# CPD workshop: How teaching assistants can support student learning

<https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/cpd-workshop-how-teaching-assistants-can-support-student-learning/>

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**Continuing his regular series, Steve Burnage talks us through CPD ideas that can be adapted. He offers a template for a 45-minute workshop with free handouts and slides on our website. This instalment looks at how to ensure teaching assistants are best able to support students’ learning and progress**

To deliver this 45-minute CPD training in your school, follow the advice and structure in the article below and download the free supporting handout and the PowerPoint presentation by clicking on the buttons above.

The purpose of this article is to provide a summary of a 45-minute interactive training session that could be suitable for a support staff meeting, development group, small group CPD session or for individual study.

The training outline is included below while the PowerPoint slides and an accompanying participant’s handout is available for free from the SecEd website (see above).

#### Slide 1: Welcome

In order to facilitate this training, you will need:

* Copies of the PowerPoint slides printed three to a page with space for notes for each participant.
* Copies of the accompanying “Amazing TAs” handout for each participant.
* Flip chart paper and marker pens.

#### Slide 2: The role of the teaching assistant

Teaching assistants play a central role in supporting students’ learning and progress in almost every school and college in the UK, yet the requirements of the role are often blurred and there is still some uncertainty about how teaching assistants can work to bring about maximum impact.

**Activity:**

As you watch this video clip, be thinking about the role of teaching assistants in your school.

* How closely does the role described here match the role in your school?
* What would you add or change to the role described?

Before we move on to the next slide, use some flip chart paper to share ideas on what an effective teaching assistant does.

#### Slide 3: Supporting what?

The role of any teaching assistant is to raise standards through the support of pupils, teachers, the curriculum and the school. Yet Ofsted has previously noted that many teaching assistants are not used effectively, despite many schools investing a lot of money in them. So, what can we do to ensure that teaching assistants offer the best support to our pupils, teachers, curriculum and schools?

#### Slide 4: Working in partnership

Teaching assistants should work in partnership with teaching staff. The classroom teacher acts as senior colleague and subject specialist with the teaching assistant acting as assistant to the teacher and a specialist in additional needs. As a matter of routine, teaching staff and in-class support staff agree a plan of action before deployment – integrated into lesson planning and identifying key pupils/groups or activities the teaching assistant should focus on.

The teaching assistant should be identified in every stage of the lesson and recognise where he/she would be most beneficial during starter activity, main delivery, independent working and the plenary.

Opportunities for teaching assistants to deploy assessment for learning – to be communicated with the teacher – should also be discussed and possibly identified during the planning process.

**Activity:**

* On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you meet each of these criteria at the moment?
* What would need to change to move each of these bullet points one step closer to 10?

#### Slide 5: Supporting techniques

In-class support staff do not always permanently attach themselves to a student, instead adopting one or more of the following models (with agreement of teaching staff and/or after discussion in the planning process):

* Relaying – in-class support staff move periodically between students identified as being priorities for support due to additional needs.
* Zoning – in-class support staff locate themselves near a group of students with additional needs, monitoring and providing input when necessary.
* Coaching – in-class support staff are temporarily assigned to an individual or small group of students to guide them through a task that may prove particularly difficult (such as an extended writing or reading task when there are literacy difficulties).
* Facilitating – in-class support staff provide “drop-in support” by setting up assistive technology or other specialised equipment in the classroom, adapting resources, helping a student to organise coursework/homework etc.
* Supervising – in-class support staff oversee the higher-ability or independent learners.
* Safeguarding – in-class support staff monitor and where necessary assist in activities that pose a manageable risk to the health and safety of a student with an additional need, particularly those with visual impairment, a medical condition or a physical disability.

#### Slide 6: Relaying

Often teaching assistants feel the need to attach themselves to one particular student. This can be a waste of time and resources. An effective teaching assistant will move periodically between students identified as being priorities for support due to additional needs.

**Activity:**

* How would you identify which students to support in each class?
* How would you discuss this with the class teacher?

#### Slide 7: Zoning

Teaching assistants locate themselves near a group of students with additional needs, monitoring and providing input when necessary.

**Activity:**

* How would you identify where to position yourself in a class to maximise your “zone”?
* How would you discuss this with the class teacher?

#### Slide 8: Coaching

Teaching assistants are temporarily assigned to an individual or small group of students to guide them through a task that may prove particularly difficult (such as an extended writing or reading task when there are literacy difficulties).

**Activity:**

* How would you identify which students to coach and when?
* How would you discuss this with the class teacher?

#### Slide 9: Facilitating

Teaching assistants provide “drop-in support” by setting up assistive technology or other specialised equipment in the classroom, adapting resources, helping a student to organise coursework/homework etc.

**Activity:**

* How would you identify when and how to use drop-in support?
* How will you ensure that you can operate any required equipment, resources or machinery effectively?
* How would you discuss this with the class teacher?

#### Slide 10: Supervising

The needs of the most able learners is often neglected when schools consider their students with SEN. Often teachers would not naturally think of assigning a teaching assistant to support the learning of most able students, but why not?

**Activity:**

* Do you think a class teacher should assign a teaching assistant to support able students?
* How would you identify an exceptionally able learners in need of support?
* How would you discuss this with the class teacher?

#### Slide 11: Safeguarding

Teaching assistants monitor, and where necessary, assist in activities that pose a manageable risk to the health and safety of a student with an additional need, particularly those with visual impairment, a medical condition or a physical disability.

**Activity:**

* How would you identify an activity that may pose a manageable risk to a student?
* How would you identify an appropriate support strategy?
* How would you discuss this with the class teacher?

#### Slide 12: Challenges

Teaching assistants work very hard to support students’ learning and progress. Often it is a lack of support, collaboration or understanding on the part of the class teacher that can lead to a teaching assistant not being fully effective in their role.

**Activity:**

* What do you find most challenging about your work as a teaching assistant?
* What are the solutions?

#### Slide 13: Things teaching assistants like

Often the teaching assistant is the best person to know how to work effectively in the classroom and how to get the very best out of students of all abilities who are in need of classroom support.

**Activity:**

* What do you like to see happen in a classroom?
* What helps you do your job as well as you can?
* What needs to change?

#### Slide 14: Conclusions

The role of the teaching assistant is very important. The effective deployment of support staff can make the difference between a child succeeding or failing.

Much of the teaching assistant’s role is directed by the teacher, but an outstanding teaching assistant is also intuitive and responds to the needs of the children in front of them.

It is important that both teacher and teaching assistant work together with the aim that all the children in the class are learning throughout the lesson. Children should make progress through suitably challenging activities and questioning.

#### Slide 15: Making it work at work

**Activity:**

What will you do as a result of this training? Working in groups, look at the action sheet you have produced during this training.

* What are the three key learning points for you?
* How will you know when your change has been successful?
* ***Steve Burnage has experience leading challenging inner city and urban secondary schools. He now works as a freelance trainer, consultant and author for staff development, strategic development, performance management and coaching and mentoring. Visit*** [***www.simplyinset.co.uk***](http://www.simplyinset.co.uk/) ***and read his previous articles for SecEd, including his previous CPD workshop overviews, at*** [***http://bit.ly/2u1KW9e***](http://bit.ly/2u1KW9e)