

--- Call for papers ---

Teaching assistants: their role in the inclusion, education and achievement of pupils with special educational needs

A special issue of the European Journal of Special Needs Education

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Overview

The long-term, international trend towards the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) has been accompanied and enabled by an increase in the employment and deployment of a paraprofessional workforce, known variously as teaching assistants, teacher aides and paraeducators. Australia, Italy, Sweden, Canada, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, New Zealand, South Africa, the United States and the United Kingdom have all experienced large increases in this section of their education workforces (Giangreco, Doyle & Suter, 2014).

It is claimed that policies of inclusion and provision for pupils with SEN in mainstream settings in many countries rely heavily on this 'non-teaching' workforce (Masdeu Navarro, 2015). In the last two decades, the growing prevalence and prominence of teaching assistants (TAs)ⁱ in schools and classrooms have attracted attention from researchers, who have been keen to characterise effective models of TA deployment and to identify and measure TAs' various forms of impact (Blatchford, Russell & Webster, 2012; Sharma & Salend, 2016). Despite this attention, the deployment and impact of TAs remains an area of contestability.

While there is evidence to show that TAs can have a positive impact on learning outcomes, effects vary by the types of deployment. Large-scale research examining the impact of TAs providing general classroom support suggests that pupils, particularly those with SEN and/or low prior attainment, perform worse in classes with a TA present (Blatchford, Russell & Webster, 2012). However, results from trials where TAs are trained to deliver structured curriculum intervention programmes to individual pupils or small groups, on average, show moderate positive benefits (Slavin, 2018).

Opportunities for teachers and TAs to plan and work together effectively, and the nature and quality of preparation and training for both roles are strongly associated with learning outcomes (Webster *et al.*, 2011). While positive effects have been found in terms of teacher workload and reduced stress (Blatchford, Russell & Webster, 2012), the evidence that TAs

ⁱ For the purposes of this call for papers, we use the commonly understood term 'teaching assistants' (TAs) to refer to school staff in pupil-based and classroom-based *support* roles who work mainly with pupils with SEN. We include in this definition school staff known, among other titles, as teacher aides, teaching aides, special needs assistants, paraeducators, paraprofessionals and pedagogue assistants. Our definition excludes teachers.

can improve pupils' 'soft' skills and well-being is mixed. For example, facilitating the inclusion of pupils with SEN has unintended consequences in terms of reducing interactions with teachers and peers, and creating dependencies on adult support.

This special issue on the topic of teaching assistants – which, to the best of our knowledge, would be a first for major international education journal – is both timely and important. Drawing together international research and perspectives on the role, deployment and impact of TAs from various perspectives and from a range of methodological approaches, this special issue intends to serve as an indicative summary of the research in this field to date and as a point of departure for future research and development.

Potential themes

We invite contributions from researchers on a variety of themes relating to the employment, deployment, training and impact of TAs. Below we list, in no special order, some indicative (but not exhaustive) themes that we anticipate would be of interest to the intended readership:

- The role and/or impact of TAs in relation to, for example:
 - Processes of inclusion for pupils with SEN
 - Supporting pupils' behavioural, social and emotional needs/development
 - Peer relationships
 - Teachers and/or teaching (e.g. workload; classroom management)
- The nature and quality of the interactions between TAs and pupils
- Professional learning and training for TAs
- Collaboration and planning between teachers and TAs (i.e. opportunities for liaison; co-teachingⁱⁱ)
- Constructs of professional identity (i.e. TAs' perceptions of their role/purpose; the effect of TAs' conditions/contracts of employment on identity)
- Comparative studies (e.g. between jurisdictions; between TAs and paraprofessionals in other sectors, such as health or social care)
- Historical perspectives
- Policy perspectives.

We invite contributions from a range of international jurisdictions, settings (i.e. mainstream/regular schools, special schools and specialist settings) and across age groups (i.e. from nursery through to post-compulsory education). We welcome theoretical and empirical papers representing a range of perspectives and orientations, and on studies using qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method designs.

The focus for this special issue is on TAs in relation to pupils with SEN, disabilities and/or behavioural difficulties. In some countries (e.g. the UK), TAs also support pupils who experience socioeconomic disadvantage and/or who underachieve academically relative to their peers. We also welcome contributions focusing on TAs working in these contexts.

ⁱⁱ In this context, co-teaching refers to instances where teachers *and* TAs work together to plan lessons, share teaching and/or carry out assessments. We exclude from our definition instances where *only* teachers work together.

Intended readership

We expect the readership for this special issue to be broad and to appeal to researchers and practitioners in both mainstream/regular and special education, including (but not limited to) those interested in education effectiveness, school improvement, school leadership and teacher training. We also anticipate the special issue to be of interest to policymakers.

Submission process and timeline

Abstracts should be 500 words maximum and submitted by **30 June 2019**. Please email abstracts to Rob Webster {rob.webster@ucl.ac.uk} by the deadline.

30 June 2019	Deadline for submission of abstracts
July 2019	Invitations for full manuscript submission sent to authors
31 January 2020	Deadline for submission of full manuscript
May 2020	Reviewers' feedback sent to authors
30 September 2020	Deadline for submission of revised manuscripts
December 2020	Reviewers' feedback on revised manuscript sent to authors
31 January 2021	Deadline for final revisions. Editorial decisions
28 February 2021	Deadline for full and final manuscripts
Spring 2021	Publication

Full manuscripts will be limited to 7,000 words, including all tables and references. All articles in this special issue will undergo rigorous double-blind peer review by at least two anonymous referees, following the timeline above.

All submissions should be prepared in accordance with the *European Journal of Special Needs Education's* author guidelines {<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?journalCode=rejs20&page=instructions>} and submitted to {rob.webster@ucl.ac.uk}.

Inquiries

Inquiries are welcome and can be addressed to the guest editors:

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