

Teacher aides as Integral Team Educators

Teacher aides are invaluable members of the classroom team and will at times feel like the superhero, so teams make conscious decisions about how to most effectively use their assistance and the precious time with them. Here are some handy hints to get started:

Get to know each other

Don't underestimate the power of making a connection and investing time in getting to know your TA. Remember it's likely that the TA in your classroom is going to be your superhero for the rest of the academic year! To get things off to a great start, schedule an informal meeting with your Teacher Aide. Find out a little bit about them and let them know how grateful you are for their help and support. Take the time to ask your TA a few questions that will help you to determine their skill set, their work style and most importantly to define their role.

- What do you consider to be your strengths as a Teacher Aide?
- What aspects of your role do you enjoy the most?
- What aspects of your role do you not enjoy?
- How can I make your job easier?

From here, you'll need to decide the roles your Teacher Aide will play in instructional teaching such as leading group work and in supporting students such as

- PBS
- Zones of Regulation
- AAC and
- resource development.

Make sure that your TA has the necessary qualifications, professional development, confidence and support to undertake these roles. If not work out how best to support your TA to undertake these roles through their Annual Professional Development Plan or through asking Administration for your TA to be supported to do some further professional development. It's important to remember that there is no 'one size fits all' of how to use a teacher aide effectively and that your decisions should be in line with school policy.

Teacher Aide visibility

Mix it up and give your TA the opportunity to contribute to the whole class in a visible way. There are many benefits to making your Teacher Aide more visible in the classroom. Why not ask confident TA's if they would be happy to be the class scribe during shared writing tasks, to demonstrate resources or equipment. Perhaps you could encourage your Teacher Aide to focus on stretching your students' curiosity and reasoning ability by asking open-ended questions.

This approach to using a Teacher Aide time benefits the whole class, raises your TA's profile and helps to break down any misperception that TA's work on specific tasks only. You will need to ensure that your TA is both qualified and comfortable to contribute in this way. It's also important to note that your TA should not replace direct instruction teaching from the classroom teacher.

Take a photo!

Take a photo of your TA and place it in spaces around the room where you are referring to your class team - put it next to your photo. Also include your TA's photo on things like AAC or PODD - basically if your photo is anywhere to be seen in the room or on AAC for students so should your TA's.

Organise your room with your Teacher Aide

Organise your classroom with your TA so that you can bounce ideas off each other about where best to place and store things. That way you will both know where things are. There's nothing more frustrating for a TA than having to rummage around for teaching resources at the last minute. It's the ultimate time waster.

Where possible label the classroom as to where things are, for example, label the cupboards with their contents and always tell you Teacher Aide if you have moved things around.

Organise your Teacher Aide's resource making time

Give your TA the tools that they need to do their resource development job well by making sure you have the things needed for resource making readily available clearly labelled with written (or verbal) instructions and accessible.

Use your TA's time effectively by creating a ready-to-go folder of things you need developed and place it where the TA knows where to look it so they can work on class resources in their resource development time.

Communicate

Communication is key to your relationship with your TA, a successful classroom and optimal student learning and engagement.

Communicate at the start of the year about your vision. Communicate at the start of term about programs, term calendars, student goals, classroom and behaviour strategies. Communicate each week about your weekly plans, resources needed, weekly events and roles during the week. Communicate each day about daily program, roles, student needs. Days are busy so make communication efficient and effective - catch up for 5 minutes before school starts or the afternoon before for daily chats. Make designated time for a catch up at a mutually agreed time for year and term chats or during student free days.

During the busy, fast-paced school day, it's not always possible to sit and discuss things in person and in a timely way. So, it's a good idea to set up a TA Communication Notebook to ensure that you get feedback. A Teacher Aide Communication Notebook doesn't have to be fancy it might just be useful to have one!

Some days can be challenging and some days you will have had to work as a team on multiple layers with learning, student behaviour, student safety, medical issues. Always, check in with each other to ensure your TA is ok.

Just as it is important to communicate plans before learning experiences, it is also crucial to share feedback. Feedback from your TA regarding student achievement and progress can form an important part of your assessment and will help to inform future planning, teaching and learning.

Build the Team

Share your vision for the classroom with your TA, ask for their input and feedback build the team! Share each of your skills and expertise with each other - capacity build. Lead with confidence but humility. We are all life- long learners - celebrate new learning.

Share the load with tasks that are required during the day - toileting, feeding cleaning up. Let your TA know that you are on board with and equally responsible for sharing the load with non-direct teaching tasks that are part and parcel of the day. Tag team with these jobs.

Wellbeing - "/>

Say "thank you" to let them know that you recognise and appreciate the valuable contribution they make to the education and support of your students.

Working effectively with a Teacher Aide and making the most of their much sought after time takes planning. It's like most other aspects of teaching. If you put in the time and effort to set up well, you'll thank yourself later. Perhaps the most important things to remember are to:

- build and nurture a positive relationship with your TA
- communicate effectively with your TA
- provide your TA with the support and resources that they need to do their job effectively.

Teacher Aides have a huge impact on the lives of students. Whether it be a reassuring quiet word or an encouraging gentle hand on a shoulder, they provide expertise, support and encouragement, enhance your teaching team and some days will feel like your superhero!. (Adapted from Teach Starter).