

Teacher Aides (SSOs)

What does the research say?

There is very little evidence to support the impact of teacher aides (TAs) per se. Research that examines the impact of Teacher Assistants as providing general classroom support suggests that students in a class with a teaching aide present do not, on average, outperform those where only a teacher is present. This average finding covers a range of impacts. In some cases teachers and TAs work together effectively, leading to increases in achievement. In other cases students, particularly those who are low attaining or identified as having special educational needs, there can be a negative consequence with learners performing worse in classes with teaching aides.¹ This is particularly the case when the TA works with a teacher who may be underprepared and the TA unqualified to teach students with special needs. In the absence of professional direction and appropriate training, how TAs work with children and what they actually do to support each child's participations and achievement will depend on their own values, attitudes, knowledge and experiences which may have inadvertent consequences².

There is also little evidence to suggest that learners with special needs do better at school simply because they are supported by a teacher aide³. If a teacher cannot provide supervision, the TA (the least qualified person) may be left to deal with students with the most complex learning needs. TAs may provide too much support and reduce a child's independence in self-care, socialisation and learning. Learners may become unnecessarily dependent on a TA and teachers may become less involved with students with special needs, therefore compromising their education.⁴

In the absence of national educational policy to guide sites, site leaders are left to make decisions about the optimum use of support staff.

When making decisions about the use of SSOs, sites are encouraged to consider⁵:

- Effective orientation or induction and ongoing supervision
- Provision of relevant training and development
- Recognition of professional status of the SSO
- Clarification, negotiation and shared understanding of teachers' and aides' respective roles and responsibilities
- Clearly documented processes for the way teachers and SSOs interact and are supported
- Clear, honest and professional ongoing communication processes
- Clearly documented collaborative ways of working together
- High expectations for courteous and thoughtful behaviour among all members of the class and school towards the SSO
- Involving older students in making decisions about the nature of the support (eg asking learners to identify what actually helps and makes a positive difference to their learning and school life)

Recommendations:

The MUSEC verdict is "Use with caution" whilst the Australian Teaching Learning Toolkit suggests there is "low impact for high cost, based on limited evidence.

¹ <http://evidenceforlearning.org.au/toolkit/teaching-assistants/>

² Rutherford G 2012 The relational role of teacher aides in supporting students and teachers p 317 in S. Carrington & J. MacArthur (Eds.), *Teaching in inclusive school communities* (pp. 313-339). John Wiley and Sons, Australia Ltd.

³ MUSEC Briefing June 2006 Teacher Aides Issue 8

⁴ The relational role of teacher aides in supporting students and teachers p 332 in S. Carrington & J. MacArthur (Eds.), *Teaching in inclusive school communities* (pp. 313-339). John Wiley and Sons, Australia Ltd.

⁵ The relational role of teacher aides in supporting students and teachers p 334-5 in S. Carrington & J. MacArthur (Eds.), *Teaching in inclusive school communities* (pp. 313-339). John Wiley and Sons, Australia Ltd.