TEACHER AIDES

IN

SPECIAL EDUCATION

BY

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A treatise submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Education of the Handicapped Course - Christchurch Teachers College.

1987
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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

The role of teacher aides, in particular, and ancillary staff, in general, is emerging as a topic of considerable debate in our changing education system. It is not surprising, perhaps, that so much controversy and misunderstanding surrounds their deployment. This paper will attempt to clarify some of the central issues regarding teacher aides in Special Education.

Initially, I will present a synopsis of terms relevant to the ensuing discussion - among them; teacher aide, paraprofessional, attendant, and teacher's assistant.

In the second chapter, the discussion will centre around a brief historical analysis of the use of teacher aides and the manner in which their role has changed as the mainstreaming issue has materialized.

While recognizing that principals create unique job descriptions appropriate to their schools' particular needs - within the guidelines set by the School Administration Handbook¹ - the third chapter will focus on the perceived and actual roles teacher aides are expected to fill.

The fourth chapter will consider the
training available for teacher aides in New Zealand. It will quickly become evident that this, despite the efforts of ESPA - the union that teacher aides belong to - is neither appropriate nor abundant.

In light of the paucity of pre-service and in-service training available for teacher aides, the fifth chapter will consist of suggestions for teacher aides in their role as 'helpers' in individualised programmes for children with special needs.

Some of the pitfalls and problems - including teacher aide burnout - will then be highlighted in chapter six in an effort to arouse the sensitivities of three groups in particular - principals, teachers, and teacher aides.

Finally, I will propose a list of recommendations arising out of the previous analysis of teacher aides and their role in Special Education in New Zealand.

Although the central focus of this paper is the teacher aide, it is important at this stage to clearly define the roles of various ancillary staff contributing to Special Education.

Paraprofessional:

In the American literature this term is used synonymously with 'teacher aide.' In
New Zealand, however, it has a broader definition, encompassing teacher aide, librarian assistant, laboratory assistant, teaching assistant, attendant, or nursing aide.

**Teacher Aide:**

This denotes someone employed by the Education Board and used within a school at the discretion of the principal in non-teaching tasks. The *Draft Review of Special Education* (1987) defines a teacher aide as assisting with "intensive supervision, personal hygiene, mobility, and communication activities under a teacher's direction."³

**Teaching Assistant:**

While ESPA recommended that the name 'teacher aide' be changed to 'teacher assistant' in 1986,⁴ a teaching assistant in the traditional sense is utilised in an IHC Pre-School or Special School (e.g. Allenvale, Christchurch). Although not a trained teacher, he/she is qualified to work with severely handicapped students. For example, he/she may have completed the one year course held at Christchurch Teachers' College, 'Teaching People With Disabilities'.

**Attendant:**

He/She is employed, particularly in units/schools for the physically disabled - as at Hammersley Park, Christchurch - to support
the disabled child within education. This might include assisting with toileting (e.g. catheterising), bracing, and feeding. Generally an attendant works in liaison with the occupational therapist and physiotherapist. In other settings, e.g. Special Schools, teacher aides, perform attendant duties.

* 

Endnotes:


2. ESPA: Education Service Paraprofessional Association.


CHAPTER TWO:

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Over the years since teacher aides were first introduced into the New Zealand Education System, their role has changed significantly. Initially they were employed to perform clerical and supervisory duties that required no professional training. For example, a typical day for a teacher aide might involve typing and duplicating materials, housekeeping chores in the classroom, and playground supervision.

The rationale for the usefulness of this role was that it gave teachers more time with individual children by freeing them from non-teaching duties.

Today - despite the fact that no pre-service or in-service training is required, or provided by the Department of Education - the teacher aide usually has direct involvement in the instructional process. This may take several forms, including supervision of small-group activities, listening to a child reading, and/or assisting a student on a one-to-one basis with his/her individualised programme.

One sees then, that the teacher aide's role has evolved from one of largely engaging in clerical work to assisting in the implementation of the classroom programme under the direction of the teacher. This shift in emphasis
has notable implications for the current main-streaming issue: The presence of a teacher aide creates a variety of different options for accommodating special needs children in their least restrictive environments. For example (1) by supervising the rest of the class, the teacher aide can free the teacher to work with the special needs child on a one-to-one basis; (2) the teacher aide can be attached to a particular special needs child and be charged with assisting him/her in functioning satisfactorily in the mainstream setting; (3) teacher aides are a more affordable resource than certificated teachers in an already financially strained Special Education system.

The historical shift in the teacher aides' role has not happened without criticism, however. Although directly involved in the education of children, no provision has been made for training teacher aides for this role. ESPA - Education Service Paraprofessional Association - has, without success, submitted to the Department of Education a case for providing pre- and in-service training for teacher aides. Their efforts to date, and further comments about training will ensue in chapter four. For now, I outline, for the benefit of teacher aides, some policy details of ESPA (abridged).
1. **NAME:**

The name of the Association shall be "**THE EDUCATION SERVICE PARAPROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION (INCORPORATED)**"

2. **INTERPRETATION:**

The meaning of the term "Paraprofessional" shall include employment by the Department of Education, an Education Board or any other educational authority recognised by the Director-General of Education, as a teacher aide, a library assistant, a laboratory assistant, an assistant in an IHC group at school, an attendant at a school for physically handicapped children, or a nursing aide, and whose salaries are set by determination by the Director-General of Education.

3. **OBJECTS:**

The objects for which the Association is established are: (a) to uphold and maintain the just claims of members individually and collectively; (b) to represent the interests of members on all matters related to rates of remuneration and conditions of service; (c) to advance the cause of education generally.

4. **ELIGIBILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP:**

Membership of the Association shall be available to all persons who are currently employed in ancillary appointments (including those above).
5. **SUBSCRIPTIONS:**

The annual subscription for membership of the Association shall be as set from time to time by the Annual General Meeting of the Association. The method of payment shall be either by deduction from salary or by the payment of a single annual subscription to the National Secretary of the Association.

6. **ANNUAL MEETINGS:**

The Annual General Meeting of the Association shall be held during the August holidays, and formal notification of the actual dates and venue of the annual meeting will be advised in writing to all branch secretaries not later than 1 April in any year.

7. **FUNCTIONS OF ANNUAL MEETING:**

The functions of Annual Meeting shall be:

(a) to elect the National President, National Vice-President and other members of the National Executive; (b) to determine the policy of the Association in all areas of interest to the Association and its members; (c) to consider proposals to amend the rules of the Association; (d) to determine actions to be taken to achieve the objects of the Association.

8. **REGISTERED OFFICE:**

The Registered Office of the Association shall be situated at Education House, West Block, 178-182 Willis St, P.O. Box 466, Wgtn.
Endnotes:


2. Education Service Paraprofessional Association. Policy and Rules. (abridged)
CHAPTER THREE:

JOB DESCRIPTION

In a two year NFER research study conducted in 70 schools throughout England and Wales (1982-1984), the researchers came to the conclusion that;

... ancillaries constitute a major staffing resource whose imaginative deployment can greatly enhance the education of pupils with special needs in mainstream settings.

Similarly, in New Zealand, the job description of teacher aides and other ancillary staff must be carefully designed to ensure that they are used productively for the benefit of students, teachers, and their personal career satisfaction.

The Department of Education does not prescribe a job description for teacher aides, but rather provides a list of guidelines in the School Administration Handbook. These are as follows:

11.16.7. Teacher Aides. Teacher aides may be appointed to schools under the same conditions as other ancillary staff as set out in paragraph 11.16.2.

11.16.8. Duties of Teacher Aides. Aides are subject to the control of the head teacher and also of the teacher to whom they are for the time being assigned. With the approval of the
District Senior Inspector, the following duties, formerly largely performed by junior assistants, may be carried out by teacher aides under the guidance of trained teachers.

(a) **Usual non-teaching tasks to assist the professional work of teachers** such as assisting with the preparation and clearing of a classroom for different periods, (e.g. preparation and distribution of materials and organisation of the room for developmental periods; mathematics periods; art and craft activities; physical education periods and also assistance in the training of children in keeping with these tasks); toilet training; putting on and off of coats, shoes, clothes etc. and associated routines. Supervision of infants during intervals and lunch periods and on excursions - getting in and out of buses etc. Sick bay duties. Preparation and repair of apparatus and material and assistance with displays of work. Banking, collection of money, notices within classrooms. Book preparation and maintenance including libraries.

(b) **Additional duties including simplified teaching tasks which may be performed with the approval of the District Senior Inspector** as follows:
i New entrants (infants): Taking small groups of children under the supervision of the class teacher for practice tasks and developmental activities. Speaking to small groups of children and encouraging children to talk about experiences and activities and interests at home. Telling and reading stories to children and encouraging them to listen, to comment, and to join in repetitive parts. Encouraging children to act out ideas of themselves performing activities (washing, walking, jumping etc) and of animals and vehicles they can imitate. Giving children practice in basic patterns of speech introduced by the teacher from time to time, and after the teacher has introduced variations, providing further occasions where they may be practised and distinguished.

ii Older infant children: Reading stories to groups of children and discussing aspects with them. Assisting with group and practice work in reading and language programmes in first and second year infant classes under the supervision of the teacher.
Listening to a child using the skills he has attained in reading. Encouraging children to read and interpret supplementary books with pictures and captions and to give captions for their own pictures and activities. Helping with dictionary work in oral and writing tasks requiring checking of sounds and words. Assisting with checking of work done by children.

iii Older children: Taking responsibility for supervising groups at work on understood practice and exploratory tasks. Oversight of children, under the supervision of the teacher, in simple physical education activities selected and planned by the teacher. Listening to drama and reading groups. Guiding work in Maori culture and assisting with club work, when the person concerned has special interest and ability.

11.16.9. The Aide and Teachers. The extent and the limits of the aide's responsibility should be clearly defined and understood by all teachers. She should be encouraged to identify with the school and made to feel that she is making a worthwhile contribution. The principal is responsible for her schedule of
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duties and should have these recorded in writing. These will be determined by the needs of the particular school. In many cases some time allocation may be granted to specific teachers for specific duties. The nature of these duties should be understood by all teachers who should feel that the teacher aide is of use to them.

11.16.10. Planning and Training. The involvement of the teacher aide in a minor teaching role necessitates precise planning on the part of the class teacher and a systematic programme of training within the school. The work plan should state clearly the instructional objectives for the unit of work so that the aide knows precisely what is to be attempted and the role she is to play in the learning situation.2

Bearing these guidelines in mind, principals then, are obliged to create job descriptions which are specific to the needs of their particular schools. At Riccarton High School, for example, a satellite class for intellectually handicapped pupils has recently been established. The teacher there has access to 20 hours teacher aide time, for which he has written the following job description;

The appointee should have an understanding and sympathetic approach to the needs of intellectually handicapped people and be adapt-
able to the needs of the classroom and whole school.

The teacher aide will be expected to work under the guidance of the classroom teacher and most of her work will involve the following.

1. Assisting with programmes in most subject areas at times on an individual basis or as a small group. This may involve some simple data recording, that can be learnt on the job.

2. Accompanying pupils to and assisting with them working with other classes as and when this develops e.g. cooking programme, typing class.

3. Catheterising one spina-bifida pupil twice daily. Nurse Maude can assist with teaching this process if required.

4. Handling occasional toileting accidents by assisting with showering and dressing. Assisting female students with any personal hygiene problems that may arise.

5. Assist with any medical emergencies that may arise, e.g. seizures.

6. Accompanying students out of school grounds for social skills training, e.g. shopping, busing, and banking training.

7. One afternoon per week will be oversight of a small group of pupils. This is to allow the classroom teacher to liaise with
a primary satellite class and the base
school Ferndale, as part of his function
as the Ferndale Deputy Principal.

(8) The appointee will need to be flexible in
handling any new needs that may arise with
any new pupils entering the class in the
future. 3

At Hammersley Park School, the principal
has 62.5 hours available to him to allocate
within the physically disabled unit and the
school. Of this time, 45 hours are 'basic' and
may be used for clerical or teacher aide duties,
15 hours are 'discretionary' and may only be
used for teacher duties, and 2.5 hours are for
English as a Second Language pupils. 4 The
Draft Review Of Special Education explains the
allocation procedure:

Present policies provide all primary
schools with an entitlement of basic
hours of teacher aide staffing (this
includes clerical), based on roll
size. Each District Senior Inspector
of primary schools is also allocated
a separate entitlement of dis­
cretionary ancillary teacher aide hours.
These hours are for distribution to
particular 'schools with special
needs', to special schools, classes,
and clinics, and to assist individual
students. 5

Discretionary hours are applied for - on
an individual case basis - towards the end of
of third term for the following year.

The teacher aide job description adhered
to at Hammersley Park School, is detailed below:
JOB TITLE: Teacher Aide
RESPONSIBLE TO: Head Teacher

GENERAL: (a) Non-teaching tasks to assist the professional work of the School.
(b) Approved simplified teaching tasks.

SPECIFIC: (a) Supervision of pupils in tasks as directed by the Head Teacher.
(b) Assisting the Teacher/Therapist as required in the School or Unit.
(c) Preparation and repair of apparatus and material.

Depending on the area of the School to which the teacher aide is assigned, the head teacher then identifies several key tasks and attaches them to the above job description. In the physically disabled unit, these might include: (1) assisting children in completing directed tasks.
(2) physically helping children to move around the classroom/school.
(3) making classroom equipment.
(4) assisting children at interval and lunchtime.
(5) setting up the computer.
(6) arranging the classroom environment.

As noted in chapter one, attendants are
also employed in units for the physically disabled. Because the tasks they do are usually completed by teacher aides in other environments, e.g. Ferndale School, their job description is presented below:

JOB TITLE: Attendant
RESPONSIBLE TO: Head Teacher

FUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH:
Classroom Teachers
Physiotherapists
Occupational Therapists
Parents
Transport Operators

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES:

(a) To assist with the physical care of the disabled children at Hammersley Park School.
(b) To encourage self care and independence within the limitations of the individual disability with particular regard to toileting and toileting procedures.

KEY TASKS:
(1) Toileting: On demand toileting as required during the day. Assistance as required. Supervision while in the toilet - safety and skills training. Training in the basis of personal
hygiene. Fitting of appliances. Administration of suppositories, catheters, etc. as prescribed by Paediatrician.

(2) Transfer and Transport: To supervise and ensure children are seated correctly in transport. To have wheelchairs and other aides ready for children's arrival. To co-ordinate and control a taxi transport list.

(3) Supervision: Playground duty as listed on the general staff duty roster. Assistance with swimming.

(4) Maintenance: Keep all equipment in good operational order. Minor adjustments to wheelchairs. Minor repairs to other equipment if appropriate.

(5) Other duties as may be required from time to time by the Head Teacher, e.g. Friday games, feeding, bracing, and standing, as advised by Physiotherapists. Specific examples have been discussed above to highlight the manner in which teacher aides are used in special settings. It is now important to identify the role of teacher aides
in more general terms. In the British study previously cited, the research team identified two main educational roles for teacher aides in mainstream classes, that is, "working alongside a specific pupil, and carrying out general duties while having a watching brief on a specific pupil."^{9}

In our education system, one can identify at least ten responsibilities the teacher aide may be given:

1. **Administering informal screening and diagnostic instruments** - With adequate training and experience, a teacher aide can (a) observe students for screening purposes, (b) administer teacher-made/standardised tests, (c) score tests, (d) assist teacher in interpreting test results.

2. **Securing instructional equipment and materials** - This might include compiling a list of materials and equipment available in the community and arranging for its availability as required.

3. **Modifying existing equipment and materials** - When not directly involved with students, teacher aides may be required to alter equipment and materials to suit the needs of individuals within the classroom.

4. **Supervising independent or small group**
work - After a task is set by the teacher, the teacher aide may assist pupils in completing the activity.

(5) **Monitoring behavioural modification programmes** - Following consultation with the teacher, the teacher aide may do the daily monitoring of an individual's or small group's behavioural modification programme, e.g. recording on-task behaviour over a 30 minute period, three times a day.

(6) **Accompanying a pupil to a mainstream classroom** - When a pupil is mainstreamed for part of a day, the teacher aide may accompany him/her to ensure that he/she copes in the new environment.

(7) **Attending to personal hygiene needs of students** - In settings where attendants are not employed, part of the teacher aide's responsibilities may involve taking care of the toileting needs of physically and intellectually handicapped pupils.

(8) **Arranging the physical environment** - At the beginning and end of each day, the teacher aide may be required to assist with preparation of the classroom environment. In addition, he/she may be asked to establish interest corners, library displays, etc.

(9) ** Escorting pupils in the community** - For
social skills training, the teacher aide may take individuals or small groups out of the school to practise, for example, busing skills, using a public telephone.

(10) Setting up a student's programme - According to individual needs, this might involve putting a head pointer on, moving a typewriter, turning on a computer, fitting arm braces - essentially any provision that needs to be implemented before a pupil's programme can begin.

Whatever responsibilities are assigned to teacher aides, remains, as mentioned, the prerogative of the principal (or head teacher). However, a common procedure is to set job descriptions on the basis of teacher's needs and teacher aide experiences and strengths;

* Since each (teacher aide) brings different skills and expectations to a job and each teacher's needs are different, the (teacher aide's) job description must be tailored to reflect their unique interaction. 10

Because it is recognised that consultation can be time-consuming for busy personnel, the following inventories may provide a useful starting point when compiling job descriptions for new teacher aides;

* The term 'paraprofessional' is used in the original text.
FIGURE 3.1
Inventory of Teacher Aide Skills and Teacher Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Listed below are a number of tasks which a teacher aide may perform. If you are a teacher aide, mark with a 'TA' those activities/duties which you feel you could conduct. If you are a teacher, mark with a 'T' those areas in which you intend to use a teacher aide.

**Instructional Support**

1. Reinforce concepts already presented by the teacher, by assisting students in reading, mathematics, spelling, articulation, vocabulary development, signing, mobility, and/or self-care.
2. Listen to students read.
3. Read to students.
4. Supervise independent or small group work.
5. Modify written materials, e.g. tape record stories, rewrite to lower level.
6. Help students work on projects.
7. Help students select library books.
8. Assist physically disabled students, e.g. feeding, positioning.
9. Help students explore careers and special interests.
10. Practice vocabulary with non-English speaking students.
    **Other. Please describe.**

**Behaviour Management Support**

11. Provide and/or supervise earned reinforcement.
12. Supervise time out.
13. Be a resource for students who are experiencing stress.
14. Monitor progress on contracts.
15. Enhance students' self-concept by providing positive feedback.
    **Other. Please describe.**

**Diagnostic Support**

16. Correct and grade assigned activities.
17. Observe and record academic behaviour and progress, e.g. reading rate.
18. Observe and record social behaviour(s).
19. Administer informal assessments.
    **Other. Please describe.**

**Classroom Organisation**

20. Make instructional games.
21. Develop and manage learning centres.
22. Prepare displays.
23. Locate instructional materials.
25. Make bulletin boards.
    **Other. Please describe.**
Clerical Support
26. Type.
27. Duplicate Materials.
28. Take Attendance.
29. Record test results.
Other. Please describe.
FIGURE 3.2

Teacher Aide Job Placement:

Preferred Style and Setting

The following list of considerations may help you decide what type of assistance you are best suited to lend. Your answers will be considered in deciding which teacher/programme you might be most comfortable working with. Place a check along each of the scaled lines to show your preference.

Example: If you work best when supervised closely, you should mark the scale in this fashion:

```
| close | X | independent |
```

Job Demands:

Would you rather have your duties listed in a very specific way or defined more generally?

```
detailed | broadly described
```

Would you prefer 'routine' or 'challenging' tasks?

```
routine | challenging
```

Would you rather be supervised closely by the teacher or given more independence as you work?

```
close | independent
```

Schedule:

Do you like to know exactly when to start and stop a task, or would you rather have a more variable schedule while on the job?

```
fixed | variable
```
FIGURE 3.3

Teacher Aide Supervision:

Teacher Expectations

In considering the primary responsibilities which a teacher aide may be assigned in your programme, please evaluate the nature and degree of supervision required. Place a check mark along each of the scaled lines to indicate your preference.

Example: If you expect the teacher aide to function with little direct supervision, you should mark the scale in this fashion:

| close | | independent |

**Job Demands:**

Will you be presenting the teacher aide with specific duties to be performed, or will they be defined more generally?

| detailed | | broadly described |

Will you be presenting the teacher aide with routine tasks or more complex ones?

| routine | | challenging |

Do you intend to provide close supervision, or do you expect the teacher aide to function relatively independently?

| close | | independent |

**Schedule:**

Will you require the teacher aide to follow a more fixed or variable timetable with assigned tasks?

| fixed | | variable |
Endnotes:


3. Thanks to Mr Tom Reilly and Mr Ken Begg, Ferndale School.

4. Thanks to Mr Ian Grieve, Hammersley Park School.


6. Thanks to Mrs Jennifer Loughton and Mr Ian Grieve, Hammersley Park School.

7. Thanks to Mrs Jennifer Loughton and Mr Ian Grieve, Hammersley Park School.

8. Thanks to Mr Ian Grieve, Hammersley Park School.


CHAPTER FOUR:

TRAINING

Historically, the teacher aide in Special Education has been characterized by "high job turnover rates, low pay, low status, and a minimum of education or training." The focus of this chapter will be on the selection, placement, and training of teacher aides for their role in the education of children.

First, however, the schedule of wages for teacher aides is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

FIGURE 4.1

Schedule of Wages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Aides in Primary and Secondary Schools and Teacher Assistants in Secondary Schools</th>
<th>Hourly rate effective from 15.1.87</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On appointment (under 20)</td>
<td>6.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On appointment (over 20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than 1 year equivalent recognised service</td>
<td>7.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 1 year equivalent recognised service</td>
<td>7.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 6 onwards</td>
<td>8.20</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Each Education Board is ultimately responsible for hiring teacher aides. However, it often delegates the appointments to individual
principals who sometimes draw from resources already known to them, e.g. volunteers who have been assisting in the school for some time. When considering suitable persons for a teacher aide position, principals look for various qualities. These include:

* maturity
* previous experience
* ability to relate well to teachers and pupils
* effective communication skills
* flexibility - willingness to adapt to the needs of a programme
* initiative
* confidence
* sensitivity
* commitment
* physical well-being

These qualities are often not readily apparent in an interview situation and one notes how much easier - and less haphazard - the appointments procedure would be if provision was made for training prospective and current teacher aides.

In June of this year (1987), the National Secretary of ESPA, Helen Anderson, sent a letter to the then Minister of Education, Mr Marshall, expressing disappointment at the lack of improvements for ancillary staffing in the 1987 budget. Among the key issues identified was in-service
training. In his reply, Mr Marshall commented:

...I am fully aware of the fine contributions which teacher aides make in schools throughout the country, and the need to have teachers well supported in their work in classrooms. But it simply was not possible to win all of the improvements that we would like to have seen.

Mr Marshall makes no reference to training - an omission which clearly emphasizes the present importance the Department of Education places on this critical issue.

To date, the Department has failed to prepare teacher aides in any way for their responsibilities in and out of the classroom. Teachers are, in effect, responsible for on-the-job training - a totally unsatisfactory situation for both teachers and teacher aides.

In-service training is an integral part of ESPA policy. In response to concern expressed by members, ESPA has implemented in-service training days "in order to help ancillary staff improve the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their job responsibilities."4

Their efforts, however, have been somewhat frustrated by several factors;

(1) active opposition from Education Authorities.

(2) attendance by ancillary staff is at the discretion of principals.

(3) those who attend courses are unable
to claim travel expenses.

(4) schools can not employ relievers for the time that ancillary staff are attending training days.\(^5\)

Nevertheless, ESPA has successfully responded to members' concerns. In addition to courses run for library assistants and science technicians, a two-day course for teacher aides was organised by the ESPA National Executive on March 23-24 this year (1987). It was held in the Northland area and involved a varied programme encompassing:

...the use of, overhead projectors, making transparencies and blown-up books; video tape recorders; duplicator and masters; how to cope with elementary first aid; working with IHC and special needs children; the library - book binding and repairing and cataloguing.

Another in-service course held in Wellington on October 1 (1987), focused on three themes - one of which was Special Education. Colleen Pilgrim, an Inspector and Supervisor in Special Education with the Department of Education, who addressed the meeting, praised the efforts to date of ancillary staff. She commented that many had skills in braille and sign language and called for "a new recognition of their skills and qualifications."\(^7\) Further to this, Mrs Pilgrim "emphasized the need for adequate training of teachers and ancillary staff in the area of Special Education."\(^8\)
Endnotes:


2. Education Service Paraprofessional Association. *Schedule of Wages*.


4. 'ESPA Extra' Draft material for November issue of *National Education*.

5. 'ESPA Extra' Draft material for November issue of *National Education*.

6. 'ESPA Extra' Draft material for November issue of *National Education*.

7. 'ESPA Extra' Draft material for November issue of *National Education*.

8. 'ESPA Extra' Draft material for November issue of *National Education*.

* My thanks to Ailsa Coutts, Assistant Secretary, Education Service Paraprofessional Association, for 'ESPA Extra' draft material.
Despite calls for reduced class sizes, many teachers in New Zealand schools still teach 35 or more children each day. It is little wonder that concern has been expressed about the mainstreaming of children with special needs. Teacher aides, if deployed thoughtfully, are an invaluable resource for busy teachers who suddenly find, e.g. a Downs Syndrome or physically disabled student in their classrooms.

Once an individualised education programme (IEP) has been established for the special needs pupil, the teacher aide can play an active role in monitoring progress and assisting the student in achieving his/her short-term objectives and long-range goals. -

The following is a list of suggestions which may help new teacher aides, particularly, in positively contributing to the instructional programme of the special needs student. (The assumption is made in each suggestion that the teaching materials have been compiled and provided by the classroom teacher, and all the work done by the aide is under the direction of the teacher.)

**Beginning a Task:**

1. Establish rapport with the pupil, but
watch for he/she 'taking over' - cut off kindly but firmly. e.g. "Thank you for telling me about your kittens. You can tell me more later. Let's begin work now."

(2) Never assume that the pupil will know what to do. Give instructions clearly and slowly, repeating if necessary.

(3) Expect learning to take place. If a student picks up that you are hesitant, he/she may doubt his/her own abilities to achieve a task.

(4) Stimulate a student's senses - especially to compensate for deficit in one sense. This means: be interested; be vital; be enthusiastic.

(5) Make a task relevant - ensure that a pupil knows why he/she is doing a particular activity.

During a Task:

(1) If a student is failing at a particular task, consider the determiners of defeat;
* unable to work at a given time
* unable to work in a given place
* unable to work in the manner asked
* unable to do as much work as assigned
* unable to work as long as asked
* task may be too difficult
* learner may not be motivated to try.1

(2) Provide cues to facilitate learning. Some visual and verbal cues or prompts which
may be utilised are as follows:

(a) MANUAL: teacher aide physically helps student with a task.
   e.g. task - tying shoe laces
   prompt - teacher aide holds bow in place for student.

(b) PROXIMITY: teacher aide places correct item closer to student to help him/her choose correctly.
   e.g. task - point to the square
   prompt - square is closer to student than rectangle.

(c) WITHIN STIMULUS: teacher aide emphasizes correct item in some way to help student to discriminate.
   e.g. task - point to letter 'S'
   prompt - letter 'S' is larger than letter 'C'.

(d) VERBAL: teacher aide helps student by using his/her voice.
   e.g. task - naming objects
   prompt - "say 'plate'".

All prompts should be faded systematically as soon as appropriate. (NB When modeling, remember to mirror image the skill/action or stand behind the student.)

(j) While student is working, praise his/her attempts - however small they may be.
   Eye contact, a smile, a nod, verbal praise
are important indicators to an individual that he/she is OK.

(4) When listening to a pupil reading, wait, before offering the correct word. - The pupil may need time to think about the word in context.

(5) At all times, encourage the student to be as independent of you as practically possible.

After a Task:

(1) Remember to praise. Be specific about the type of success, e.g. "Good printing", "I like the way you put the blocks in the box". Avoid "Good girl/boy".

(2) Discuss the task with the student and on the basis of this, describe its relevance, success, possible modifications, to the classroom teacher.

(3) Where applicable, record probe results, fill in/sign behavioural contract, and reward with reinforcer.

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Endnotes:

CHAPTER SIX:

TEACHER AIDE BURNOUT

At the beginning of chapter four, I cited some of the less desirable characteristics of the teacher aide's job - low pay, low status, and minimal opportunities to adequately train for teacher aide positions. In this chapter, one will see how these and other interpersonal factors contribute to burnout among teacher aides.

In 1985, Frith and Mims identified stress as the principle cause of burnout among professionals. They suggested that the variables affecting stress parallel those experienced by teacher aides in Special Education. Each will now be described in turn:

(a) \textit{Stagnation} - Because they lack specialist or formal training, many teacher aides are discouraged from seeking employment in other fields (despite the excellent experience they might have accrued). Further, their subordinate role in the classroom counters the display of creativity.

(b) \textit{Lack of Career Advancement} - A small increase in wages, one more week of annual leave for the eighth and subsequent year of service, and minor improvements in
sick leave entitlements provide the only incentives for remaining in this career. At this stage, there is no incentive for professional development.

(c) **Inadequate Training** - As described, most of the training for teacher aides is done 'on the job' by the classroom teacher. Insufficient training "hampers job performance and... discourages (teacher aides) from being active members of the educational team." 

(d) **Poor Organizational Structure** - This is most likely to occur when a teacher aide is confused about the authority figure to whom he/she is responsible. Without exception, this should ultimately by the principal or head teacher of a school/unit.

(e) **Undefined Role Description** - Lack of a specific job description is one of the most common problems experienced by teacher aides. It is inadequate to be told informally that one's responsibility is to carry out the assignments as set by a particular teacher. To avoid confusion, the 'assignments' must be described in writing.

(f) **Lack of Support from Authority Figures** - At the very least, principals should
recommend that teacher aides join their union - ESPA.

(g) Misconceptions About the Roles of Others - Particularly where formal preparation is lacking, misunderstandings about what others (e.g. attendants, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, teachers, fellow teacher aides) are supposed to do often leads to communication problems, embarrassment, and/or resentment.

(h) Poor Salaries - This factor becomes especially significant when one considers that teacher aides (up to year eight) in continuous service are only paid for three weeks at Christmas. Effectively, they lose their source of income for three or four weeks.\footnote{...}

(i) Lack of Recognition - "Being at the lower end of the employment spectrum, teacher aides are often the last to receive recognition for their efforts."\footnote{...} Teacher aides often engage in activities which are of invaluable benefit to pupils and staff, (e.g. reorganising the school library). How often are they recognised and appreciated?

While the picture painted is somewhat bleak, it is nevertheless an accurate depiction of the problems faced by many (though certainly
not all) teacher aides. There are, however, various coping strategies which can be employed at several levels:

**Administrative Level**

1. Principals should advocate a team approach to the instructional process in which teacher aides assume 'meaningful' roles.
2. Teacher aides who are given unambiguous expectations by principals are more likely to complete their tasks admirably.
3. Principals should publicly encourage and endorse the acceptance of teacher aides as valuable team members to their staff and to parents.6

**Teacher Level**

1. Teachers can enhance teacher aide's role perception by sharing insights and teaching ideas with them.
2. Assigning 'meaningful' tasks to teacher aides will be reflected in the enthusiasm they subsequently show.
3. Verbal acknowledgement and/or a thank you note requires little effort but means a great deal to the recipient.7

**Teacher Aide Level**

1. Teacher aides can benefit from understanding the symptoms of burnout and taking steps to cope with it, e.g. joining ESPA would ensure that professional interests, at
least, were being met.

(2) Teacher aides should talk to other teacher aides - share successes and seek support.

(3) Within the school environment, teacher aides should strive to have their needs met.

* 

Endnotes:


2. Education Service Paraprofessional Association. Salaries and Conditions of Service Agreement - Addenda A.


CHAPTER SEVEN:

RECOMMENDATIONS

* That the Department of Education accept responsibility for pre- and in-service training of ancillary staff.

* That in-service courses be developed for ancillary staff, specifically designed for those who work with children with special needs.\(^1\)

* That the allocation of ancillary staffing be made on a needs basis, rather than a role basis.

* That ancillary staff be entitled to enrol for ASTU studies, and that present units be extended to include papers directly related to the work of ancillary staff in supporting teachers in the special needs areas.\(^2\)

* That the completion of in-service courses and ASTU or similarly recognised papers, aggregate an entitlement for recognition of qualification payments.\(^3\)

* That serious consideration be given to the allocation of teacher aides available for mainstreaming. "Without financial backing, together with all ancillary service... mainstreaming cannot succeed."\(^4\)
That a special allowance be negotiated for ancillary staff who assist children with toileting, showering, lifting, and other general support required through a disability.  

That attendants and teacher aides be provided, as of right, to gloves and gowns when attending children in toilets.

That in-service training be provided in basic first-aid.

That teacher aides be paid over the entire Christmas holiday break.

Endnotes:


4. 'Surveys Into Special Schools' in National Education. (Wellington: New Zealand Educational Institute, September, 1987). p. 149.

5. Education Service Paraprofessional Association. Policy and Rules. 12.6
REFERENCES:


* Education Service Paraprofessional Association. Policy and Rules.

* Education Service Paraprofessional Association. Schedule of Wages.

* Education Service Paraprofessional Association. Salaries and Conditions of Service Agreement.

* 'ESPA Extra' Draft Material for November issue of National Education.


* 'Surveys into Special Schools' in National Education. Wellington: New Zealand Educational Institute, September, 1987. pp 146-149.