- **Summary** – This summarises the ideas expressed in the brainstorm and lasts slightly longer:
  - Give yourself and the group time to read through the contributions – or read them aloud yourself.
  - Try to link them together by asking open-ended questions such as 'Is it possible to group any of these points together?' or 'Is it possible to prioritise any of these points?', etc. It is also useful to ask for a specific contribution to be explained.

The summary leads to:

- **Discussion** – It is important to use the brainstorm to make inferences and draw conclusions. It is no good just leaving it as a list of contributions. Try to lead a discussion that identifies priorities and suggests 'best' practice.

## Buzz groups

This technique allows larger groups to be broken down into smaller units. This happens very often in the sessions when the group is asked to work in pairs or threes. The smaller group focuses its attention on a particular problem or question and then, after a short period of time, shares their findings with the larger group through a wider discussion. Buzz groups:

- encourage everyone to participate and share ideas
- encourage active rather than passive learning
- promote group discussion
- allow a smooth transition from the small group to the larger group
- are useful for gathering information, sharing it and producing a coherent summary.

Each small group will need equipment such as paper and pencils/pens and the tutor will need a whiteboard or flip chart with the appropriate markers. There are usually three stages:

- **Buzz:**
  - The task should be made clear through a carefully-worded question, statement or specific task.
  - One person in each group may need to be the 'scribe' or spokesperson.
  - Point out the task and tell the groups to start.
  - Walk around so that you can pick up any useful information from the groups and be available for questions and clarification.
  - Stop the 'buzz' at the end of a specific time span or when it is obvious that they have exhausted the topic and are no longer discussing it.
- **Discussion:**
  - Bring the trainees all together and ask members of each group to state their conclusions briefly. The first groups may have a lot to say and later groups very little because earlier groups will have already said most of what is useful. This makes it important to rotate the groups that start the discussions.
  - There will be lots of common ideas and ideas which logically form into groups and patterns. It is important that the tutor uses the whiteboard or flip chart to identify these patterns and summarise them clearly.
  - Invite opinions from everyone and use open-ended questions with 'what', 'why' and 'how' to tease out further details.
- **Conclusion** – It is important that key points are identified, highlighted and discussed further. The tutor should expand on the issues raised by using a presentation/handout that contains further or more specific information.

## Using this resource

### Navigation

Running in standard Web-browser software, the onscreen content is designed to offer you rapid access to all the information. There are two main routes to follow:

- **Section by section** – Click on the tabs across the top of the screen and the subsection headings that appear in the left-hand menu to browse through the resource.
- **Via the index** – Click on the index tab. This provides all the training session areas in alphabetical order. This is an ideal approach for quick, specific searches.

Click on 'Core Skills Enrichment' at the top of the screen to return to the front page of the resource.

### Digital files

A range of digital files are provided:

- **Tutor's guidance** – Session notes are provided as PDF (portable document format) files.
- **Trainee resources** – These are provided as Microsoft® Word and Microsoft® PowerPoint files and can be used as they are or in edited forms. They can be printed out, copied and distributed as required.

To access the digital files, either click on the links found in the resource, or look in the folder called **digital\_files**. You will need Microsoft® Word and PowerPoint, and Adobe Reader (or compatible software) to open the digital files.

### Technical

If you experience any technical difficulties when using *Core Skills Enrichment*, please call technical support on 01223 224949 or 01223 350555. Technical support is available to licensed users during normal working hours. Please be sure to note down as much information as possible about your system, what you were attempting to do, and how it was failing, as this information can help to find a solution more quickly.

You can also contact us via [coreskills@pearson.co.uk](mailto:coreskills@pearson.co.uk).

### Optimal performance

To get the most out of *Core Skills Enrichment*, a modern Web browser (such as Microsoft® Internet Explorer 5 or Netscape 6 or later) is recommended.

### Using digital files

Following a link to a digital file may open the file within a browser window. To save a file (for example, a Microsoft® Word file) so that it can be opened in the relevant software and edited, right-click on the link and select **Save Target As...** . The file can then be printed or saved to a suitable location on the network for the trainees to access.

To make PDFs appear in a new window, open Adobe Reader, select **Edit>Preferences**, click on **Internet**, and then untick **Display PDF in Browser**.

If your computer does not already have Adobe Reader installed, look in the **installers** folder for the appropriate installer for your operating system.

### Network installation

*Core Skills Enrichment* can be accessed over a network. No installation is necessary; just copy the **coreskills** folder from the CD to a suitable shared location.

To make accessing the resource easy, you could create a shortcut on each networked machine pointing to the file, **index.html**, on the server.