



UNIT-3

Working in the Classroom

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Work confidently in a classroom setting
- ✓ Understand the National Literacy Strategy
- ✓ Discuss the National Numeracy Strategy

Unit 3

Working in the Classroom

Teaching assistants provide invaluable support for teachers in a classroom setting. They are expected to perform in a manner that enables the teacher to concentrate exclusively on setting tasks and delivering lessons in a structured manner. A teaching assistant will be called upon to provide a variety of supplementary services to help teachers perform their own primary duties. One example of which being to prepare the teaching environment ahead of each lesson and ensure pupils have access to all necessary resources.

When lessons are not currently taking place, the teaching assistant covers a variety of administrative duties and assists with extracurricular activities. Some teaching assistants help students across a broad range of subject areas, while others focus on more specific areas of teaching, such as mathematics, literacy or music.

Responsibilities of a teaching assistant in the classroom

A teaching assistant's typical duties may include the following:

- Preparing the physical environment of the classroom for lessons
- Ensuring all required learning resources are provided
- Helping teachers create viable lesson plans
- Encouraging children to take part in discussions
- Helping pupils of all ages with their reading and writing skills
- Reading stories and extracts to groups of pupils
- Noting students who appear to be struggling to complete tasks
- Providing specialist support for pupils with special needs
- Organizing and supervising group activities
- Assessing students' progress and general performance
- Planning and assisting with extra-curricular activities
- Organizing meetings and conversing with pupils' parents
- Teaching classes when teachers are absent
- Keeping the classroom environment tidy and orderly
- Contributing to classroom health and safety

Supporting Pupils' learning

Studies have demonstrated how adults and children process information in very different ways. Different learning styles involve different amounts of listening, touching, looking and speaking. It's also known that children and adults alike study with different levels of effectiveness at various times of the day. Just as some find it easy to work in the morning, others take away more from lessons attended in the afternoon.

Teaching assistants are expected to acknowledge and understand all of the above. They must realise the importance of adapting their teaching and supportive techniques to suit the individual learning styles of the pupils they work with. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching, or the services provided by a teaching assistant.

During learning activities, pupils should be encouraged:

- to explore their environment or investigate new information/ideas
- to discover things for themselves through a wide variety of experiences
- to embrace the mistakes they make as opportunities to learn and grow from the experience
- to gradually build a sense of independence and autonomy
- to take a genuine interest in the subject matter, rather than it being forced upon them
- to use all resources at their disposal to take maximum value from each lesson

The Teaching Assistant's role in supporting learning activities involves:

- Helping teachers plan and oversee learning activities
- Ensuring all appropriate learning materials and supplementary resources are provided
- Adapting and modifying activities to suit individual learning styles
- Helping every pupil confidently achieve their goals and objectives
- Being available to answer questions and provide support at all times
- Encouraging children to become independent and make their own decisions

In order to become an effective teaching assistant, you need to get to know the typical classroom activities and preferred lesson structures in the school in which you work. The more familiar you become with the classroom environment you work in, the easier it becomes to assist those you work with.

The National Literacy Strategy

Primary School - The Literacy Hour

One of the most important aspects of the daily classroom experience for primary school pupils is the literacy hour. True to its name, the literacy hour requires all primary school pupils to undergo at least 1 hour of activities focused on the improvement of literacy skills, every school day. This may include writing activities, reading activities, spelling and grammar activities and so on. More often than not, the literacy hour takes place during the morning, rather than in the afternoon.

The National Literacy Strategy was introduced by the government to encourage schools to take a more regimented approach to improving pupils' literacy. Official government policy also states that the literacy hour should be broken up into smaller segments. The first two 15-minute periods and the last 10 minutes are dedicated to whole class teaching. The central twenty-minute period is dedicated to group and independent work.

Secondary School - Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy

Also part of the National Literacy Strategy, the key stage 3 literacy strategy is aimed at pupils aged 11 to 14. Support is provided for those transitioning from primary school to secondary school, while additional 'booster classes' are available for all pupils facing challenges with reading and writing at an appropriate level.

Helping pupils to develop their literacy skills

Teaching assistants are expected to play a direct role in helping the pupils they work with improve their literacy skills. Your duties will include planning and supporting literacy activities in the classroom, contributing to discussions and providing additional support for pupils experiencing difficulties with their reading and writing skills.

Supporting primary school pupils, you will help them to:

- Improve their reading and writing skills
- Correct and learn from their mistakes
- Build confident spelling and grammar skills
- Write by hand in a legible manner
- Take an interest in language in general
- Boost their vocabulary and knowledge of words
- Plan, draft and write legible texts
- Become interested in books and literature

- Use their imagination when writing
- Take genuine pleasure in reading and writing
- Build the confidence to express themselves in writing

Supporting secondary school pupils, you will help them to:

- Take an interest in a much wider range of books, poems, plays and nonfiction works
- Get to know some of the most important writers from the history of literature
- Read between the lines and evaluate texts in an analytical way
- Question how writers develop characters and plots for their books
- Explore different ways of presenting writing for different purposes
- Develop advanced spelling, grammar and handwriting skills
- Take their already established vocabularies to the next level.
- Confidently review works of literature and share their opinions
- Express their likes and dislikes about the books they read

The National Numeracy Strategy

Primary School - The Numeracy Hour

Like the literacy hour, the numeracy hour requires all primary school pupils to undergo at least 1 hour of numeracy-based activities in every school day. The structure of the numeracy hour isn't quite as formal as that of the literacy hour – each hour consists of a 10-minute oral and mental starter, a 40-minute main teaching activity and then a plenary session.

Secondary School - Springboard 7

Also introduced by the government, the Springboard 7 mathematics initiative is designed to help year 6 pupils transition smoothly to year 7, by consolidating all they've learned in the past year.

Helping pupils to develop their numeracy skills

In order to effectively support both teachers and pupils, it is important for teaching assistants to understand:

- The nature of the activities planned for each session
- The objectives and goals of the pupils
- How much support pupils may require
- How to pinpoint and report potential problems to the teacher

When supporting pupils in primary school with their numeracy skills, you will help them to:

- Build a detailed introductory knowledge of numbers
- Understand the importance of good numeracy skills
- Solve simple maths problems independently
- Use the basic functions of a calculator
- Create and present simple tables, charts and graphs
- Associate mathematics with real-world scenarios
- Master the basics of mental arithmetic
- Work with a variety of helpful mathematical tools and resources

When supporting pupils in secondary schools, you will be helping them to:

- Build a deeper understanding of the importance and relevance of mathematics
- Carry out more complex calculations independently
- Understand the more advanced features of a calculator
- Bring logic and problem-solving skills to the field of mathematics
- Create advanced tables, graphs, charts and other visual guides
- Understand the various letter symbols in algebra
- Use mental arithmetic to perform most basic calculations

Behaviour Management

Another important aspect of the teaching assistant's role is to monitor pupils' behaviour in a classroom setting. Teachers and schools outline their own policies regarding the behaviour of pupils (both during and between lessons), which must be understood and enforced by the teaching assistant. All instances of problematic behaviour must be noted, addressed and reported formally.

Teaching assistants can promote positive and responsible behaviour in the classroom in a variety of ways, such as:

- Knowing every pupil's name and using it
- Maintaining a positive and optimistic attitude
- Ensuring each pupil feels important and valued
- Remaining in constant communication with pupils
- Providing extra support for struggling pupils
- Preparing interesting activities and engaging materials
- Encouraging independence and autonomy
- Demonstrating trust

Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE)

PSHE refers to a standardized framework wherein the social and personal development of every pupil is encouraged and supported by the school.

PSHE can help pupils:

- Build confidence and self-belief
- Become independent and autonomous
- Accept and learn from their mistakes
- Complete more tasks autonomously
- Build a sense of trust in others
- Take responsibility for their actions
- Develop awareness of their behaviour
- Establish and preserve meaningful relationships
- Adopt a positive and optimistic attitude
- Become active participants in every discussion
- Live a healthy and positive lifestyle
- Play a role in everyday health and safety
- Understand the consequences of their actions
- Take a genuine interest in learning

As a Teaching Assistant, you can play a key role in the PSHE of your pupils by:

- Empowering pupils to take ownership of their actions
- Leading by example with a positive and optimistic attitude
- Demonstrating relentless patience and tenacity
- Providing every pupil with personal support when needed
- Actively listening to what pupils have to say
- Identifying the potential in every pupil you work with
- Encouraging pupils to discuss their problems and concerns
- Overseeing health, safety and hygiene in the classroom
- Ensuring that all conflicts are resolved quickly and amicably
- Encouraging independence and autonomy
- Being the best role model you can be

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Cheryl Jones-Walker, (2015), Identity Work in the Classroom.*