

# **Education and Skill Development for Education Assistants**

## **HANDBOOK FOR INSTRUCTORS**



**Winter 2014**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Background

- Learning Options
- Requisite Knowledge for EA Learning Options
- Pathways to Public Post Secondary Education

Teaching a Learning Option

- Principles of Adult Learning
- Becoming Familiar with the Materials
- Rescheduling / Canceling a Session
- Record keeping – attendance policy
- Summative assessment
- Evaluation

Appendices

A: Professional Development Framework

B: Best Practices for Professional Development

C: A Guide to the Adult Learner

D: Attendance and Assessment Form

E: Participant Evaluation Form

F: Instructor Evaluation Form

G: Certificate Template

## Introduction

The SSEAC Education and Skill Development for Education Assistants Initiative is designed to meet two main objectives: to support the professional development of education assistants working in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom and to develop, coordinate and provide relevant, systematic and sustainable professional development to education assistants across BC. It is believed that by enhancing the competencies of education assistants the learning, participation and membership of students with disabilities in the regular classroom will be strengthened.

This professional development project has been framed with four guiding principles:

- Effective and quality professional development that improves the competency of EAs to work collaboratively with teachers and teams to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities are aligned with adult learning principles, evidence based educational practices and standards for professional development as outlined by the National Staff Development Council.
- Evidence based practices provide guidance and evidence for supporting the learning of students with disabilities. Learning options will integrate the application of these practices to the work of EAs.
- Sustainability is viewed as a long term change of practice in EAs, partnerships with local districts and post-secondary institutions and accessibility for all education assistants. Evaluation of individual learning options, and the project overall, is seen as a critical component to improve effectiveness and make decisions with respect to the professional development of education assistants.
- Collaboration is central to ensuring the aims of enhanced competency in EAs.

For additional information see Appendix A: Professional Development Framework and Appendix B: Best Practices for Professional Development.

## **Background: Learning Options**

Fourteen learning options were developed through this initiative based on the results of surveys completed by education assistants, special education administrators and teachers. The options are:

1. Foundations of Inclusive Education
2. Professional and Ethical Practice
3. Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders (POPARD)
4. Introduction to Assistive Technology
5. Understanding Behaviour
6. Understanding Common Medical Issues
7. Basic Sign Language
8. Supporting Learners with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
9. Introduction to Instructional Strategies
10. Building Student Independence
11. Introduction to Common Mental Health
12. Helping Students Think Socially in a Social World
13. Building a Solid Number Foundation
14. Technology to Support Learning in the Classroom

For each learning option in this project, a curricular framework has been developed which is included in your package. This includes learning outcomes, session outlines, activities, power point presentations, handouts and a summative assessment with criteria for satisfactory completion.

## Background: Requisite Knowledge For EA Learning Options

The Education Assistants attending your learning option will have different backgrounds and experiences working with students with disabilities in the classroom. It may be helpful to briefly discuss key ideas that are foundational to supporting learners with disabilities prior to teaching the identified learning outcomes for your particular learning options. Please see the following list of requisite knowledge to be discussed in your opening session as applicable.

### 1. The philosophy of inclusion

British Columbia promotes an inclusive education system in which all students are fully participating members of a community of learners. Membership, belonging and learning for all students is foundational in inclusive classrooms. Inclusion is a philosophy whereby every student is accorded dignity and worth, is evaluated in terms of individual needs and is accepted as a unique individual in regular classes. Inclusive schooling is related, but different from, the movement to integrate or mainstream students. For more detailed information, please see [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed) or [www.bctf.ca/teachingto diversity](http://www.bctf.ca/teachingto diversity) or [www.kidstogether.org](http://www.kidstogether.org)

### 2. Definition of adaptations and modifications

- Adapted programs retain the learning outcomes of the prescribed curriculum.
- The adaptations are provided so the student can participate in the program.
- Students on adapted programs are assessed using the standards for the course/program and can receive credit toward a Dogwood graduation certificate.
- A modified program has learning outcomes that are substantially different from the prescribed curriculum.
- Any changes to prescribed learning outcomes are specifically selected to meet the student's special needs.
- These learning outcomes are detailed on the student's individual education plan (IEP).

**•Note: a student may be on an adapted program for some areas and a modified program for others.**

For more detailed information, please see

[http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/adaptations\\_and\\_modifications\\_guide.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/adaptations_and_modifications_guide.pdf)

## Background: Requisite Knowledge For EA Learning Options

### 3. Role of the Education Assistant

The BC Ministry of Education, in the *Manual of Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines for Special Education (Section B.3)* states “The teacher responsible for a student with special needs is responsible for designing, supervising, and assessing the educational program for that student. Teachers are expected to design programs for students with special needs. Teachers’ assistants play a key role in many programs for students with special needs, performing functions, which range from personal care to assisting the teacher with instructional programs. Under the direction of a teacher they may play a key role in implementing the program.”

For more detailed information, please see the revised BCTF/CUPE document:

[http://www.cupe.bc.ca/sites/default/files/2009\\_Roles\\_Resp\\_2.pdf](http://www.cupe.bc.ca/sites/default/files/2009_Roles_Resp_2.pdf)

### 4. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) — definition and components

The BC Ministry of Education, in the *Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines* states: An IEP is a documented plan developed for a student with special needs that describes individualized goals, adaptations, modifications, the services to be provided, and includes measures for tracking achievement. It serves as a tool for collaborative planning among the school, the parents, the student (where appropriate) and, as necessary, school district personnel, other ministries and/or community agencies.

Typically an IEP includes individualized goals with measurable objectives, adaptations and/or modifications where appropriate, the strategies to meet these goals, and measures for tracking student achievement in relation to the goals. It also documents the special education services being provided as these relate to the student’s identified needs.

Further information is available on the website:

[http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/special\\_ed\\_policy\\_manual.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/special_ed_policy_manual.pdf)

## **Background: Pathways to Public Post Secondary Programs**

Participants in the sessions may or may not have a credential from a public post-secondary institution that prepared them to work as an education assistant. The learning options in this initiative have been shared with the 15 public post-secondary institutions in the province that offer education assistant certificate programs. The learning options are not equivalent to transfer credit courses.

However, participants considering one of the public post secondary certificate programs may want to submit evidence of their learning for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR).

Traditionally post-secondary institutions have given credit only for formal learning that occurred in their own classrooms and labs. PLAR is a concept that permits you to earn credit for post-secondary level knowledge regardless of where or how the learning occurred. It is a process by which you demonstrate that what you have learned is equivalent to what is being taught in a traditional post-secondary context. You provide proof of what you have learned.

Participants intending to discuss PLAR will need to keep a professional development portfolio that includes:

- Description of learning option
- Learning activities
- Summative assessment
- Certificate of completion

Information about the Education Assistant Programs in BC public post secondary institutions can be found in the Overview for Participant's handout.

## Teaching a Learning Option

Adults learn best when they are actively involved in their own learning and when they see direct relevance to their work. Each learning option purposefully incorporates a variety of teaching strategies, individual to whole group work, things to try at work, reflective activities and opportunities to receive feedback.

As much as possible, the curriculum has education assistants engaging actively with the materials and reflecting on their specific work circumstances. The number of participants will affect how to group participants and instructors are encouraged to make decisions that they feel best meet the needs of the learners in the option they are instructing.

Educator and staff development consultant, Robin Fogarty, writes that adult educators need to consider the characteristics and motivators of the adult learner, the curriculum, formats of delivery and ways of instruction that make a difference to adult learners. The curriculum developers of these learning options have taken in consideration these important principles. For additional information on these ideas see Appendix C: A Guide to the Adult Learner.

You have been asked by your school district to teach this learning option because you have expertise related to the content and are familiar with the role of the education assistant in relation to this particular learning option. As noted earlier, this project's goal is to deliver consistent professional development for education assistants throughout the province. You can support the achievement of that goal by taking the time to read through the provided materials and becoming familiar with the content, activities, summative assessment with marking rubric and power points. Instructors are expected to adhere to the curriculum package as it is written and to include all the components that are outlined in each session.

In addition, Appendix B: Best Practices for Professional Development outlines the importance of teaching for skills to be transferred from a workshop to actual practice in the classroom. Each learning option has been developed in 3-hour segments. However, districts may have chosen a schedule for the option that includes weekends, evenings, Pro-D days, etc., which will involve you combining sessions. In either case, it is important to support participants to relate activities to their work environments and apply their learning from one session to the next.

A summative assessment with marking rubric has been created for each learning option. As the instructor you will be responsible for evaluating the assessments. Participants will receive Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. Instructors may use their discretion and support a participant to redo their summative assessment, **one time only**, if appropriate.

## Teaching a Learning Option

The learning option you are teaching may include the use of various presentation formats (i.e.: you tube, power points, web pages, DVD). Before you teach a session ensure you have the appropriate equipment and that the various presentation modes work for you.

One copy of each handout is included in the curriculum package. Additional copies will need to be made prior to teaching.

If for some reason a session needs to be rescheduled or cancelled contact the school district staff person who is responsible for organizing the delivery of this option. They will assist you in contacting participants and finding an alternative dates. **Participants must attend for the full number of hours of the learning option to be eligible for a certificate of completion.**

There are four important tasks that need to be addressed as you begin to teach your learning option.

1. Remind participants to review the information that has been provided to them about post secondary programs for credentialing education assistants. Participants will need to maintain a portfolio of their materials if they intend to use them for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR).
2. Explain how participants receive a certificate of completion (attendance at all sessions **and** satisfactory completion of the summative assessment). At this time go over the attendance policy.

**Attendance policy: Participants may be absent no more than one 3-hour session for any learning option. Only absences related to medical issues or family emergencies will be accepted.**

Benefits to education assistants who choose to complete the summative assessment include

- the possibility of receiving recognition of prior learning at one of the public post secondary institutions that offer preservice certificate programs for education assistants
- consideration for positions that require specific training
- professional development that could assist with employment in school districts throughout the province.

## Teaching a Learning Option

If the education assistant does not attend all sessions or decides to not complete a summative assessment there will be no certificate of completion granted as proof of knowledge learned.

3. Review the expectations / rubric for the summative assessment. It will be helpful for participants to have this information in the first or second session in the learning option. Be clear with participants when the summative assessment is due. As well if participants want their summative assessment and the evaluation rubric returned to them they would need to give you a stamped, self addressed envelope. Instructors are not expected to retain copies of participants' work.
4. Briefly review any of the items listed in the requisite knowledge section that you feel are appropriate to cover.

## Teaching a Learning Option

In the last session of the learning option please complete these tasks:

1. Finalize summative assessments. This may include assessing participants during the last session, collecting summative assessments or returning assessments. Confirm with any participants who do not submit a summative assessment that they do not want a certificate of completion.
- For those conducting evaluations in their final class, this will require you to give each participant feedback using the rubric that is part of the option package. On the attendance & assessment form record the appropriate evaluation and forward the form to **John Malcolmson, CUPE, B.C. Regional Office, #500-4940 Canada Way, Burnaby BC V5G 4T3**

For those collecting summative assessments, let participants know that you will be finished evaluating their assignments one to two weeks from their submission. Make any personal arrangements for receiving late submissions, remembering that you will need to **mail in the attendance and assessment log two weeks from the option's last session**. Also, make arrangement for participants to get their assessments and rubric back. Participants will need these for their professional portfolio (documents necessary for discussion with post secondary institutions).

- Have participants complete the evaluation form in the last 15 minutes of the concluding session. It is very important for SSEAC to receive feedback from the education assistants as the learning options were designed with them in mind. You will find this in the appendix section of this booklet. Collect the forms and mail to **John Malcolmson, CUPE, B.C. Regional Office, #500-4940 Canada Way, Burnaby BC V5G 4T3**
2. When mailing in the attendance/assessment form and participant evaluation form also submit your evaluation of the instructor's packages. You will find this in the appendix section of this booklet. SSEAC will be evaluating the options for future development ideas and revisions.
3. Complete a certificate for each eligible participant after you have evaluated summative assessments and mail to participants. A fillable form has been provided for you.

**Thank you for your contribution to the education and skill development of education assistants in BC. It is through your efforts with this curriculum that we are all working together to enhance the skills of education assistants to support the learning of all students.**

## Appendices

A: Professional Development Framework

B: Best Practices for Professional Development

C: A Guide to the Adult Learner

D: Attendance and Assessment Form (mail to: John Malcolmson, CUPE, B.C. Regional Office, #500-4940 Canada Way, Burnaby BC V5G 4T3)

E: Participant Evaluation Form (mail to: John Malcolmson, CUPE, B.C. Regional Office, #500-4940 Canada Way, Burnaby BC V5G 4T3)

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G: Certificate Template

## **Appendix A: Professional Development Framework (abbreviated)**

### **Enduring Understandings**

- All students are unique, have value, belong and can learn
- Supporting the learning, participation and membership of students requires intentional practices
- Evidence based practices inform current supports
- The work of supporting learning for students with disabilities is collaborative
- Confidentiality and ethical practice apply to one's work
- Ongoing learning and staying current are critical elements of one's work

### **Ways of thinking**

- Critical
- Reflective
- Inquiring
- Creative
- Problem-solving
- Collaborative
- Flexible (seek alternatives, see multiple perspectives)

### **Knowledge**

- Foundational (roles/responsibilities, collaboration, contemporary principles in inclusive education, learner characteristics, the learning environment, classroom supports and instructional supports for students with disabilities in elementary and secondary classes, observation, current research on does & don'ts in paraeducation)
- Enhancing classroom supports and instructional strategies for students with disabilities in elementary and secondary classes
- Understanding behaviour challenges requires a problem solving approach for planning support

### **Skills**

- Interpersonal communication and teamwork
- Implementation of positive behaviour support plans
- Context specifics (i.e.: elementary vs. secondary, content/curriculum specifics, transitions)
- Specific disability-related supports for learners, as applied in the regular classroom
- Instructional strategies, including adaptation and modifications
- Information, media and technology literacy

## Appendix B: Best Practices in Professional Development

“Paraeducator training programs should be long-range, comprehensive and systematic. Often the impact of training is lessened because it is based on available speakers or the current “hot topic” rather than on progressive development of an identified set of knowledge and skills” (Pickett and Gerlach, 1997).



### What Works

- ❑ Attention must be given to follow up strategies for learning to go from professional development / training to sustained learning or practice.
- ❑ 20% of participant’s learning will occur inside the training room and 80% will come from practicing outside the training setting.
- ❑ Studies on professional development state:
  - Traditional workshops, with no follow up, will result in only 5-10% change.
  - A group of schools working together, with follow up, will result in 75-90% change.
  - The most effective ways to develop change in practice are interactive experiential learning activities connected to real work situations, reflective activities, practice in the actual training, followed by onsite observation and feedback.
  - Follow up supports are critical when there is an emphasis on skill development and transferring those skills to the classroom.
  - The use of technology supports educators to learn new practices.
  - Ongoing, intensive and rigorous opportunities for learning make the most difference.
  - Systematic and comprehensive plans are foundational for educators to enhance their competency.
- ❑ Follow up support can be face-to-face or virtual. Examples include problem solving discussions, study groups, focused team meetings, blogs, modeling, coaching, practice with feedback, mentoring
- ❑ Distributing learning over time i.e.: taking a workshop and dividing it into parts with work place related practice activities conducted between the scheduled sessions supports the development of changes in practice.

### References:

Fogarty, R. (2007). *From Staff Room to Classroom*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.  
Garmston, R. (2003). Group wise: as trainings grow shorter, follow-up plays a bigger role. *Journal of Staff Development* vol. 24, no.4.  
Pickett, A.L. & Gerlach, K. (1997). *Supervising paraeducators in school settings: A team approach*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED.  
Richardson, J. (2003). *Build a bridge between workshop and classroom*. Tools for Schools.



## **Appendix C: A Guide to the Adult Learner** (adapted From Staffroom to Classroom by Robin Fogarty)

1. Adults seek learning experiences to cope with specific life or professional changing events.
2. Adults often engage in learning for its own reward, but also because of career implications or needs in a current role, or a potential job in the future.
3. Adults prefer to learn something in depth rather than at a superficial, introductory or awareness level. They want specifics.
4. Adult learners prefer the tried and true – they may need to know why a new idea, concept, change in a field is important and encouraged to try new things.
5. Adults are reluctant to give up old materials. They cautiously weave the new into their existing repertoire, and hence it is a slow process for them to feel confident with something new. Practice therefore becomes important to their skill development and application to their work.
6. Adults like to work with others as they learn. They thrive in collaboration with a colleague and in the discussion process that ensues.
7. Adult learners want interactive, hands-on learning experiences. They want to try things in step-by-step procedural ways.
8. Adults prefer “how-to” trainings. They want practical applications.
9. Adult learners prefer courses to be delivered through eclectic approaches.
10. Non human learning (books, TV, Internet) is popular in adult learning.
11. Adults like problem-centered learning. Case scenarios are learning situations that provide adult learners with real-world problems that support them to apply ideas and skills.
12. Adults carry reservoirs of personal experience. They will attach the new to former or existing information. This helps them internalize information into long term memory, particular as it relates to career interests or personally fulfilling courses.
13. Adult learners want actual situations to ponder and problems to solve.
14. Adults let their schoolwork take second place to jobs and family.
15. Adults can struggle to apply newly learned ideas or skills. More often than not, with complex processes, transfer requires explicit coaching and much “shepherding” to be skillfully applied.
16. Most adults are usually clear and focused about what they want to achieve.
17. Adults are self-directed learners – they usually seek out learning situations.
18. Facilitation of groups works better than lecture format with adult learners.
19. Adults expect their class time to be well spent.
20. Adults are pragmatic learners.



## Appendix E. Education and Skills Development for EAs: Evaluation form for learning option participants

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Learning option name: \_\_\_\_\_

School district/Local union: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate your views on the following questions by placing a check mark in the column that most reflects your perspective.

Question	Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree
The instructor was well prepared and able to teach the learning option				
The learning option content provided was relevant and of good quality				
The learning option will be useful to me in the work I do as an education assistant				
The learning option has encouraged me to look at other training options available under the Education and Skills Development for EAs project				
The learning option content has encouraged me to seek out further training or upgrading options beyond local school district professional development offerings.				
Overall the learning option was well suited to my needs				

Do you have any other comments regarding your experience with this learning option?

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Do you have any suggestions for further training and upgrading for education assistants?

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## Appendix F. Education and Skills Development for EAs: Instructor Evaluation Form

Instructor name:	_____
Name of learning option:	_____
Date of course:	_____
School district:	_____
Number of participants:	_____

Was the content of learning option appropriate to the needs of participants?

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Was the length of the learning option appropriate?

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Do you have any suggestions for improvement of the content, activities and/or materials provided for this option?

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Do you have suggestions for further learning options to support EA learning?

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## Appendix G. Certificate Template

Instructions:

- Print enough copies for all participants who attended and successfully completed the summative assignment
- Print participants name, option, number of hours and date completed in appropriate sections
- Sign your name and title
- Mail / send to participants along with their summative assessment (participants will need for their portfolio)

