

In education, the term "support" is often misunderstood. Many people think that hiring Educational Assistants (EAs) will provide the necessary support for students. However, EAs themselves are not the support; they are tools that help facilitate support within the educational system.

Key Terms in Education

- **Needs:** These are the specific challenges students face while learning. Each student has unique needs influenced by obstacles in their learning environment. For example, a student with executive functioning needs may struggle with organization and time management.
- **Supports:** These are tools that help students manage their needs. Examples include visual checklists, technology aids, and organizational tools. The key is that supports should align with the student's specific needs.
- **Strategies:** These are actions taken to use supports effectively. For instance, a student might decide to leave home earlier to avoid being late. Strategies empower students to take charge of their learning.
- **Resources:** This refers to the people, time, and funding needed to implement supports and strategies. Resources should be allocated in a way that empowers students rather than simply trying to fix their needs.

The Role of Educational Assistants

EAs can be helpful, but they should not be viewed as the main solution to supporting students. Relying too much on EAs can reduce students' independence and self-determination. It's essential to understand their role and to provide guidelines for their effective use in classrooms.



Moving Forward

To improve educational planning, it's crucial to understand students' needs and develop tailored supports and strategies. Resources should be used in ways that promote independence and self-advocacy.

Actions for Improvement:

- **Needs-Based Planning:** Create individual and classroom support plans that focus on specific student needs.
- **Teaching Self-Determination:** Educate students about their needs and how to use supports and strategies effectively.
- **Evaluate Resource Allocation:** Assess how resources are currently used and advocate for better allocation focused on inclusion.
- **Encourage Collaboration:** Foster ongoing communication among students, families, educational assistants, and educators to ensure that resources are effectively used.

Understanding the difference between needs, supports, strategies, and resources is essential for promoting inclusive education. The goal is to empower students and create supportive learning environments that respect their diverse needs.



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