Working Together:
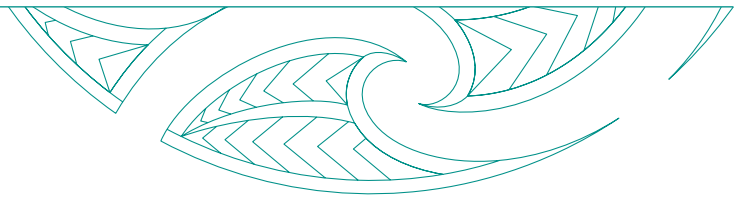
How Teacher Aides Can Have The Most Impact

"You're seeing them achieve and it's just –
it's fantastic. I love what I do. To see the progress
and the joy and the smile on their face."

TA

Contents

Introduction

Teacher aides in Aotearoa New Zealand have a wide range of valued roles and responsibilities. We know that they can enhance learner outcomes by drawing on positive relationships, good training, collaborative practices, and cultural expertise. But we also know that teacher aides can't do their best work without good support from their schools.

ERO was commissioned by the Ministry of Education and NZEI Te Riu Roa to find out what good teacher aide practice and support looks like. This report sets out four key areas of teacher aide practice that make a difference for learners – as well as what schools can do to set teacher aides up for success.

ERO looked at teacher aide practice and support

Teacher aides (TAs) have been vital members of Aotearoa New Zealand schools for more than 50 years. We've learnt a lot about what good education looks like over that time. We also know a lot more than we used to about how TAs can make the most difference for learners.

This report is all about good TA practice and support, in real life, in our unique Aotearoa New Zealand context.

We talked to TAs, teachers, principals, Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), Learning Support Coordinators (LSCs), Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs), learners, and whānau, from 11 diverse primary and secondary schools. We heard that TAs and their schools are doing incredible, innovative work for learners. Their ideas, stories, strategies, and insights are collected in this report, alongside summaries of the research evidence base.

Not everyone will identify with the term 'teacher aide'. The TA role is called different things at different schools, for example, kaiāwhina, teaching assistant, learning assistant, or inclusive learning assistant. We've used the term teacher aide/TA in this report to reflect the language used in Ministry of Education guiding documents.

This research builds off recent TA-focused work by the Ministry of Education and NZEI Te Riu Roa, who have been working to address pay inequities for TAs, to review how their funding works, and to improve their access to professional learning and career pathways.

This report looks at four key areas of TA practice: generalised classroom support; delivering structured interventions; te ao Māori cultural leadership and support; and collaboratively supporting students with learning support needs.

By shining a light on 'what good looks like', this report can inspire and support improved practices for TAs, classroom teachers, school leaders, learning support experts, and others.

About this report

This report is for teacher aides and the people that support their work. It draws on research and real life stories to shine a light on the key ways that teacher aides, teachers, leaders, whānau, and other experts can make the most of the TA role, to make a positive difference for learners.

Why we did this research

Part of ERO's role is to share and promote good practice. TAs play a significant part in our school system, so the quality of TA practice can make a real difference for Aotearoa New Zealand's learners. We hope to inspire improvements to the ways that schools work with TAs by shining a light on up-to-date, effective practices.

What we looked at

This study looks at good TA practices in our unique Aotearoa New Zealand context and what is needed to support TAs in their role. ERO worked alongside the Ministry of Education and NZEI Te Riu Roa to explore:

→ What does the existing research evidence say about good TA practices?

→ What does the existing research evidence say about good support for TAs, from teachers, leaders, and others?

→ What do these practices and supports look like in our Aotearoa New Zealand context, and across a range of schools?

→ What insights, strategies, and stories can we gather that could be useful for the sector – TAs, teachers, leaders, and others?

There are companion guides to this report

This report is part of a suite of resources about good practice and support for teacher aides. We have put together individual guides specifically for:

→ teacher aides

→ classroom teachers

→ school leaders (including learning support leaders such as SENCOs and LSCs)

→ school boards

→ parents and whānau.

The guides includes practical information, and reflective questions, and are intended to be useful for the specific interests and roles of each group.

There are links to the guides in the 'Useful resources' section of this report, or through ERO's website: www.ero.govt.nz

How we explored good teacher aide practice and support

To establish an evidence base of 'what good TA practice looks like', we started with a deep dive into the research from Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas. After checking our understandings with sector experts, we then spoke to a selection of 11 schools about how they make good TA practices and support happen in real life. The schools represented a range of settings, communities, deciles, roll size, diversity, and urban and rural locations across Aotearoa New Zealand. As part of our interviews with schools, ERO spoke to:

→ 37 teacher aides

→ 13 school leaders (including principals, deputy principals (DPs), and Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) who don't have a classroom teacher role)

→ 13 teachers (including SENCOs who also have a classroom teacher role)

→ 7 Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs)

→ 2 Learning Support Coordinators (LSCs)

→ 2 parents and 4 secondary school students.

We also looked at samples of assessment, planning, meeting notes, professional development resources, and policy documents from these schools.

This research is focused on TA practice in English-medium, non-fundholding schools. ERO is also publishing research focused on kura kaupapa Māori, led by a specialist Māori team in 2022. Research focusing on specialist schools is being planned for 2023.

Teacher aide practice and support isn't one-size-fits-all

While this report outlines some TA practices that the national and international research shows are particularly effective for supporting learners, it is important to keep in mind that the TA role is diverse and varied. Roles and responsibilities will look different depending on the classroom, school, and community contexts that each TA works within. This means that TA support may or may not be the right response for a particular school's needs. It also means that there is no such thing as a 'typical' TA, and no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting them. Teacher aides, teachers, school leaders, and other key actors should reflect on their school's unique contexts when considering the practices outlined in this report.

Report structure

This report is divided into six parts.

Part 1 provides an overview of the teacher aide role, in Aotearoa New Zealand and more widely, and how understandings of good TA practice have changed over time.

Parts 2 to 5 focus on four key areas of TA practice that national and international research highlight as particularly effective in supporting learners. For each area, we outline good practices and their benefits for learners, and what is needed to support these practices. We also provide real life strategies that TAs and schools find work well, and good practice examples.

→ **Part 2** focuses on **generalised classroom support**. We set out the benefits of TAs working with the wider class, and enabling teachers to have quality interactions with those learners that need extra support.

→ **Part 3** is about **delivering structured interventions**. We look at ways that TAs can support learning through short, highly structured sessions with individuals and small groups, using evidence-based programmes and interventions.

→ **Part 4** is about **te ao Māori cultural leadership and support** and how Māori TAs can draw on their cultural expertise to support staff and learners.

→ **Part 5** looks at **collaboratively supporting students with learning support needs**. We outline the main features of an effective, collaborative approach to supporting the learning and wellbeing of these students.

Part 6 concludes the report by **summarising** what we found from the schools we talked to. Then we share some **useful resources** for schools and whānau.

Part 1: The teacher aide role and how it has changed

Teacher aides have been in Aotearoa New Zealand schools for more than fifty years. Our understandings about how to provide good inclusive education have grown over that time, and so have our understandings of how teacher aides can best contribute to students' learning and wellbeing. In this section we look at the role of teacher aides, how and why understandings of good teacher aide practice have changed over time, and current understandings of good teacher aide practice.

The Aotearoa New Zealand teacher aide workforce

Teacher aides play a major part in our school system. There are around 25,000 TAs employed across Aotearoa New Zealand, with at least one TA employed in over 96 percent of our schools.

Most TAs work part-time. The TA workforce is about 86 percent women, and represents a wide range of ethnic and cultural groups. Nineteen percent of the TA workforce identifies as Māori, and 8 percent as Pacific.[a]

In recent years, TAs have been the focus of increased attention in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Ministry of Education and NZEI Te Riu Roa have worked to address pay inequities for TAs, to review how their funding works, to fund their professional learning, and improve their access to career pathways.

What teacher aides do

The TA role is diverse and varied. In 2017–2019, NZEI Te Riu Roa and the Ministry of Education did an in-depth exploration of the complex role of TAs as part of a pay equity claim. They identified 16 'general areas of responsibility' that TAs may undertake (see inset). These areas are wide-ranging: from delivering specific learning programmes to managing challenging behaviour, providing cultural support for students, and providing care and support for heath conditions. The study also identified valuable, 'less visible skills', particularly empathy/relationship skills, initiative, patience, and flexibility.[1]

There are no specific training requirements for working as a TA, and the workforce has a wide range of qualifications, experience, and expertise. Some TAs have relevant degrees or qualifications in social work or early childhood teaching, are bi- or multi-lingual, have cultural expertise that reflects the learning community of a school, or are parents of children with learning support needs.

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a   2021 Ministry of Education payroll data.

TAs usually work closely with teachers and learners, and are supported by classroom teachers, LSCs, SENCOs, other leadership and teaching staff, as well as fellow TAs. TAs work under the direction of school leaders.

TAs' general areas of responsibility, identified by the Ministry of Education and NZEI Te Riu Roa

→ Providing in-class support to the teacher to deliver the curriculum

→ Delivering specific learning programmes to students

→ Facilitating student assessment

→ Supporting inclusion in school and among peers

→ Building relationships and communicating with students

→ Working with students to help them become well-rounded individuals

→ Supporting the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of students

→ Being a Te Ao Māori teacher aide in English and Māori medium kura

→ Working with specialists and external agencies

→ Managing challenging behaviour and behavioural issues

→ Providing care and support for medical conditions

→ Providing cultural support for students

→ Supporting students' extracurricular activities, trips and events

→ Working with colleagues

→ Building and sharing expertise

→ Contributing to the effective functioning of the school

How the teacher aide role has changed over time

In the past, most TAs worked side-by-side with a few learners

When TAs were first introduced to schools in the 1960s, their main two roles were: helping teachers with minor administrative or classroom set-up tasks; and working closely with disabled learners,[b] learners with learning difficulties, or learners with physical, mental health, or behaviour issues.[2] Over the next few decades, a worldwide shift towards more inclusive, rights-based models of education meant that the number of TAs increased, to support the inclusion of more learners with support needs in mainstream schools.

It used to be common and accepted practice for TAs to spend most or all of their time working side-by-side with those learners, and even overseeing and adapting their learning. This is often called the 'velcro' model, and it was intended to help with learners' inclusion and learning success, through close one-on-one time with a TA who knew that learner well.[3]

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b   When we talk about disabled learners, we mean children and young people with significant needs for ongoing support, adaptations, or accommodations to support their education. Not all members of this community might identify with this language. We've used this term based on rigorous consultation with key stakeholders during ERO's evaluation of education for disabled learners in schools and early learning.

Side-by-side learning support doesn't work for most learners

Since the 1990s, there has been growing evidence that the traditional velcro model isn't the best thing for learners and their education. While learners and TAs often enjoy their close relationships,[4] research shows there are many negative outcomes too. Side-by-side support is strongly linked to learners' isolation, frustration, limited opportunities to make choices and self-manage, and poor learning progress.[5]

> "The use of TAs to help support pupils with particular needs seems a logical and commonsensical solution to time issues for teachers and the need for individual attention for pupils. However the data … suggests this is at a cost to the supported pupils themselves."[6]
>
> **RUBIE-DAVIES, BLATCHFORD, WEBSTER, KOUTSOUBOU, & BASSETT, 2010, P.445**

One of the main problems with side-by-side support is that it limits access to quality interactions with the classroom teacher.[7] Teachers tend to skip over learners that already have a TA working with them, so TAs can end up providing instructional support and adapting lessons for those learners instead of the teacher, and having a much closer relationship with the learner than the teacher does. For example, an Australian case study found that "when the TA was present, the teacher never worked with students with disability or learning difficulties; they were deemed the responsibility of the TA."[8] TAs who are employed to provide necessary side-by-side *physical* support (for example, for health or behaviour reasons), can end up providing side-by-side *learning* support too. This means that those learners miss out. All learners need to have access to good-quality learning interactions with qualified teachers, and to build good relationships with teachers that can inform responsive teaching strategies and plans.

> "As pupils had more contact with TAs, they had less interaction with teachers. In practice, therefore, TAs do not provide **additional** support but **alternative** support."[9]
>
> **RUBIE-DAVIES ET AL., 2010, P.430**

To avoid the negative impacts of side-by-side velcro support, schools across the world have been moving away from the traditional view of TAs as side-by-side support workers, and are finding better ways to ensure that learners with support needs have at least as much time working with their teacher as other learners do. Though many TAs still spend *some* time working with these learners, their teaching and learning is now understood to be the responsibility of qualified classroom teachers and learning support specialists, rather than TAs.[10]

> " Students with the most challenging learning needs deserve more contact time with the most trained teachers in a school. "[11]
>
> **CAUSTON-THEOHARIS, 2009, P.39**

It can be difficult to move on from side-by-side approaches

It's hard to shift practices that have been around for decades. Even though velcro support is now "widely criticised and long-discouraged",[12] it is still fairly widespread in schools around the world, including Aotearoa New Zealand.[13] ERO's recent evaluation of education for disabled learners in schools indicates that many TAs are still fulfilling a primary-instructor role, which means many learners aren't benefitting from well-coordinated, teacher-led learning.[14]

International studies have noted that classrooms can easily drift back to traditional side-by-side approaches even when schools make deliberate attempts to move away from it – such as changing policies and job descriptions, and providing professional learning and development (PLD) for staff.[15] Common barriers include time and resource pressures, low teacher confidence, and the expectations and preferences of TAs, teachers, leaders, learners, and families.[16]

> " It is very rare that adaptations are done for the students, leaving this aspect up to the teacher aide. "
>
> **SENCO**
>
> " Teacher aides were often left to plan instead of teachers. "
>
> **PARENT**
>
> — **QUOTES FROM PARTICIPANTS IN ERO'S 2022 RESEARCH INTO EDUCATION FOR DISABLED LEARNERS**[17]

Current understandings of good teacher aide practice

These days, TA roles and responsibilities are much more diverse than they were in the 1960s. Though side-by-side support persists in some classrooms, there are many others who have put in place more collaborative, responsive, and highly effective practices. With good support, contemporary TAs fulfil a wide range of valued roles and responsibilities, enhancing learner outcomes by drawing on positive relationships, good training, collaborative practices, and cultural expertise.[18]

> " They're specialised now – they don't just mix the glue. "
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

A large body of research evidence affirms that TAs' practices, and the ways they are supported, can make a big difference for learners. The international research base focuses mainly on two areas of TA support:

1) Generalised classroom support – TAs draw on collaborative planning and cultural expertise to support the wider class, enabling teachers to have quality interactions with learners who need extra support

2) Delivering structured interventions – TAs hold brief, focused sessions with individuals and small groups using evidence-based programmes and interventions.

The Aotearoa New Zealand evidence base supports those two areas, and also emphasises:

3) Te ao Māori cultural leadership and support – Māori TAs support staff and learners with their cultural knowledge

4) Collaboratively supporting students with learning support needs – TAs take a highly collaborative, autonomy-focused approach, to contribute to the learning and wellbeing of individual learners with support needs.

These are the four key areas of practice highlighted in this report. There is a section focused on each area.

Four key areas of TA practice	
Generalised classroom support	Part 2
Delivering structured interventions	Part 3
Te ao Māori cultural leadership and support	Part 4
Collaboratively supporting students with learning support needs	Part 5

Good TA practice and support isn't one-size–fits-all

Keep in mind that not *all* TAs work in these four key areas, and some TAs may work across a combination of areas. The TA role is diverse, and responsibilities will look different depending on classroom, school and community contexts.

Part 2: Generalised classroom support

Generalised classroom support is when TAs draw on lesson plans to inform good quality interactions with a range of learners across the class, while teachers work more regularly with those learners that need extra support.

In this section, we describe three important TA practices for generalised classroom support, as well as the ways that these practices need to be enabled by teachers, leaders, whānau, and other experts. We'll share what the research evidence base says, as well as stories, strategies, and quotes from schools that are making this work.

What's good generalised classroom support practice?

Generalised classroom support means that, in collaboration with classroom teachers, TAs work with learners across the wider class, using lesson plans, while teachers work more regularly with the learners that need extra support. For this to work well, teachers need to be confident supporting learners with support needs. They also need to share good information with TAs about lesson plans and intentions to inform their work around the class. TAs need to be confident in using a range of good quality interaction practices, and may also draw on their cultural and language expertise to make interactions even better.

The national and international research shows that there are three generalised classroom support practices that make the most difference for learners.

Three important generalised classroom support practices
1) TAs focus most of their interactions on the wider class, enabling teachers to work more often with learners that require more intensive learning support
2) TAs understand lesson plans and objectives, intended learning outcomes, and feedback requirements, and use these to inform their support across the class
3) TAs consistently use good quality interaction practices with learners across the class, including culturally responsive practices.

However, **these TA practices can't happen without good support** – so when we describe good practices for TAs, we'll also talk about how these should be enabled by school leaders, teachers, and other learning support staff.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out useful information about generalised classroom support practice. It includes:

1) what the **evidence** says

2) real life **TA strategies** that work well

3) real life **support strategies** that work well

4) a **good practice example** about a school that is doing good work

5) a **summary** of the most important TA and school support practices.

What sorts of classrooms would benefit from generalised classroom support?

No TA practices are one-size-fits-all. It's important to reflect about which practices will benefit each school's unique community and context. Generalised classroom support practices are likely to work well in classes that have:

→ TAs who are confident to work with a range of learners

→ teachers who are confident to work with the range of learners in their class, including those with learning support needs

→ support from school leadership to build and implement good quality generalised classroom support practices.

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1) What does the evidence say?

We looked at the national and international research base to find out what's important to know about generalised classroom support. We wanted to know which TA practices, and support practices, make the most difference for learners.

Leaders and teachers need to set the scene for a generalised classroom support approach

Leaders and teachers have more control than TAs over how classrooms are organised. This means that they need to lead the way, building up current, shared understandings across the school about the value of this approach, and putting it into practice.[19] This involves more than just knowing or saying that this is important – studies have found that behaviours don't change easily, and it takes a joint effort.[20]

At the centre of this shift is the importance of teachers recognising that they are responsible for all learners and their programmes – they should not hand this responsibility to a TA. This is true whether or not teachers are released for a portion of their hours in order to work with students with learning support needs. It can be useful for leaders to make expectations explicit.[21]

> "Maybe 10 years ago our perspective was that they [TAs] were there to help the child finish the work, stay on task."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

> "TAs can be isolated a lot, so we had to make sure we kept coming together so they knew they weren't on their own. We tried to make it as a team, not just, 'You're on your own.'"
>
> **SENCO**

Generalised classroom support promotes the learning and wellbeing of learners with support needs

Generalised classroom support practices make a big difference to the learning and wellbeing of learners with support needs. When TAs are positioned around the class, instead of focusing mostly on an individual, there are lots more opportunities for learners with support needs to benefit from direct teaching interactions with the classroom teacher. Interactions with qualified teachers have a lot of proven benefits for learners, and traditional side-by-side support tended to get in the way of those interactions – even though this wasn't the intention.[22]

Generalised approaches also work well for these learners because it opens up their opportunities for peer connections and independent learning, which has positive wellbeing and learning impacts. In comparison, traditional side-by-side support is strongly linked to learners' isolation, frustration, limited opportunities to make choices and self-manage, and feelings that they don't belong with their peers.[23] Teachers and TAs can work together to ensure that learners with support needs get a good mix of times working with the teacher, with the TA, with their peers, and independently.

> "Students become really self-conscious, particularly at that Year 8 level, of anything that sets them apart – apart from really high-needs students, which is different. Attaching an adult person to them is just not the right approach. They will respond to the support if they feel like that support is for everyone. Age-appropriateness of support is important for success."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

Practices to avoid – and why

It's not good practice for TAs to be the main people that support students with learning support needs with their schoolwork. This approach to support is linked to: [24]

→ reduced time with qualified teachers

→ limited opportunities to make choices and self-manage

→ reduced opportunities for peer connections

→ too much focus on behaviour and task completion, at the expense of other learning outcomes and key competencies

→ inappropriate adaptation of schoolwork and 'replacing the teacher' as primary instructors, leading to negative learning outcomes for students.

Teachers should avoid allocating responsibility for individuals' teaching and learning, including adaptation of lessons, to TAs.

TAs should avoid accepting responsibility for adapting and overseeing individuals' teaching and learning, unless they have relevant qualifications or expertise.

What about learners that really need an adult next to them at all times?

Where TAs are employed to provide close side-by-side supervision for individual learners for health or behaviour reasons, a modified generalised classroom approach can still be used. The key thing is ensuring that these learners don't miss out on having at least as much time working with their teachers as other learners have. Like all learners, they need opportunities to develop good responsive relationships with their classroom teacher and peers, and their learning plans still need to be teacher-led.[25] Teachers and TAs can work together (with learning support leaders and other experts) to plan for times that teachers can have quality teaching interactions with these learners. Learners might work with teachers *instead of* with a TA at times, or with teachers *as well as* a TA, depending on individual needs

Part 5 of this report talks more about how TAs can support students with learning support needs.

When TAs use good quality interaction practices, generalised classroom support promotes the learning of all learners in the class

Generalised classroom support practices mean that all learners have times that they are being supported by a TA. TAs might do this by roving the room, taking whole-class activities, or supporting flexible groups. However, for TAs to offer effective support to the wider class, they need to be equipped with a kete of quality interaction practices.

Several studies have highlighted that teacher aides who haven't been well trained in learning interactions focus too much on getting the work finished (task completion), which isn't useful for supporting learning.[26] See the box below for some interaction practices to avoid.

> "I like that you [TAs] are easy to talk to, especially because you like to do what we're doing and you learn it and do it with us."
>
> **SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT**

Good quality interactions include practices like:[27]

→ open questions

→ wait time – giving 4–5 seconds for learners to answer before speaking again

→ giving the least amount of support first

→ roving the room

→ encouraging peer-to-peer learning

→ specific feedback and feedforward

→ indicators set out in *Tātaiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners*

→ indicators set out in *Tapasā: Cultural competencies framework for teachers of Pacific learners*

→ using their own cultural and language expertise to support learners to understand learning expectations and to make connections.

Practices to avoid – and why

A wide range of studies have looked at practices that TAs regularly use in their interactions, and identified some common practices that don't support learning. These practices are more focused on completing tasks than supporting deep learning, which means that learners don't get the full benefit of lessons.

Practices for TAs to avoid are:[28]

→ closed questions (like yes/no questions)

→ giving answers and hints

→ rushing learners' thinking

→ confusing and unclear guidance

→ echoing teacher instructions

→ taking responsibility for the completion of learners' work.

To enable TAs to do good work, it's important for leaders and teachers to provide TAs with sufficient training and support for quality TA-student interactions

Several studies have highlighted that teacher aides benefit from targeted, regular training and support around good quality interactions. Unfortunately, we also know that PLD for TAs doesn't always happen in practice.[29] It's useful for school leaders to consider the known benefits of PLD for TAs in their decision-making, and draw on TA PLD funding where possible. Teachers also play a key role in promoting quality interactions, especially by modelling and discussing good practices, and identifying areas for development.[30]

In Aotearoa New Zealand, training should reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi and bicultural perspectives, and be responsive to the diverse cultures, languages, and identities of each school's community.

> "The important thing is to look at the skills they've got and work from those. Have a lot of PD around what you want to see, and a lot of guidance. I meet with the [TAs] almost every morning. It's about communication going well, followed by excellent PD."
>
> **LSC**

> "In order for us to maximise benefits for children, there MUST be PD for our learning assistants. It must be part of the job. That's just an integral part of the day-to-day operations for them."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

Having a good understanding of teachers' plans helps TAs provide good quality support to learners

TAs need to have a good understanding of what is being taught each day, so that they can offer good support to learners. When TAs understand lesson plans and objectives, intended learning outcomes, and feedback requirements, their support and interactions can be more effective.[31] All learners in the class benefit when TAs and teachers work as a team.

> "I guess [as a sector] we have this expectation that teachers arrive in places well prepared, and we're expecting [TAs] to just turn up."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

> "It's not as rewarding [for TAs] if they're just turning up. But if they have a clear purpose, have planned and prepared, there's a lot more satisfaction in the work."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

A large-scale study in the United Kingdom outlines the main things which teachers and TAs should discuss, so that TAs can be well prepared for providing generalised classroom support. They "need to know:

→ concepts, facts, info being taught

→ skills to be learned, applied, practised or extended

→ intended learning outcomes

→ expected/required feedback."[32]

The quality of TAs' support, and their ability to positively impact students, is limited without a good understanding of those elements. Lack of information can lead to less-helpful TA practices like "stereo teaching" (repeating exactly what teachers just said) and focusing too much on task completion.[33]

Teachers and TAs need dedicated time to discuss lesson plans and objectives

It's important for TAs and teachers to be able to discuss lesson plans and objectives, but this can't happen without the support of their schools. "At the institutional level, it requires responsive and flexible leadership to prioritise and safeguard planning time."[34] Research has found that opportunities for teacher-TA discussion are rarely prioritised, in favour of maximising TAs' time in-class with students.[35] This is reflected in ERO's recent evaluation of education for disabled learners, where almost half (43 percent) of TAs surveyed said they do not regularly meet with the classroom teacher.[36]

The positive impacts of regular, formalised planning time – even very brief meetings – is strongly emphasised in the research base. Making this happen in practice, though, requires good communication and careful timetabling, to ensure that meetings happen within TAs' regular hours and that any changes are agreed by everyone involved. One study outlined some effective, "creative ways" of making time for TA-teacher discussion, such as, "adjusting TAs' working hours (start early, finish early), using assembly time and having TAs join teachers for (part of) planning [times]."[37]

Generalised classroom support can take some getting used to

Because traditional models have been the norm for a long time, teachers may need support to understand how and why a shift is necessary. Professional learning opportunities focused on working effectively with TAs can promote this understanding and buy-in.[38]

A generalised support approach can feel like a big change for TAs who are accustomed to, and may enjoy, working closely with a few individuals. When TAs use a generalised classroom support approach, they are working with other learners in the class just as often, or *more* often, than with learners who have support needs.[39] A role focused on support for a wide range of learners might require a significant shift in expectations, mindsets, and behaviours, for TAs as well as the teachers, leaders, and others who support their work.[40]

Classroom teachers may need extra training and support, to be confident to work with the diverse range of learning needs in their class

Teachers have reported feeling underprepared, unconfident, reluctant and/or fearful about supporting the learning of disabled learners and learners with health, behaviour, or other learning support needs. This can result in teachers actively avoiding working with these learners.[41] This is likely to contribute to the persistence of 'velcro' TA support – particularly when TAs already have expertise in, and enjoy, working closely with those learners.[42] Extra support and training may be necessary for teachers to be properly equipped and confident to offer quality teaching interactions to all of the learners in their class, particularly if their initial training has not covered this area of practice strongly.[43]

> **Tip: Parents and whānau may need help to understand a change in approach**
>
> Because side-by-side support has been around for a long time, parents and whānau might expect and value the traditional TA support approach.[44] This can create a challenge for schools who are trying to shift to more useful, current support practices. ERO has developed a short guide specifically for parents and whānau of children with learning support needs, which sets out the value of generalised support and clarifies current understandings about good quality TA support. There's a link to this guide for parents and whānau in the 'Useful resources' section of this report.

The diverse cultures and languages of TAs can make interactions even better

Learners benefit when schools purposefully appoint TAs who share their culture or speak their home languages, and encourage those TAs to use languages in daily interactions. Bi- and multi-lingual TAs have an especially important role in supporting the participation and language acquisition of students that are English language learners in Aotearoa New Zealand.[45]

2) Real life TA strategies that work well

As part of this study, we talked to teacher aides, teachers, SENCOs, LSCs, senior leaders, RTLBs, parents, learners, and sector experts about strategies that have worked well in their experience. We've collected their ideas and strategies here. It's important to reflect about which practices will benefit each school's unique community and context – no practices are one-size-fits-all so these strategies won't be the right fit for everyone.

Real life TA strategies that work well include:

→ **Deliberately building up their relationships with all learners in the class.** Several TAs talked about how they focus initial conversations on figuring out shared interests, like favourite sports teams. Another TA told us that she does quick internet searches about learners' favourite movies or games to help engage them in conversation.

→ **Building culturally responsive practices, and using cultural expertise.** Some TAs work on individual and team goals related to supporting Māori learners and Pacific learners, drawing on *Tātaiako* and *Tapasā* frameworks and indicators. We heard about goals that range from basic use of language and greetings, to building deep understandings of culturally responsive practices to specifically benefit Māori learners, Pacific learners, or learners from diverse cultural groups within their school community. Other TAs maximise shared language and culture to build learners' relationships and belonging, and to facilitate connections between learners and their peers and other staff.

→ **Working to support the learning across the class, by roving the room or rotating support for small groups.** TAs shared that they had to develop a flexible approach to working well with a range of learners, with a range of different needs. "I have to switch my style to fit in – It's like a switch." (TA)

> "[The TA] will work with the student [with identified needs] and also others, going around the groups. Not just honing in and focusing on that individual, but supporting that individual as part of the bigger picture. Our [TAs] are very good at that."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

> "I'll carry on with [the teacher's] programme, do exactly what she's done. She'll set up then take the kids [with learning support needs] … then I'll rove around. Teach as if you were the teacher, as if you were her."
>
> **TA**

→ **Taking large group activities in areas where they feel comfortable and confident.** TAs with special interests in art, technology, and storytelling use their skillsets within whole-class sessions, in liaison with classroom teachers. This creates opportunities for teachers to have interactions with individuals and small groups that require extra support.

→ **Sharing information and insights with classroom teachers.** TAs told us that they make sure teachers are kept up to speed on what TAs are noticing about learners' interests, friendships and learning, as well as promptly passing on messages from parents and sharing their expertise about health, disability, or behaviour supports. This helps ensure that TAs don't "hold the key" (Teacher) to working with particular students, and also boosts professional trust and teamwork with teachers.

→ **Engaging in professional learning.**
This includes regular training and planning discussions, formalised courses, targeted reading, and personal networks like social media groups. "I belong to different groups online, we're just constantly reading little snippets of research" (TA). TAs follow up new learning by talking to colleagues about ways to embed new skills in their daily practice. We heard that informal observations of teachers' practices is a valued form of PLD for many TAs.

> "They absorb practice by observing and working alongside experienced teachers and when possible through professional discussions."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

→ **Tailoring their interactions to learners' needs.**
TAs use open-ended questions to support students' understandings and help them make connections to previous learning. "[The TA] asks, 'Tell me more' 'What else?' 'Does anybody have anything to add on?' 'What do YOU think?'" (Teacher). Others model a learning mindset by saying things like, "You know, I'm not sure. Shall we find out together?" (TA). We heard about TAs encouraging students to talk through their learning, and to present it in a range of ways, like through sculpture, voice recordings, and stop-motion. We heard that asking teachers about what strategies should look like at different levels equips TAs to have useful interactions across the class. Some TAs note that having previous experience working at higher year levels was helpful.

> "You [TAs] encourage us to actually do our work."
>
> – **STUDENT**

→ **Engaging with planning documents and meetings to understand lesson plans.**
Some TAs find it useful to take notes for themselves about particular words and instructions. In cases where TAs start work during class time, some use the first 5–10 mins after arriving to carefully check over planning documentation; while others have a system of "ready to go" resource baskets prepared by the classroom teacher, which contain familiar resources discussed at previous meetings and notes with any new key information. "I've been at schools where TAs are in class and it's just, 'What shall I do, what shall I do?' It's not like that here – they come in with a plan" (LSC).

> "I like to be very organised, know beforehand what I'm doing. [The teacher's] learnt that, just tell me beforehand, five minutes before so I can get my head around it. In the mornings we have short five, ten minutes to catch up. For example, we're doing maths today, geometry, here's the sheet. Then I know the expectations."
>
> **TA**

> "The [online planner] is very detailed and tells me exactly what I need to do. I hate asking, 'What exactly do I have to do?'"
>
> **TA**

→ **Contributing to class planning discussions and documentation.** For example, TAs share with teachers:

— relevant local knowledge of families and the community

— cultural and linguistic expertise

— social dynamics: "We might have few kids working together on a maths programme. But the TA will say, this kid won't work when that kid sits there. So we'll change it" (Teacher)

— engagement levels and triggers for students with behavioural challenges

— access challenges for students with learning support needs: "You help me take notes because I struggle to do two things at once, like when we watched that documentary it was way faster to pause and tell you what to note down, I would have taken longer and gotten distracted" (Student)

— insights about which learners are feeling unsure. Several participants had noticed that learners are sometimes more comfortable admitting that they don't understand schoolwork to TAs than to teachers.

> "It's easier to ask you guys for help because you're not the teacher at the front of the room … sometimes the teacher is scary to ask because you don't want that teacher to know you're behind or whatever."
>
> **SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT**

3) Real life support strategies that work well

As part of this study, we talked to teacher aides, teachers, SENCOs, LSCs, senior leaders, RTLBs, parents, learners, and sector experts about strategies that have worked well in their experience. We've collected their ideas and strategies here. It's important to reflect about which practices will benefit each school's unique community and context – no practices are one-size-fits-all so these strategies won't be the right fit for everyone.

Real life leader, teacher, and learning support staff strategies that work well include:

→ **Arranging the classroom to enable a generalised support approach.** Teachers organise their lessons so that they and TAs rotate support for flexible grouping or "work stations" during key lessons. We heard about teachers deliberately encouraging peer-to-peer learning through seating arrangements, flexible learning groups, and careful matching of learners with support needs with supportive peers. They shared that this reduces the need for constant adult support.

→ **Teachers deliberately building knowledge, understandings, and relationships, so that they can be confident to support all learners in their class.** Teachers shared how they take extra time to build relationships with learners with support needs, to actively reduce any uncertainty around supporting their specific needs. "That child is actually *my* responsibility, and *I* need to build that relationship with that child" (Teacher). We heard that teachers find it useful to reflect about their own biases and be aware of the tendency for teachers to skip over learners with support needs – this helps to actively work against enacting poorer practices.

Short story: A teacher deliberately builds her relationship with a learner, with TA support

A newly graduated teacher at a primary school has taken a proactive approach to building a relationship with a learner with behavioural and learning support needs. She noticed that he appeared "more comfortable around the TA." The teacher talked to the TA to share information about the learner's interests, rhythms, and cues, and started spending more one-one-one time with him in the class while the TA worked with others. Over time, this learner showed signs that his relationship with the teacher had been successfully built – for example, he would approach the teacher as often as he would approach the TA.

→ **Carefully timetabling TA support to ensure that TAs have opportunities to build relationships with a range of learners and teachers.** Leaders and teachers shared that TAs need opportunities to work with lots of learners and teachers in order to build up a flexible, collaborative approach. Participants also note that some learners need a slower approach to building relationships with a range of TAs, so planning has to start with considering learners' needs.

> "I ensure that my team get to work with the broadest range of students. In the early days when [TAs] were tagged to one … student, that became a hard day, to a hard week, to a hard term, to no enjoyment. We all want to participate with all of our students. Regarding our most vulnerable, trickier students, that's the weight for the team to carry, not one person. When we timetable, we protect that…We want to protect relationships with the students."
>
> **SENCO**

→ **Leaders growing current understandings and buy-in for a generalised support approach throughout the school, through PLD, clear expectations, policies, and repeated messages.** We heard that it is useful for senior leaders to make expectations for TA support explicit to all staff, for example at whole-staff meetings and in documentation. One TA shared that he and his TA colleagues appreciated this being explicitly and firmly stated by a new school principal at a staff-only day.

> "Teachers are kind, generous people, but fear means they can get a bit defensive. Give them the 'why', and how the learning support team can help."
>
> **SENCO**

→ **Supporting parents, whānau, and learners to understand the 'team' approach to teaching, and how this benefits all learners in the class.** Teachers explain the approach to learners at the start of the year, and repeat messages over time. One Auckland TA shared that it makes her job easier when teachers are clear with learners about her role in the class. For example, one teacher that she works alongside tells learners, "Whāea _____ is one of the people who teach you." Some leaders find it useful to have one-on-one conversations with families of learners with support needs. For some families it works well to start by going over how the Aotearoa New Zealand school system might be different to their home countries.

Short story: Teachers focusing on learners that need more support

A rural school classroom is moving towards a generalised support model, starting with their approach to literacy learning. The teacher, who is also the SENCO, works with the learners that need more targeted teaching, focused on accelerating progress. "As skilled as our TAs are, we're the ones with a teaching degree. And parents need to see we work with their children as well" (Teacher/SENCO). While the teacher is engaged in these more intense teaching interactions, the TA roves the classroom, supporting the learning of those that require more moderate support.

→ **Taking active steps to include TAs as part of the school team.** This includes considering subtle messages about TAs' 'place' in the school, thinking about how hierarchies might be communicated. Many participants spoke about the difference it makes when TAs are invited to staff-only days and PLD sessions. We also heard about small, impactful changes, like deciding not to put TAs' names last in lists or on newsletters, adding TAs to email chains and social media chats, ensuring TAs have access to resources and databases, and having a consistent approach to addressing all staff – by first name or by title.

> "The children understand that the learning assistant's voice carries the same weight as the teacher's … Don't create a them-and-us mentality in the students."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "TAs need to be on all staff access. They need to be able to access archives, so they're not considered 'other', or having to chase for basic information."
>
> **TA**

→ **Supporting shared understandings by including TAs in staff meetings, training, PLD, and staff-only days.** We heard that when time and resources are limited, schools make it work by capitalising on quieter times during TAs' work hours, using assembly or sports times to meet, or staggering their staff break times. Some schools hold repeat PLD sessions for TAs that are unable to attend with others.

→ **Arranging for TAs to present to, or put together resources for, teaching staff about areas of expertise.** For example, around sensory therapy, or specific diagnoses.

→ **Schools offering PLD in key skills like scaffolding and open questioning.** Online resources and 'libraries' of key PLD documents are useful for TAs. "Slow and steady" (RTLB) approaches are particularly effective for some TAs who are reluctant to shift practice, as is modelling, consistent messages, and discussions around the benefits for learners. Some RTLBs and SENCOs provide specific training and modelling on strategies that support learners to understand teacher instructions, without encouraging overreliance – "show and go" and "spray and walk away" approaches.

> "Wait time, open questioning, these sorts of things, a lot of our teachers get PLD in that, but TAs don't and it's a missed opportunity."
>
> **RTLB**

> "I think there are easy ways you can train and really value TAs, that have significant impact."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

> " We find that what works is modelling and reflecting, discussing good practice, answering questions. It's about being side by side rather than expert and learner. You find you develop better relationships and you get more out of that. It's built through regular contact, modelling, and being a learner with them. All the stuff that works in the classroom too. "
>
> **RTLB**

Short story: Building the knowledge and capability of TAs

The TA team at an urban secondary school value their established culture of capability building, which supports them to have effective interactions with a wide range of students.

Although the Criteria are intended for teachers, this team finds it useful to draw on the Practising Teacher Criteria as a basis for regular one-on-one professional discussions between the SENCO and TAs, and to decide on individual development goals. Presentations and resources around key practices like scaffolding are developed in-house and stored on a central database for TAs to revisit. TAs shared that they value the pedagogical learning, particularly because it helps them to:

→ see themselves as skilled professionals

→ feel equipped to work effectively with a wide range of students

→ have shared language and concepts with the teaching staff

→ understand how and why key practices are used and notice their impact on student learning.

→ **Matching TAs and classes based on shared language and culture.** For example, one school purposefully recruits TAs that reflected the cultures and languages of a range of Pacific groups, to support the learning and belonging of the school's high proportion of Pacific learners and families. Another school matches TAs and other staff that speak Mayalayam with learners and families at their school.

→ **Formalising regular meetings between teaching and TA staff, within TAs' work hours.** Schools capitalise on quieter times during school hours; use assembly or sports times to meet; stagger break times, or arrange cover within the TA team. "We'll just go half [of the team] at a time, and we know each others' jobs" (TA). Meetings vary between schools in length, timing, and frequency, but leaders, teachers and TAs all affirm that the time is well worthwhile. "Yes, it's time that TAs aren't with students, but I'd argue that [because of the planning,] the time that they spend with students makes more of an impact" (Principal). "Getting time to meet with teachers, that's not just on the fly, is so, so crucial" (TA). At two schools, these meetings had originally been put in place to respond to urgent student needs, and then retained as staff noticed their positive impact in the classroom.

> "Teachers meet all the time, it's so normal. For us [TAs], it's quite a radical thing to do. You have to have somebody loud and stroppy like me to make it occur."
>
> **TA**

→ **Leaders advocating for TA time and building buy-in from staff.** Some schools use teacher meetings to discuss and reflect on the pros and cons of using a portion of TAs' work hours for collaborative planning, in contrast with maximising their time in-class. This helps with teacher buy-in.

> "In the long run, the benefit of putting some time aside to plan, evaluate, work collaboratively, will mean the programme will work so much better. Benefits are enormous if you make time to do it."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

→ **Using a wide range of strategies to share information between teachers and TAs.** These include:

— clear, easily accessible planning documentation. Schools provide TAs with WIFI and access to devices. We also heard about wall displays, whiteboards, clipboards, email, phone calls, texts, and chat apps

— teachers encouraging TAs to familiarise themselves with lesson plans at the start of class time

— one Head TA attending both weekly TA meetings and weekly teacher meetings, and acting as a TA representative and conduit for messaging across the two groups

— teachers preparing "ready to go" resource baskets for TAs who arrive after class has begun, equipping them to start work with the class immediately

> "We're working with other children [whole class], so the teacher will have those resources ready there on the desk for us, ready for the day's lessons."
>
> **TA**

— leaders and teachers advocating for TAs' inclusion and access: "The principal had a directive that TAs must be put on [the school's online planning tool], because some teachers still refused to put us in. That's what we're facing. It's not like we're going to change something, we just want to be their silent partner" (TA).

4) Good practice example

Generalised classroom support

An urban primary school with a high-Pacific roll prioritises time for TAs and teachers to connect. Staff shared that the school has a "village," "family" and "aiga" feeling, where responsibilities are shared. Brief, daily planning times, combined with a school culture of positive and non-hierarchical relationships, mean collaborative classroom practices flow easily between teachers and TAs.

"We work like a team, inside the classroom and out." **(TA)**

Every morning teachers meet briefly with TAs to discuss students' learning and plan for the day ahead. This equips TAs for their interactions that day. During class time, TAs rotate working with different groups of children, spending concentrated time with each of them, and using quality interaction skills.

At other times, TAs support the majority of the class in large-group activities, while teachers work intensively with small groups of higher-needs children.

Because a large proportion of the school roll is Pacific, leaders have purposefully recruited TAs from the local community that represent a range of Pacific cultures and languages. This enables the school to thoughtfully match TAs with learners, with a special focus on those who are new to Aotearoa New Zealand or learning English. Pacific TAs work across Pacific-language and English-language classes, where their cultural and community insights play a big role in planning sessions to tailor teaching interactions. Consistency of practice is further supported by regular, whole-staff PLD.

Leaders, teachers, and TAs affirm that maintaining strong ties to Pacific communities, and a culture of shared decision-making, successfully promotes a positive work environment based on a shared commitment to learners.

"Making the community proud and happy about their children ... that's the main thing for us." **(SAMOAN TA)**

"Growing up in this area, born and bred, I went to this school... it's giving back to these kids." **(SAMOAN TA)**

This is echoed by the senior leadership team who emphasise the key role of TAs in their learning community.

"The [TAs] are highly invested... Highly invested in the school, community, children, and making that positive difference." **(PRINCIPAL)**

5) Summary

In this section, we looked at three key ways that TAs can make a difference for learners through generalised classroom support practices. We also looked at the ways that these good practices need to be enabled by teachers and leaders.

Good TA practices look like...	Good school practices look like...
TAs focusing most of their interactions on the wider class, enabling teachers to work more often with learners that require more intensive learning support.	Leaders and teachers valuing and **embedding a generalised approach** to TA support. **Teachers being confident** and capable to support the diverse range of learning needs in their class.
TAs having a good **understanding of lesson plans** and objectives, intended learning outcomes, and feedback requirements, and using these to inform their support across the class.	Leaders and teachers **sharing information with TAs**, and prioritising time for teachers and TAs to discuss lesson plans and objectives.
TAs consistently **using good teaching interaction practices** with learners across the class, including culturally responsive practices.	Leaders and teachers **providing TAs with sufficient training and support** for quality TA-student interactions. Leaders and teachers **maximising the diverse languages and cultures of TAs** to support learners.

Part 3: Delivering structured interventions

Teacher aides can positively impact students' learning by delivering highly structured, evidence-based programmes and interventions to learners. Good TA practice comes from robust training, careful timetabling, and regular liaison with classroom teachers.

In this section, we describe three important TA practices for delivering structured interventions, as well as the ways that these practices need to be enabled by teachers, leaders, whānau, and other experts. We'll share what the research evidence base says, as well as stories, strategies, and quotes from schools that are making this work.

What's good practice when delivering structured interventions?

In collaboration with classroom teachers, TAs take short sessions with individuals or small groups, using evidence-based interventions or programmes. For this to work well, TAs need to have a strong understanding of how the intervention works and how exactly they should use it. Interventions work best when they are delivered in brief, well-paced sessions that don't get in the way of regular classroom learning. It's even better if the interventions relate directly *to* classroom learning, so that learners can make links across settings.

The national and international research shows that there are structured intervention delivery practices that make the most difference for learners.

Three important structured intervention practices
1) TAs deliver interventions as intended, using a highly structured approach.
2) TAs deliver interventions in brief, well-paced sessions, with minimal disruption to regular classroom learning.
3) TAs are clear with learners about learning objectives, expectations, and how the intervention links to regular classroom learning.

However, **these TA practices can't happen without good support** – so when we describe good practices for TAs, we'll also talk about how these should be enabled by school leaders, teachers, and other learning support staff.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out useful information about delivering structured interventions. It includes:

1) what the **evidence** says

2) real life **TA strategies** that work well

3) real life **support strategies** that work well

4) a **good practice example** about a school that is doing good work

5) a **summary** of the most important TA and school support practices.

What sorts of classrooms would benefit from TAs delivering structured interventions?

No TA practices are one-size-fits-all. It's important to reflect on what practices will benefit each school's unique community and context.

This area of TA practice is likely to work well in classes that have:

→ learners who would benefit from targeted interventions

→ TAs that are prepared to deliver interventions according to guidance

→ robust processes for selecting suitable, evidence-based interventions, based on assessment and collaborative discussion

→ support from school leadership to facilitate quality training, oversight, and appropriate timetabling.

1) What does the evidence say?

We looked at the national and international research base to find out what's important to know about delivering structured interventions. We wanted to know which TA practices, and support practices, make the most difference for learners.

TAs can benefit learners through interventions – but only if they're delivered in a structured way

Research shows that good quality, evidence-based interventions and programmes can make a big difference to students' learning. However, because they are specifically designed to be implemented in particular ways, their success depends on how they're delivered.

Interventions will usually give specific instructions around the intended length of sessions, regularity, scripts, protocols, assessments, and other resources. The research base clearly shows that when TAs deliver well-chosen interventions according to their intended structure, there are positive impacts on student learning. On the other hand, when these interventions are *not* delivered according to their intended structure – for example, not using the resources, or attempting to condense several short sessions into one long one – they have a *negative* impact on student learning.[46]

> "It has to be run with fidelity. That's the key word we use … Making sure TAs are running programmes with fidelity, so progress for students is made … If a TA is doing a structured literacy lesson, but missing out key parts, this impacts the student at the end of the intervention."
>
> **RTLB**

TAs need robust training and support to get the structured delivery right

The structure and delivery of targeted interventions are key to their success, which means that TAs need a strong understanding of how to deliver them appropriately, according to their intended structure.[47] This means being familiar with relevant guidance, scripts, assessments, and other resources. It also helps for TAs to have a strong understanding of the *purpose* of the structured intervention – how and why particular interventions are used for particular students.

It's important that TAs receive extensive training, including regular, robust support from experts, opportunities for discussion, and observations of practice. Professional support should include consideration of culturally responsive practices that promote the learning and wellbeing of Māori learners, Pacific learners, and learners from diverse ethnic groups.

Intervention sessions should be carefully timetabled

Timing matters with intervention sessions. Good quality intervention sessions are brief and regular. They take place at times that have no or minimal disruption to students' regular classroom learning, participation, belonging, and continuity of learning.[48] Making this work means that leaders and teachers need to consider these factors when planning lessons and timetables. TAs can also support timetabling by:

→ contributing their insights to timetabling discussions, for example, information about students' preferences, care routines and energy levels, and classroom dynamics.

→ having a good understanding of the intended timing of interventions, and reminding teachers and leaders.

Delivering structured interventions

> "If a programme is intended to be run four days a week but is only run two days a week, this affects the progress of the student."
>
> **RTLB**

Good pacing is important

Effective intervention sessions are well-paced, meaning they are unhurried, engaging, and build on previous learning as intended.[49] TAs need to be aware of the pacing of their delivery, so that they're ready to respond flexibly to learners and support their engagement.

Learners need to know why they are engaging with interventions

Interventions work best when they have meaning and relevance for learners. Research shows that it's important for students to understand what they are learning from the intervention, why they are doing so, what they can expect from sessions, and how this will relate to their regular classroom learning.[50] TAs should be explicit about the learning objectives and expectations of intervention sessions. This means that they need to have a good understanding of those things themselves.

TAs should be clear with learners about how their sessions fit in with their regular classroom learning – but it can be hard for teachers and TAs to connect about this

To support engagement and learning, TAs should clarify for learners how their intervention sessions link to classroom lessons. To do this, TAs need to find out about those links from classroom teachers, and plan a shared approach to making this clear for learners.[51] However, opportunities for teachers and TAs to discuss key learning don't appear to be prioritised at many Aotearoa New Zealand schools. In ERO's recent evaluation of provision for disabled learners, almost half (43 percent) of TAs surveyed said they do not regularly meet with the classroom teacher and 33 percent do not meet regularly with the SENCO to plan and review learning programmes for disabled learners.[52]

Leaders and teachers should prioritise regular times, within TAs' work hours, for teachers and TAs to discuss, plan, review, and make assessments of intervention learning

Regular communication between TAs and teachers is necessary, to plan, review and discuss the learning happening in both settings, and decide how these can be linked across settings. These discussions are most useful when they are frequent, formalised, and focused. These discussions will also support leaders and teachers to monitor outcomes of interventions, and evaluate their effectiveness.[53]

Teachers need to work with TAs to make clear links between the intervention and classroom lessons

Teachers and TAs share the responsibility of making clear, explicit links that relate intervention learning to classroom learning. Teachers and TAs should work together to maximise the learning benefits of interventions by:[54]

→ talking with students about how what they learn in interventions is useful for their classroom learning

→ talking with students about how what they learn in classroom lessons is useful for their intervention sessions.

> "Quite often we talk about what programmes kids are doing with TAs. We give students a lot of voice about what they like."
>
> **TEACHER**

Interventions needs to be the right fit for learners

Choosing the *right* intervention is important. Leaders and teachers need to ensure that interventions are well suited to the needs of their learners. This includes using appropriate assessments to decide on interventions and target learners.[55] It can be useful for schools to conduct a "health check" on their use of interventions, reflecting on whether interventions are evidence-based, well-timetabled, and if they need to refresh their training.[56]

2) Real life TA strategies that work well

As part of this study, we talked to teacher aides, teachers, SENCOs, LSCs, senior leaders, RTLBs, parents, learners, and sector experts about strategies that have worked well in their experience. We've collected their ideas and strategies here. It's important to reflect about which practices will benefit each school's unique community and context – no practices are one-size-fits-all so these strategies won't be the right fit for everyone.

Real life TA strategies that work well include:

→ **Engaging in training provided by teachers, SENCOs, external providers, and other experts.** This helps ensure that TAs are clear about requirements and have opportunities to ask questions. We heard that good training for TAs helps keep practices consistent across the school. "With [our school's structured literacy programme], because it has that scope and sequence, everyone is on the same page" (LSC).

> "[PLD] was so helpful because I got a real guide on how much to say before giving another instruction."
>
> **TA**

→ **Sticking to the structure.** This means correct use of the intervention's resources and strategies. One TA finds it useful to laminate prompt cards and instructions to use in sessions. Others check plans and resources ahead of time, to make sure they are fully prepared for delivery. Another TA described how she purposefully works to familiarise herself with the specific language of the programme, even when it feels unnatural at first, for example, first/then statements.

→ **Taking responsibility for their understanding of expectations.**
TAs shared examples of:

— approaching teachers, SENCOs, LSCs, and specialist teachers with questions

— asking to observe particular practices, to cement their understanding

— revisiting PLD resources

— discussing programmes and strategies with other TAs.

Teacher aide voices: Structured interventions

TAs from various schools that we spoke with shared the value of seeing for themselves that interventions were working:

"You can see the progress in the children – it's so valuable."

"For me it's seeing the progress of the children … by the end of the year … there's progress, that's reward enough."

"[A learner] was frustrated in Year 2, at not being able to read and everyone else could read. And he was so upset … he wanted to read the book and he couldn't read it. And he can now read those books."

"For me it's rewarding to see those children who are struggling so much – and I've got some pretty tough kids on my list – and to see them achieve was just amazing. I had one little boy who received a certificate at the end of the term for his hard work in literacy and he's never received a certificate before … it almost brought tears to my eyes."

"The evidence is there in the progress that's being made by these children."

"We can see it's working."

→ **Working with teachers and leaders to plan timetables for the term, focusing on following the intended structure of the intervention and good timing for students.** Many TAs are directly involved in timetabling meetings, so that they can line their sessions up with classroom lesson plans. "It's the teachers implementing the plan, and I'm just carrying it out for them as a back up to what they're doing in class to try and catch [the learners] up" (TA).

→ **Using their knowledge of learners, and good understandings of how and why the structured programme works, to make responsive decisions about pacing.** TAs recalled times when they slowed sessions down, or deferred them to times when students were ready to learn. "Some kids will have arrived that day and they're really not in the headspace to do much. So you kind of have to adapt to that. You need to pick that up and say they're not listening today, we're not going anywhere with this, so I might cut a session short" (TA). "I look at their facial expression, whether they're engaged or not. You can see when you're losing them, and change tack" (TA).

→ **Being explicit about the intended learning.** For example, starting sessions by stating what the learning focus will be, and recapping key learning outcomes at the end. "'Why am I teaching you to blend? This is why.' 'Right, today our focus is the floss rule…' 'You've done so well learning all of these sounds – today we're going to learn a new sound'" (TA).

→ **Being explicit about how sessions link to classroom learning.** TAs ask learners how last week's intervention session had been useful in their regular class, helping learners to make connections between the two settings. We also heard about TAs ending sessions with the question: "What did you learn that you can take into your module today?" (LSC).

> "I basically back up what the teachers are teaching in class. So, where they're at with the teacher is what I'm teaching, so it's not new to them."
>
> **TA**

> "They're not giving the kids new information – the TA is going over what's already been taught."
>
> **LSC**

→ **Using information about regular classroom learning to tailor session content.** For example, ensuring learners understand key words (e.g., 'syllable', 'diagram'), and talking about how these words are used in the programme and in regular classes. "They will hear it later on as they go through the school – so then when they hear a teacher explain, 'We're going to do diagrams today,' they automatically know – Oh I know that" (TA). Another school uses topics from the class as examples in intervention discussions. Students' interests and passions were also useful for linking learning across both settings. "He likes the Titanic so we do maths stories around that" (TA).

> "We make sure we don't just do a random different topic. We look at the context of the modules and try and fit that in where possible."
>
> **LSC**

Delivering structured interventions

→ **Communicating about progress to the classroom teacher.** TAs touch base regularly with teachers about how sessions are going and to plan next steps together. Then TAs can be clear with learners about next steps. "Once [the learner has] got that and they've learnt that, we relate that back to the teacher and say, 'They have achieved this, what's the next step?' … And we tell the children, 'You've done so well, you've achieved this – we're going to move on and look at something new next week.' So then they're aware that, wow I've achieved this, and it kind of makes them excited to come back next week" (TA).

3) Real life support strategies that work well

As part of this study, we talked to teacher aides, teachers, SENCOs, LSCs, senior leaders, RTLBs, parents, learners, and sector experts about strategies that have worked well in their experience. We've collected their ideas and strategies here. It's important to reflect about which practices will benefit each school's unique community and context – no practices are one-size-fits-all so these strategies won't be the right fit for everyone.

Real life leader, teacher, and learning support staff strategies that work well include:

→ **Being clear from the start.** Many leaders shared that it's effective to start PLD with a focus on how the programme will positively impact students: "If you give people a 'why' behind the 'what', they're more likely to be on board and have that buy-in" (RTLB). Early sessions emphasise the importance of implementing the programme as intended. Some leaders talk explicitly about "fidelity" (RTLB, Principal, DP) to the programme, or start with a focus on the intervention's evidence base.

→ **Keeping up training over time.** Schools that we talked to ensure that professional development (PD) opportunities include clear, repeated messages about how the specific techniques, strategies, resources, or scripts. "PD PD PD is the most important thing! Good quality PD is what makes the difference. And regularly across the term, not haphazard" (LSC). They also provide regular opportunities for targeted observation and discussion.

> "For a TA, having a scope and sequence to follow is often really good as well, because they know, 'This is what you're working toward, and this is how you do it.'"
>
> **TA**

→ **Communicating regularly about programme and classroom learning.** "Sharing is a good thing. RTLB learning goals, they'll be on [the shared drive]. Timetables, programmes, all on there. There's a lot of discussion between teachers and TAs about what those programmes are. We all work together really, constantly having discussions each day about what kids have done in their programmes that day. We bring problems to each other and try and find solutions" (SENCO). Two schools conduct regular termly reviews of how well their timetabling works, through online platforms or in meetings.

→ **Organising timetables to enable well-timed intervention sessions.** Leaders, teachers, and TAs shared how they map work schedules, student needs, and resourcing requirements on large sheets of paper, with sticky notes on walls, or with timetabling software. "As SENCO, I sit down together with the TAs and work out who has extra funding support. Look at their learning goals. Then I work with TAs to work out the timetable, then talk to teacher" (SENCO).

> "We have a very large desk and we map it all out. Seven TAs, making sure they're in the right spot to meet kids' needs … Every term [Principal] and I sit for hours and go through timetabling … we just start with what the kids' needs are then work around them."
>
> **SENCO**

→ **Organising classes to enable well-timed intervention sessions.** Some schools pair or group learners to maximise TAs' time, or blend their intervention sessions into class times when all learners are working on small-group activities.

> "[At secondary school,] with the age of our students, they can feel quite whakamā about being taken away and working one-on-one, so we try where possible if there are any interventions … that they are within their learning space."
>
> **LSC**

→ **Working with TAs to adjust, defer, or break up planned sessions.** Leaders, TAs and teachers all report that professional trust and communication around those judgements is foundational to this working well. "One of [the TAs] said I'm actually really hard pushed getting this amount of students in this block. So I had to go back to the classroom teacher … we made some changes" (SENCO). "Sometimes the teacher might give me a plan, and I'll go, WHOA there's no way I can do that in the 15-minute window, so I'll go back to that teacher" (TA).

→ **Communicating regularly about linking learning.** Teachers and TAs use notebooks or online platforms to communicate when in-person discussion isn't possible. "All our students potentially work with seven different teachers during the week, and several different [TAs], so communication is very important" (SENCO). This also means that teachers can be responsive when TAs report that programme learning "hasn't quite clicked" (TA), using this information to boost learning in-class.

→ **Sequencing classroom lessons so structured sessions are scheduled close to relevant in-class learning.** Some schools do this by involving TAs in termly planning, to match intervention sessions to classroom lessons. Other schools hold interventions in-class, during rotating flexible grouping sessions or self-selected activity times, so that the teacher can easily check in on intervention sessions to pick up on key ideas, and offer expert guidance. "I can ask a question that gives [the TA] a clue of the direction to go with the students" (DP/SENCO).

Delivering structured interventions

4) Good practice example

Delivering structured interventions

This primary school has taken a long-term, sustained approach to implementing structured literacy programmes across the school. Initial support came from an external PLD provider, who spent a year working with teachers and TAs as well as training the school's Resource Teacher of Literacy (RTLit) to deliver training herself. The RTLit now provides ongoing support at the school.

> "All the teachers are trained in it; TAs are trained in it as well…If we have questions about kids, we ask her [RTLit]. She continues to work alongside us and our TAs." **(LSC)**

> "It's all about keeping the knowledge level and skill. We train our junior teachers, but we want expertise across the school in every team." **(DP)**

Formalised training, along with regular discussion and modelling opportunities, are built into school timetables, using quieter times as opportunities to build practice.

> "Quite often on Friday afternoons the rest of the school is at sport … it's the least invasive time to take TAs out [for regular training]. We value upskilling. We have PLD at least two times a term." **(DP)**

Good communication supports teachers and TAs to match the content of structured interventions with classroom learning.

> "The classroom teacher takes the programme first. Then the TA follows up, for example paragraphs, TAs would follow up on that specific content … [TAs are] not giving kids new information; the TA is going over what's already been taught." **(LSC)**

Teacher aides from the school agreed that the point of their sessions was to enhance, not replace, classroom learning. They shared their strategies for keeping closely aligned to teachers' in-class work:

> "It's just using the same language, the same visuals, the same word packs, the same sound packs, so then the child's not confused." **(TA)**

> "I work alongside teachers, when I first get my timetable with the children that I'm taking, I go to my teachers at the beginning of the term or the beginning of the year, and make sure … Say I go to a classroom at ten o'clock, [the teacher] makes sure she's already seen those children before I come at ten o'clock, and then I'm taking them after that … They're always getting double time." **(TA)**

> "We use a notebook for them – and if the teacher's seen them first then she jots down what the tricky part was for the day, what the focus was in that lesson, and then when I'm with the child I take that notebook as well and I back that up – and vice versa. If I see them first I'm writing the notes in this notebook that goes back to the class with that student, and the teacher sees… and she backs it up and does sentence writing or 'work writing' using that particular area where the focus was." **(TA)**

5) Summary

In this section, we looked at three key ways that TAs can make a difference for learners through good practices in delivering structured interventions. We also looked at the ways that these good practices need to be enabled by teachers and leaders.

Good TA practices look like…	Good school practices look like…
TAs **delivering interventions as intended**, using a highly structured approach.	Leaders and teachers **providing TAs with extensive training and support** in the delivery of the intervention.
TAs **delivering interventions in brief, well-paced sessions**, with minimal disruption to regular classroom learning.	Intervention **sessions being carefully timetabled**, for minimal disruption to students' regular classroom learning.
TAs being clear with learners about learning objectives, expectations, and links between the intervention and regular classroom learning.	Leaders and teachers **prioritising time for teachers and TAs to discuss**, plan, review and make assessments of intervention learning, and discuss links to classroom lessons.

Delivering structured interventions

Part 4: Te ao Māori cultural leadership and support

Māori TAs can have positive impacts on learning through modelling and promoting te reo Māori, supporting the cultural understandings and practices of staff and students, leading initiatives and school events, or taking a liaison role in the school community.

In this section, we describe three important TA practices for te ao Māori cultural leadership and support, as well as the ways that these practices need to be enabled by teachers, leaders, whānau, and other experts. We'll share what the research evidence base says, as well as stories, strategies, and quotes from schools that are making this work.

What is te ao Māori cultural leadership and support?

TAs with Māori cultural knowledge and language expertise can use this to tailor and enhance their interactions and support their schools' culturally responsive practices. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori TAs have a highly valued role in supporting schools' bicultural practices, te reo Māori knowledge, and connections with Māori learners, whānau, hapū, iwi, and other networks or community groups that are relevant to whānau Māori.

Māori TAs can make a difference for learners by modelling and promoting te reo Māori, supporting the cultural understanding and practices of staff and students, leading initiatives and school events, or taking a liaison role in the school community.

Some aspects of this part of the report will also be relevant for non-Māori TAs who have expertise in te reo Māori.

Research shows that there are three te ao Māori cultural leadership and support practices that make the most difference for learners.

Three important te ao Māori cultural leadership and support practices
1) TAs deliberately promote te reo Māori to learners and staff through modelling, resources, activities, and expert advice and guidance
2) Māori TAs take a leadership role in supporting bicultural curriculum and culturally responsive practices at the school
3) Māori TAs build relationships with whānau, hapū, iwi, and community networks, and draw on these connections to support learners.

However, **these TA practices can't happen without good support** – so when we describe good practices for TAs, we'll also talk about how these should be enabled by school leaders and teachers.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out useful information about te ao Māori cultural leadership and support practices. It includes:

1) what the **evidence** says

2) real life **TA strategies** that work well

3) real life **support strategies** that work well

4) a **good practice example** about a school that is doing good work

5) a **summary** of the most important TA and school support practices.

What sorts of schools would benefit from Māori TAs' te ao Māori cultural leadership and support?

No TA practices are one-size-fits-all. It's important to reflect on what practices will benefit each school's unique community and context. This area of TA practice is likely to work well in schools that have:

→ Māori TAs with expertise in te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, kaupapa Māori, kawa Māori, mātauranga Māori, te ao Māori, and/or connections with whānau, hapū, iwi, or other networks relevant to whānau Māori at the school

→ teachers and school leaders who value this expertise, understand the complex challenges involved for TAs with this expertise, and are prepared to take active steps to mitigate these challenges.

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1) What does the evidence say?

> "… while it is very important that non-Māori learn to become effective teachers of Māori, we need to have school staff, both teaching and non-teaching, who can become the resource people for the transmission of authentic Māori culture … These taonga (treasures) have the potential to enrich the cultural dimensions of the schools and students they serve…"[57]
>
> **COFFIN, 2013, P.93**

TAs can play a key role in promoting and supporting te reo Māori

Research into the work of TAs in Aotearoa New Zealand identified that many are actively promoting te reo Māori in their school, with a range of effective formal and informal strategies. NZEI Te Riu Roa and the Ministry of Education outline a range of valued practices, including:[58]

- → adaptation and preparation of te reo Māori resources and activities to support teaching and learning
- → using te reo Māori in daily conversations to provide assistance or respond to needs
- → supporting and encouraging the use of te reo Māori in the classroom
- → delivering te reo Māori programmes
- → translating resources and learning materials into te reo Māori
- → speaking te reo Māori when representing the school in the community
- → providing expert advice and guidance to teachers on te reo Māori.

All learners benefit from quality te reo Māori provision

Te reo Māori learning is highly valuable for all learners, including Māori learners, in Aotearoa New Zealand schools. This is clearly set out in guiding curriculum documents and professional teaching standards.

All school staff need to promote te reo Māori

Research into the experiences of Māori teachers, as well as indigenous teachers and TAs overseas, highlights the challenges of feeling overly responsible for the language-learning of staff and students.[59] Having experts on staff is great, but it doesn't mean that this aspect of teaching and learning should be left entirely up to them. As always, teachers should take personal responsibility for their own use of te reo Māori – this is clearly set out in professional teaching standards.[60] Leaders and teachers may need to grow their understanding and practices through specific training, including around Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Staff can also use the *Poutama Reo* framework and tools to review and improve te reo Māori support at the school (see link in 'Useful Resources', at the end of this report).

Teachers and leaders can add value to TAs' te reo Māori initiatives by:

- → modelling engagement in TA-led staff PLD sessions
- → using resources developed by TAs
- → supporting TAs' language-acquisition teaching skills through encouraging professional discussions and guidance
- → seeking and using te reo Māori guidance from TAs
- → front-loading and revisiting te reo Māori learning during regular class time
- → promoting and advocating for te reo Māori
- → arranging timetables to enable dedicated time for te reo Māori initiatives.

> ### Short story: Te reo Māori lessons in the classroom
>
> One Māori TAs' journey to re-learn her own reo has led to a shift in te reo Māori learning across her school. As this TA's fluency increased, she used te reo Māori more and more frequently within her interactions. Leaders recognised the taonga of this knowledge and met with the TA to explore ways they could work together to support te reo Māori learning within the school. Her timetable was rearranged for class-based sessions throughout the school four days a week, with Fridays for planning, creating resources, and discussing ideas with leadership.

Māori TAs can provide guidance to improve their school's bicultural practices

The cultural expertise of Māori TAs means that they are well-placed to take a leadership or support role in supporting authentic bicultural curriculum and culturally responsive practices. Research shows a range of positive impacts of having Māori teachers on staff, particularly for tamariki me rangatahi Māori.[61] This is echoed by international research specifically around teacher aides who have indigenous cultural expertise.[62]

Many Māori TAs in Aotearoa New Zealand have responsibilities involving cultural expertise at their school. NZEI Te Riu Roa and the Ministry of Education have identified a range of valued TA practices, including:[63]

→ supporting teachers by guiding students and colleagues in tikanga Māori on marae and during pōwhiri

→ participating in activities that encourage kaitiakitanga

→ coordination and delivery of kapa haka and other Māori arts programmes

→ leadership at cultural events

→ representing the school at community events

→ expert advice and guidance around tikanga Māori.

Culturally responsive practices and bicultural curriculum improvements benefit *all* learners, including Māori learners, in Aotearoa New Zealand schools. Later in this part of the report, we focus more strongly on ways that Māori TAs can use their cultural expertise to specifically benefit Māori learners and whānau.

It's important for leaders and teachers to maximise opportunities for TAs to share their expertise with students and staff

Teachers should actively engage in TAs' cultural leadership work. This might mean promoting initiatives, engaging in TA-led PLD sessions, using resources developed by TAs, encouraging student membership in kapa haka groups or other cultural programmes, or seeking TAs' advice and guidance around working with Māori learners and whānau. Where appropriate, leaders and teachers should consider how they can remove barriers, for example, through resourcing, rearranging timetables, provision of PLD to enhance TAs' specific skill sets, and through clear messages and expectations for staff and learners.

Te ao Māori cultural leadership

Short story: Seeking Māori TAs' advice and guidance

Staff from a mid-size primary school shared an example of teaching staff and a Māori TA bringing their knowledge and expertise together. A Māori learner with autism had experienced significant grief and trauma, and was finding school challenging. His teacher recognised the importance of culturally responsive support for this learner and sought the guidance of a Māori TA. Before the TA started to work with the learner kanohi ki te kanohi, the teacher shared important information about his triggers and preferences. This meant that the TA could offer highly tailored support for this learner.

"[The teacher] came to me and said, [TA], I'm having trouble with [Māori learner] – this is how he likes things done … She made sure that when I approached him, I was approaching him with all of the knowledge that I needed." **(TA)**

Leaders and teachers should continue to take their own active steps to build and maintain culturally responsive practices and bicultural curriculum

Aotearoa New Zealand's professional teaching standards clearly set out that teachers should take personal responsibility for building their own culturally responsive practices; understanding and acknowledging the histories, heritages, languages, and cultures of tamariki me whānau Māori; and for their own use of te reo me ngā tikanga Māori.[64] Leaders and teachers may need to grow their understanding and practices through specific training, including around Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Māori TAs can enhance outcomes for Māori learners in a liaison role

Māori TAs can play a valuable role in supporting the learning and wellbeing of Māori learners, particularly when they have good knowledge of learners' backgrounds and whānau, and use this information to make connections, provide appropriate support, offer expert advice around how best to work with Māori learners, encourage students' learning, or help address serious issues.[65] Cultural understanding is key to this kind of liaison work,[66] which means Māori TAs are well-placed to provide tailored support to whānau Māori. Research has also found that whānau Māori value being able to connect directly with Māori school staff, for their intrinsic understanding of te ao Māori.[67]

"… Nurturing and growing community engagement requires consistent, skilful and timely communication, which requires using communication skills that she developed on the pathway to becoming a confident leader of her school while personifying, living and modelling what it is to be Māori."[68]

HUNT, 2016, P.34

"I'm a very community person, I'm very interwoven into this community."

TA

Cultural leadership and support has workload and wellbeing implications, which should be acknowledged and mitigated

Research shows that a cultural leadership and support role comes with a range of personal, social, and emotional challenges (see box below). Leaders and teachers should take active steps to reduce pressures and support wellbeing, in discussion with TAs. Appropriately supporting TAs has practical implications, particularly in terms of thoughtful, flexible arrangement of work schedules, which should include careful monitoring of time spent working off-site.

Practices to avoid – and why

Research has highlighted common and concerning practices around the expectations of, and workload for, school staff with cultural capital. Too often, these staff report having extra, unacknowledged obligations.

As well as significant workload issues,[69] staff report complex social and emotional pressures around:[70]

→ educating colleagues, including bosses

→ drawing on personal relationships to benefit the school

→ feeling that they are seen to be responsible for the education and behaviour of all Māori students

→ advocating against racism

→ attending events in their own time

→ 'representing' the school in their own community

→ discomfort with enacting a tuakana role with some whānau, hapū, or iwi members

→ tension when community members have problems with the school

→ feeling personally committed to serving Māori as much as they can.

In cases where Māori TAs choose to share the taonga of their expertise, **leaders and teachers should avoid** taking this for granted. It's crucial that leaders and teachers actively value and support TAs through proper recognition, thoughtful rearrangement of schedules and workload as appropriate, and responsive wellbeing support.

Te ao Māori cultural leadership

2) Real life TA strategies that work well

As part of this study, we talked to Māori TAs, as well as teachers, SENCOs, LSCs, senior leaders, RTLBs, and Māori education sector experts about strategies that have worked well in their experience. We have collected their ideas and strategies here. It's important to reflect about which practices will benefit each school's unique community and context – no practices are one-size-fits-all so these strategies won't be the right fit for everyone.

Real life TA strategies that work well include:

→ **Supporting staff learning along with students.** One TA leads in-class sessions. We heard that in-class sessions were effective for both staff and learners. "They've really embraced te reo Māori. Because teacher stays in the classroom … it's a way of them getting to learn without getting separate PD. And it's relevant for the age group they're teaching" (TA). This TA sends resources to teaching staff prior to sessions, so that they can front-load or revisit learning with students if they choose. "Some teachers really run with it. I do send the planning to the teachers, and all the links for all the songs, video clips. So they can do it before or do it after if they have time to refresh" (TA).

→ **Starting with kupu that have special relevance for learners.** For example, focusing on the meanings behind familiar kupu from school values or waiata, and making links between familiar words, for example, haere mai, hōmai, manawa mai. Other examples are linking language-learning to current events and children's interests, like ngā Matariki tīrama; designing karakia related to the school, local stories, and learners' experiences.

Short story: Supporting learners to engage with kupu

At an Auckland school, a TA is working on building students' understandings of te reo Māori, rather than rote-learnt phrases. She recalls starting with key words from familiar school karakia and waiata, using these as a basis for open questions and discussion.

"Manawa mai – we know manawa and we know mai … how do you bring your heart to me? What could that mean?" (TA)

→ **Being responsive to staff needs.** For example, scaffolding the understandings of overseas-trained staff, starting with discussions about historical and contemporary contexts of te reo Māori. "Understanding the reasons behind it is just as important. It's important to know why we're learning it and what the reason is" (TA). Another TA held a PLD session for staff around key language used at the school, including their PB4L (Positive Behaviour for Learning; a Ministry of Education programme) values.

→ **Supporting whānau to understand the valued place of te reo Māori in education.** At an urban primary school, a key focus is supporting whānau Māori to build trust in the education system, particularly around the teaching and use of te reo Māori in all Aotearoa New Zealand schools. "It may not have been important in the past, but it's important now, and making sure [whānau Māori] understand that it's changed from when they went to school, and making sure that they understand that their children have access to everything that they missed out on" (TA).

→ **Building kapa haka programmes to support learners' leadership skills and behavioural learning.** Some staff noted that kapa haka is also useful for building teachers' understandings around the value of te ao Māori for Māori learners' engagement, behaviour, and leadership skills. "Kapa haka has been the biggest bridge, the best bridge. Because it's music, dancing, entertainment. It's a collective thing, so even our shy children excel" (TA).

→ **Drawing on stories about ātua to help Māori learners' behavioural and emotional regulation.** "The way that I do that is connect it to our gods, and explain them and how it's a good thing, but you have to use it in the right way ... In te ao Māori it's so important that our emotions are first. So then we can navigate that to see how we can learn while having those emotions" (TA).

→ **Writing karakia to support students experiencing grief or trauma, and to support self-regulation.** A TA works with learners and their whānau to design personalised karakia. "I wanted to give him [a karakia] that would calm him down when things were getting too much" (TA).

→ **Using their expertise to tailor existing school practices.** Some TAs described this as "moving from generic to specific" (TA), or "getting rid of token" (TA). Examples of tailoring practice include: working with iwi to create karakia, waiata and define tikanga; speaking to teachers, formally and informally, about tikanga me te reo Māori and how these can be incorporated into the everyday classroom setting; presenting to teaching staff at meetings and on teacher-only days, to take them through shifts to practice; and redesigning pōwhiri to be more appropriate to, and reflective of, the school and community. At one school, this involves a TA working with iwi to write a karanga that is appropriate to mana whenua as well as the TA's own iwi kawa.

— **Drawing on existing community connections and relationships, along with their school connections, to broker support for Māori learners.** Examples include taking a "navigator" role to connect whānau with support agencies; connecting with ngā kōhanga reo to support transitions; registering tamariki with their iwi.

— **Supporting whānau Māori to engage with the school.** For example, talking to whānau about current understandings in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system – and how these might differ from their own experience of school. We also heard examples of TAs designing individualised karakia and pepeha with whānau; working with "disconnected" whānau to value te reo Māori me pūrākau Māori; providing support at whānau-teacher meetings.

Te ao Māori cultural leadership

> "I think our staff *thought* they had good relationships with whānau and iwi."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

— **Building networks and connections.** This involved meeting with whānau, iwi and community, within and outside of the school; attending community events; and working with government agencies to widen networks, build iwi connections, and bring in PLD for staff.

Short story: Building relationships through whakapapa

A Māori TA shares how culturally responsive support can make a big difference in Māori learner engagement:

> "A 13-year-old girl moved up here last year. It was a hard transition, she didn't talk for months. The teachers came to me and asked if I could do something. I researched her family before I talked to her. I realised that she was from a very predominant family in [area]. I rang [her iwi], and they sent me a book all about her family, her grandfather, her whole whakapapa. And as soon as I took it to her, she opened her mouth and told me her whole whakapapa from her old school. And this is a child that hadn't talked. And then she talked for two minutes in te reo Māori. And from that, I could get more info. And then I walked in and saw her drawing, so I wrote a book and she's just finished illustrating it for me. I gave it as project over the term break. Her artwork is insane. I've never seen a child ever draw like that … Knowing her in that way, it made her excited to talk to me. Excited to tell me about her grandmother. It really helped. Her teacher told me there's been a shift; he'd struggled with her before." **(TA)**

3) Real life support strategies that work well

As part of this study, we talked to Māori TAs, as well as teachers, SENCOs, LSCs, senior leaders, RTLBs, and Māori education sector experts about strategies that have worked well in their experience. We have collected their ideas and strategies here. It's important to reflect about which practices will benefit each school's unique community and context – no practices are one-size-fits-all so these strategies won't be the right fit for everyone.

Real life leader, teacher, and learning support staff strategies that work well include:

→ **Leaders modelling support for TAs.** For example, inviting TAs to lead te reo Māori sessions for teaching staff on staff-only days; reorganising the learning support team timetable to prioritise te reo Māori sessions. At one school that we spoke to, this includes setting aside weekly planning time for the TA to plan lessons and prepare resources.

→ **Teachers engaging in te reo Māori learning.** For example, approaching TAs for advice around te reo Māori for use in the classroom; asking questions and modelling enthusiasm during PLD sessions; overseas-trained teachers focusing on using and normalising key kupu like "ākonga"; teachers using TAs' resources to prepare learners for te reo Māori lessons or to revisit the learning afterwards. One TA noted that it is "obvious" which teachers do this, from the increased capability of their learners.

→ **Leaders setting clear expectations for staff around their engagement with TAs' te reo Māori initiatives.** We heard examples of:

— Giving repeated and consistent messages about the importance of this learning.

— Setting expectations that teachers actively engage with TAs' in-class reo sessions – not use that time as an opportunity to do other work. "We've had to sort of say, 'It's your [the teacher's] job to help out. Can I see in your planning that you're taking what you're learning?'" (DP).

— Arranging for visiting experts to provide PLD sessions to support staff buy-in.

→ **Supporting Māori TAs to build or rebuild school practices**, such as pōwhiri or kapa haka programmes.

→ **Arranging for TAs to present to staff** and lead PLD sessions.

→ **Advocating for Māori TAs' initiatives** with the teaching staff and school board.

→ **Reconfiguring TA responsibilities and schedules** to prioritise te reo Māori lessons and cultural programmes as key, valued learning.

→ **Building on Māori TAs' areas of expertise** and interest – for example, one school has a TA who leads language programmes while another focuses on music and movement.

→ **Encouraging TAs** through clear, positive messages around their value and impact.

→ **Making space for quality, culturally responsive connections.** This involves adjusting expectations and timetabling to meet the needs of the TA and community – remembering that community liaison work doesn't always happen during in-school hours. One leader works deliberately with the staff and school board to recognise the importance of a Māori TA's role in the school. "The other staff can see that it's incredibly important – it's skill and expertise that they don't have ... We can't do this, and we've got someone pretty special in our mix that has that capacity" (Principal).

Te ao Māori cultural leadership

"I have had to be a lot more flexible than I usually would … We've got to slow the whole process down, because there's something special happening here."

PRINCIPAL

"If you're meeting with whānau, I don't expect that on top of – that's part of your role."

PRINCIPAL

→ **Ensuring wellbeing support is available and effective.** At one school, a middle leader skilled in emotional support strategies is strongly appreciated by a Māori TA. "She's very good at it, she takes it very seriously" (TA). This leader meets regularly with Māori TAs to check in about their work challenges and wellbeing. Another school decided to stop asking a TA to make "difficult phone calls" to Māori whānau, realising this was an unnecessary social burden.

"This role makes you pretty close to the families, and Māori families, they can get very close to you and some of them might end up just coming to you, because of their school experiences. And so it can get heavy."

TA

4) Good practice example

Te ao Māori cultural leadership and support

This school's leadership and board have made a recent decision to reduce a Māori TA's in-class role, to make room for a more intense focus on supporting whānau me tamariki Māori.

This TA had been working with whānau around their pepeha, when she noted that many of the school's Māori families were unfamiliar with elements of their whakapapa. She recognised that this was having impacts on their children and shared this insight with leadership. These insights around learners' cultural context were valued by leaders, particularly the principal, who advocated for a reconfiguration of roles and responsibilities for this TA.

"It's a significant investment for the board … [but] the benefits of this are going to be enormous in the long term." (PRINCIPAL)

The TA has moved from providing te reo Māori and cultural support for the whole school, to being more focused on whānau, iwi, and community liaison work. A first step was to create in-depth pepeha with all Māori learners and whānau. The TA then focused on registering every Māori learner with their iwi.

"When I was available to the whole school, and teaching kapa haka and te reo in every class, being available to 280 students and their families – because the Pākehā families very much love this as well … not having all of them and just being able to concentrate on the Māori families has lessened my workload. And made me be able to be more focused … I'm now fully focused on Māori students … ensuring that they are on the right path, that their families are feeling good and involved, and that we can also help make the connections for those families and those students to their whakapapa and related families. Just going with an overall Māori approach of making sure that our disconnected families are connected again." (TA)

Teaching staff value being able to approach her for expert advice around tamariki Māori learning and behaviour. Whakapapa connections form the basis of support for Māori learners' behaviour and emotional regulation, support guided by the TA. She shared a recent example of a learner with behaviour challenges who benefitted from a coordinated, wraparound response from herself, leaders, teachers, and external agencies.

"It's the collaborative way that everyone moved around him. I was able to come in and tell him stories of his ancestors. And that's usually what gives the kids the kick they need. Just to say, 'Wow, I've got that in me. I'm that type of superhero.'" (TA)

5) Summary

In this section, we looked at three key ways that Māori TAs can make a difference through te ao Māori cultural leadership and support. We also looked at the ways that these good practices need to be enabled by teachers and leaders.

Good TA practices look like…	Good school practices look like…
TAs **deliberately promoting te reo Māori** to learners and staff through modelling, resources, activities, and expert advice and guidance.	Leaders and teachers actively **supporting TAs' initiatives, as well as promoting te reo Māori** themselves.
TAs taking a leadership role in **supporting bicultural curriculum** and culturally responsive practices at the school.	Leaders and teachers **monitoring TAs' workload**, noting that some activities take place outside of school grounds and school hours. Leaders and teachers maximising **opportunities for TAs to share their expertise** with learners and staff.
TAs **building relationships with whānau, hapū, iwi and community networks**, and drawing on these connections to support learners.	Leaders and teachers **ensuring TAs are well supported** to enact their liaison strategies. This includes acknowledging and mitigating wellbeing implications for TAs.

Part 5: Collaboratively supporting students with learning support needs

The traditional approach of side-by-side TA support doesn't work well for most students with learning support needs. Good quality TA support involves working closely with teachers, learning support staff, whānau, and other experts, to plan and implement shared strategies. With a teamwork approach, TAs can play a positive role in supporting the learning, wellbeing, peer connections, and independence of these learners.

In this section, we describe three important TA practices for collaborative support for learners with support needs, as well as the ways that these practices need to be enabled by teachers, leaders, whānau, and other experts. We'll share what the research evidence base says, as well as stories, strategies, and quotes from schools that are making this work.

What is collaborative support for students with learning support needs?

A good collaborative approach involves TAs working closely with teachers, learning support staff, specialists, whānau, and other experts to get on the same page. This way, TAs can be confident using shared strategies, techniques, resources, and equipment that help students' learning and wellbeing. Planning and training should ensure that when TAs work with these learners, their interactions and strategies consistently support learners' autonomy and agency, as well as actively promote inclusion, peer-to-peer learning, and friendships.

The national and international research shows that there are three collaborative support practices that make the most difference for learners.

Three important practices for collaborative support for students with learning support needs
1) TAs work with specialists and experts to understand and implement strategies, techniques, and resources
2) TAs consistently support learners' autonomy and agency
3) TAs actively promote inclusion, peer-to-peer learning, and friendships.

However, these **TA practices can't happen without good support** – so when we describe good practices for TAs, we'll also talk about how these should be enabled by school leaders and teachers.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out useful information about collaborative support for students with learning support needs. It includes:

1) what the **evidence** says

2) real life **TA strategies** that work well

3) real life **support strategies** that work well

4) a **good practice example** about a school that is doing good work

5) a **summary** of the most important TA and school support practices.

> **What sorts of classrooms would benefit from a collaborative approach to supporting students with learning support needs?**
>
> No TA practices are one-size-fits-all. It's important to reflect on what practices will benefit each school's unique community and context. This area of TA practice is likely to work well in classes that have:
>
> → learners that require support for specific health, learning, access and/or behaviour needs
>
> → TAs who are confident to work with a range of learners
>
> → teachers who are confident to work with learners in their class who have learning support needs
>
> → teachers and school leadership who are prepared to promote good practices, provide necessary training and oversight, and responsively arrange timetables and resources.

1) What does the evidence say?

We looked at the national and international research base to find out what's important to know about delivering structured interventions. We wanted to know which TA practices, and support practices, make the most difference for learners.

TAs need to understand and use evidence-based, consistent strategies

To provide good quality support for students with learning support needs, TAs need the right information and guidance from the right people. With support from experts (such as therapists, specialists, SENCOs, LSCs, teachers and leaders, and whānau), TAs should ensure that they fully understand how to use strategies, techniques, and resources.[71]

> "If we're working alongside a student who has been identified as, for example, autistic, we need to understand the traits of autism and how it affects that student personally and respond appropriately ... it is not a one-size-fits-all scenario."
>
> **TA**

This should include clarifying strategies for supporting learners beyond the classroom environment, for example, helping with transitions between learning spaces or supervising mealtimes. Guidance from experts should also include consideration of the health and safety of TAs, for example, if their role includes physically lifting learners or supporting learners with escalated behaviour.

Collaborative planning for learners with support needs should include consideration of culturally responsive practices that promote the learning and wellbeing of Māori learners,[72] Pacific learners, and learners from diverse cultural groups.

TAs require robust training and support around planned strategies, techniques, use of resources, and equipment

Good support for TAs involves quality training from relevant experts (specialists, therapists, resource teachers, parents and whānau, or others) which clarify for TAs both the *how* and the *why* of strategies and techniques. TAs benefit from modelling, as well as opportunities to try out techniques and equipment and receive feedback, and regular opportunities for shared planning and discussion. To ensure that plans are put into practice, it's important that TAs are supported to fully understand the rationale behind strategies, and believe in their value.[73]

Classroom teachers also require good training to be confident and capable to meet the needs of the diversity of learners in their classes. In ERO's recent evaluation of education for disabled learners in schools, we heard a number of worrying examples of teachers feeling reluctant to include disabled learners in their classroom without having individual learning support or TAs present.[74]

Good practice requires good communication, including meetings within TAs' work hours

There are better outcomes for learners with support needs when the adults that support them take a collaborative approach to achieving learner-focused goals. This involves:[75]

→ effective information-sharing

→ regular, formalised meetings to plan, discuss, and evaluate learning

→ making sure roles and responsibilities are explicit and well understood

→ providing opportunities for TAs to contribute to planning sessions with their own insights and information about learners.

Collaborative support for learning support needs

Concerningly, in ERO's recent evaluation of education for disabled learners in schools, almost half (43 percent) of TAs surveyed said they do not meet regularly with the classroom teacher and 33 percent do not meet regularly with the SENCO to plan and review learning programmes for disabled learners. Twenty-six percent of teachers reported that TA support is 'not at all' or 'to a limited extent' effectively coordinated to enable teachers to maximise the presence, participation, and learning of disabled learners in their class.[76]

TAs can enrich planning with their own insights

Great support for learners with support needs is collaborative, not just cooperative. Shared strategies are even more effective when TAs can contribute to planning for these learners, with their own insights around learners' diagnoses, interests, preferences, social dynamics, care routines, and energy levels, or insights about culture, language, or the local community.[77]

> "Sometimes [in past positions], you can feel like you've got these great ideas and you're working so intensely with these students, but you've got an idea and no-one will roll with it, and you can see how productive it would be. Here [at my current school], it's kind of, let's run it and see if it works."
>
> **TA**

Tip: TAs can help with important relationship-building

TAs often develop great relationships with learners and whānau, for example, after working alongside them for several years, or knowing them from the community. Positive relationships are a good foundation for supporting learning, but it's not good for a TA to become the main or only person that learners or whānau interact with at the school. It's really important that learners can interact regularly with teachers, other staff, and their peers, and grow their abilities to learn independently. Whānau also need opportunities to build relationships and connections with a range of staff who know their child and care about their learning.

TAs can help learners and whānau to broaden their range of connections and interactions at the school by sharing useful information with other staff (e.g., interests, preferences) to support relationship-building, and by using the deliberate inclusion strategies set out in this part of the report.

Traditional approaches don't support autonomy and agency

Some common TA practices are well-intentioned but can have negative impacts on learners' autonomy and agency. Studies have also found that TAs aren't always proactive in their classroom management and behaviour management strategies. See the box below on 'Practices to avoid', for some strategies that research shows have negative impacts on learners.

Practices to avoid – and why

Teacher aides work better in supportive classes that equip them for good quality interactions. Studies have highlighted some common well-intentioned strategies that get in the way of learners' opportunities to grow their autonomy and agency.

Practices to avoid include: [78]

→ always being physically close to learners (in cases where this is not necessary for safety reasons)

→ being a physical barrier to learners' interactions with peers

→ when working in pairs, partnering learners with TAs instead of their peers

→ leaving students waiting (e.g., for care routines or access to environments and resources)

→ inconsistent or confusing guidance that does not align with agreed planned strategies

→ "incessant" prompting[79]

→ focusing on task completion or hurrying learners' work

→ waiting for things to go wrong before acting, rather than using strategies to *prevent* escalated behaviour.

Individualised support is effective as part of a generalised support model, where teachers and TAs share responsibilities for all learners

As outlined in Part 2 of this report, learners with support needs are more positively impacted when the TAs that work with them also maintain relationships and engage in interactions with other learners across the class.

Where TAs are specifically employed to provide close side-by-side supervision for health or behaviour reasons, teachers and TAs can work together (with learning support leaders and other experts) to plan for times that teachers can have quality teaching interactions with these learners. Learners might work with teachers *instead of* with a TA at times, or with teachers *as well as* a TA, depending on individual needs.

Plans and interactions should reflect a clear, consistent focus on reducing adult support over time

Learners benefit when TAs use deliberate strategies that promote independence and provide opportunities for learners to make their own choices. Effective TAs work alongside teachers and others (including learners themselves) to find ways to reduce the need for adult support over time.

Proactive strategies that support learners' autonomy and agency include:[80]

→ discussions with learners about their aspirations, preferences, barriers, and solutions

→ being alert to opportunities for learners to take a leadership role in class

→ maintaining a focus on learners' choices, preferences, and rights to dignity during care routines

→ prevention and de-escalation of escalated behaviour – identifying trigger signs

→ facilitating support from peers

→ working with teachers and other experts to remove barriers to learners' independent movement, decision-making, and ability to participate in all aspects of education alongside their peers

→ consistently maximising opportunities to build self-care and self-regulation skills within interactions

→ finding innovative solutions to problems.

> "Toileting, accessibility, moving around. They seem like really minute things, but the fact that you value them means so much to us."
>
> **SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT**

It's important that all adults who work with learners with support needs are clear and confident about how to support those learners. Consistency makes a big difference. However, ERO's evaluation of education for disabled learners in schools found that TAs were a lot more confident than teachers in supporting disabled learners to self-regulate: 74 percent (of 415) TAs were confident, while only 36 percent (of 722) of teachers were confident.

It's important to provide professional guidance, and use a collaborative approach to supporting student autonomy and agency

Leaders and teachers can grow TAs' understandings of good practices through training and modelling good practices that promote student agency and autonomy. It's also important for leaders, teachers, and TAs to have clear, shared expectations for TA practice.[81] Research shows that they don't always agree about who is responsible for roles and tasks – particularly behaviour management, which can end up falling to TAs by default.[82] Establishing shared understandings of strategies, roles, and responsibilities means learners can benefit from more consistent and effective support.

> "A lot of students in my position prefer to overlook physical health challenges as an obstacle, as much as possible. But when you guys are constantly ensuring we monitor our physical adversity, you're making sure we remember to put our health as a priority – up there with our academics."
>
> **SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT**

Leaders need to set clear expectations for inclusion

Inclusive TA practices are much more effective when they are scaffolded by inclusive practices from others. Leaders should consider how they can deliberately and persistently set expectations for the whole school. All teachers are professionally obligated to work collaboratively to promote inclusive practice and access to learning, for all learners.[83]

Side-by-side support gets in the way of peer interactions

As outlined in Parts 1 and 2 of this report, TAs working consistently side-by-side isolates learners, while a more mobile, generalised classroom support approach better enables learners to connect with their peers. Brief, occasional interactions with learners with support needs as well as with the wider class better ensures that TAs' presence and support is not a barrier to peer interactions, social skill-building, and belonging.

> "The children just think the learning assistant is coming in to help everyone, and maybe this student just a little bit more."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

There are a range of ways TAs can help with peer connections

Research shows that TAs can promote inclusion, peer-to-peer learning, and friendships, with the following strategies:[84]

→ thoughtful timing around medication and other care routines, to minimise disruption to peer interactions – being careful about when to stay out of the way, and choosing the right times to interrupt

→ targeted teaching and de-escalation strategies that promote positive behaviour

→ recognising and avoiding triggers for escalated behaviour

→ prompting and coaching around friendship and social skills

→ working with teachers and other experts around inclusive arrangement of the classroom, resources, and lesson timetables.

Teachers need to work with TAs to support peer connections

Many of the key aspects of good TA practice are reliant on good teacher practices. Research shows that it's particularly important for teachers to:[85]

→ recognise their own responsibility for promoting all students' access to education

→ provide opportunities for peer-to-peer work within classroom lessons

→ arrange classroom environments and resources to enable student access alongside their peers

→ arrange seating so that learners aren't seated next to TAs or away from the wider class

→ arrange seating in ways that promote the learning success of those with support needs (for example, ensuring learners can see/hear; sitting away from known triggers)

→ thoughtfully time key lessons, so that learners aren't away from class during important learning or peer-connection times

→ implement agreed approaches to supporting positive behaviour and de-escalation

→ work with TAs in a generalised classroom support model where possible (see Part 2 of this report).

> "If there's something that comes up, they [TA] immediately come up with a strategy. You can see they're proud of [my child] as well … the school and especially [TA] are always thinking outside the box. [My child's] best interest is what's at heart. They're focused on finding solutions."
>
> **PARENT**

Tip: Parents and whānau may need help to understand a change in approach

Because side-by-side support has been around for a long time, parents and whānau might expect and value this traditional TA support approach.[86] This can create a challenge for schools that are trying to shift to more useful, current support practices. ERO has developed a short guide specifically for parents and whānau of learners with learning support needs, which sets out the value of generalised support and clarifies current understandings about good quality TA support. There's a link to this guide for parents and whānau in the 'Useful resources' section of this report.

2) Real life TA strategies that work well

As part of this study, we talked to teacher aides, teachers, SENCOs, LSCs, senior leaders, RTLBs, parents, learners, and sector experts about strategies that have worked well in their experience. We've collected their ideas and strategies here. It's important to reflect about which practices will benefit each school's unique community and context – no practices are one-size-fits-all so these strategies won't be the right fit for everyone.

Real life TA strategies that work well include:

→ **Actively building up their knowledge and practices.** For example, TAs asking questions and observing others' practice during training and meetings; talking with teachers and leaders about areas where they need further support; or participating in social media networks or local PLD groups that share practices and ideas. "We talk amongst ourselves, to share what we find is working for us regarding a student or to ask for ideas that have worked in the past for others" (TA).

→ **Contributing their perspectives to individual planning meetings.** Examples include:

— Highlighting student interests and preferences, so that learning plans can maximise learner engagement. "Angles, the kid's not interested. But when it's related to the angles on a basketball court, they're much more interested" (TA).

— Sharing insights around friendships and other social dynamics. "The TA will say, this kid won't work when that kid sits there. So we'll change it" (Teacher).

— Drawing on cultural expertise. Leaders and teachers strongly value having TAs on staff that reflect the cultures and languages of learners. In one example, a teacher affirms that a Tokelauan TA has particularly useful insights about a Tokelauan learner.

> " Non-verbal cues are picked up a lot quicker when you're members of the same culture. "
>
> **TEACHER**

— Drawing on their community connections to give context to student behaviour issues. Many of the TAs that we spoke to live within the school community, while this isn't as often the case with teachers and leaders. This "local knowledge" (Principal) helps to unpack what staff are observing. "I always find that the more I can understand who [learners] are and where they've come from, then it makes sense, what you often see at school in terms of behaviour and what they struggle with" (TA).

— Advocating for newer, less confident TAs to share their voice.

— Asking students what they think should be discussed at upcoming meetings.

Collaborative support for learning support needs

Short story: The value of TAs at Individual Education Plan meetings

At a large primary school, TAs play a key role in contributing to planning for the learners that they work with regularly. An experienced TA emphasised the importance of attending key meetings and speaking up.

> "[In Individual Education Plan meetings,] my main thing is to be an advocate for that child, and if the adults are going off on the wrong track, saying, 'Excuse me, no, that's not what happens', or, 'The child said this today, which indicated this', or, 'When this happens they respond like this', or, 'I've noticed this changing', or, 'They don't feel safe when this happens', or, 'That behaviour that they're doing that looks unpleasant is because they are so scared of the thing they're being asked to do.' So I'm quite happy to be quite vocal in that. I do insist at our school that if there's any meeting at all about any child with additional needs, who has teacher aide support, that the teacher aide's at the table." **(TA)**

This TA shared how she checks in with learners prior to Individual Education Plan meetings.

> "I sat down with them beforehand and said, 'Look, you know we're going to meet with Mum and Dad, and with that person who comes and visits, and we're going to talk about you to know how we can make school even better for you. What would you say if you were sitting there? Or is there a message you'd like me to tell them?' If it's appropriate, try and get their voice in the room as much as possible… 'This is their words.'" **(TA)**

→ **Sharing information with teachers and other TAs.** This helps to ensure one TA doesn't "hold the key" (Teacher) to working with particular learners. Mutual respect and good communication strategies between TAs and teachers are key to this working well. Many TAs expressed appreciation about times when their colleagues have actively sought their perspectives. "Your opinion's valued. It's what I respect the most, because that hasn't always been my experience" (TA). Many TAs have valuable expertise and experience that can support teachers to build their knowledge.

→ **Focusing on small successes that contribute to reduced support over time.** TAs emphasised that small steps add up to big learning. "We're trying to get [learner] in the process of doing half her clothing first, then the other half. Over lunchtimes I used to [be] cutting her packaging and stuff like that. Now I just leave her. I have nothing to do with her eating. She opens all her own stuff, she gets the scissors herself if she needs them. It's two years until high school, so she needs to be able to do it herself" (TA).

→ **Being alert to ways to reduce support for learners that have constant supervision.** TAs shared how they keep a relentless focus on building independence, with a range of thoughtful strategies – in discussion with teachers and other key people. We heard examples of ways that TAs regularly check in about how these learners respond to working independently, such as focusing on other learners for brief times during group-work activities, or monitoring learners from a short distance. "I might walk away from her for five minutes. I've got a wee room with a window, so I can watch her. Just to try let her do a little independent work. To see if she's up around the classroom, or if she sat and tried" (TA).

Short story: Deliberately supporting learners' independence

At the start of the school year, a young girl with a range of physical and learning challenges required a lot of support from a TA to complete her morning routine, such as unpacking her backpack. The TA prepared a 'visuals' board, and worked with the learner to move pictures every time a task was completed. The TA's support was then reduced to occasional check-ins, giving gentle prompts, and praising the girl's growing independence. Her teacher shared, "Now even when the TA isn't in the room, she'll do the routine. It's become automatic."

→ **Seeking and valuing learners' voice.** Examples include: asking learners what they think should be discussed at upcoming planning meetings; talking with diabetic students about upcoming activities and what this could mean for their medication; using shared, agreed verbal prompts to encourage students to take increasing responsibility for their wellbeing and learning – "What do *you* think?" TAs also use quality interaction techniques that encourage independent thinking, like open questioning, wait time, and consistently starting with the least amount of support first.

→ **Supporting teachers' confidence around working with learners with specific needs.** Many TAs have extensive experience and expertise in supporting specific needs, which they can share with colleagues. We heard examples of TAs presenting PLD to staff, or supporting teachers' knowledge through informal discussions. TAs shared that their enthusiasm and experience is valued and affirmed by their colleagues. "It's kind of my jam, because I'm experienced. And because they're my favourite kids to work with, the ones with the high behavioural needs or emotional and social needs. They're my jam, I can handle their jandal" (TA).

→ **Staying out of the way.** We heard that some TAs purposefully position themselves to be able to easily see and get to students if needed, while giving them space to initiate and receive peer interactions. They also consider students' engagement levels before interrupting for care routines: "Children don't want to be taken away from what they're doing" (TA). Others use small-group teaching approaches during lessons, to offer necessary support without isolating students from their peers. Another TA finds it useful to monitor peer disagreements from a distance unless it is really necessary, noting that peers will avoid a learner if it seems like they come with a "bodyguard" (TA).

Short story: Thoughtful care routines

When a TA noticed that a Year 6 student had started showing signs of embarrassment when she would approach him for his regular medical testing, she took some time to work with him around finding a solution. Together, they came up with a hand signal that she could give from across the room, that meant, "Remember you're due for your test – come and see me in the next few minutes." This student preferred this system to a sudden interruption to his peer interactions.

Collaborative support for learning support needs

→ **Deliberately promoting social skills and opportunities.** One TA shared how she encourages more socially confident learners to work alongside less-confident learners, and organises group games. "I'd say, let's go play a game, then find some likely looking suspects to join" (TA). TAs who share languages and/or cultural understandings with learners find that this is helpful for starting conversations between learners. Other TAs shared examples of modelling and practising words learners can use for approaching peers; using photo boards to help learn peers' names; and facilitating video chat sessions with friends when learners with high health needs are isolated at home.

→ **Supporting self-regulation and de-escalation.** TAs support learners with reminders, prompts, invitations to come for a walk or help with a task, or by talking about Māori ātua in relation to emotional regulation.

Short story: Proactively supporting learners' behaviour

A TA was supervising the end of morning break when she recognised trigger signs in a learner with emotional regulation challenges. She signalled this to the principal who was nearby: "Can I take him for 15 minutes at the start of session? He's about to blow." The principal arranged cover while the TA engaged the learner in agreed calm-down strategies. When the learner was ready, the TA shifted the conversation to the social situation which had made him frustrated, and they talked through ways he could respond next time.

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3) Real life support strategies that work well

As part of this study, we talked to teacher aides, teachers, SENCOs, LSCs, senior leaders, RTLBs, parents, learners, and sector experts about strategies that have worked well in their experience. We've collected their ideas and strategies here. It's important to reflect about which practices will benefit each school's unique community and context – no practices are one-size-fits-all so these strategies won't be the right fit for everyone.

Real life leader, teacher, and learning support staff strategies that work well include:

→ **Prioritising regular time to meet as a group.** At one school, teachers, TAs, and the SENCO meet fortnightly, and are often joined by specialist teachers and an educational psychologist. "It's a problem-solving, troubleshooting type of meeting to see how things are going and what we need to adapt" (Principal). The school's board recognises the importance of this time for key staff to collaborate. "We've prioritised it, it was a school decision. This is a really complex group, if we don't put that time in, we don't be doing our best by our staff and the kids. So yeah, that's one of the great challenges" (Principal). Schools use meetings to clarify priorities, strategies, short- and long-term goals, and consistent language to use with learners. "It's important for us to know what the end goal is, for that student's achievement … and how flexible we can be" (TA).

> "I've quite liked that meeting, being included. It's given me more of a feeling that it's definitely a team effort, of people in and out of school. It's a good space to share what's been happening, ideas that are working."
>
> **TA**

→ **Ensuring TAs can contribute to planning.** Some TAs shared that they appreciate when leaders and teachers deliberately make space at meetings and in planning documentation for TA contributions – recognising that TAs may not feel empowered in these spaces. Schools follow through by amending plans based on the TA's insights. We heard examples of TAs contributing key information to planning, around new or troubled friendships and known triggers for escalated behaviour; linking plans to students' passions. Some schools use other forms of communication when TA attendance at meetings isn't possible, such as phone calls, emails, or written notes.

> "Giving it the time it deserves. You can't have those proper conversations in a quick dash before morning tea"
>
> **TEACHER**

→ **Providing PLD at times that work for TAs.** This requires a flexible and responsive approach. To enable TAs to attend PLD or training, schools: hold online sessions; arrange for half the TA team to attend at a time while the other half covers the classrooms; create in-house modules; include TAs in PLD at staff-only days. It is useful when PLD is provided for teachers and TAs around the specific conditions and diagnoses of enrolled students. "They need to understand [the details of diagnoses] to be able to work with that child" (Parent).

→ **Collaborating on ways to maximise opportunities to promote learner agency and autonomy.** Schools would often clarify explicitly within Individual Education Plans that a long-term goal for a student is to have less reliance on TA support, and link strategies to this goal, for example, using communication boards and visuals, and alternating support from a range of adults and peers, along with independent learning times when possible. We heard that keeping a long-term focus on autonomy helps everyone involved to be clear about why shorter-term strategies are used. "Making sure that the 'why' is talked about first" (SENCO).

→ **Sharing strategies with whānau so that strategies are consistent for learners between school and home.** "Consistency is the key for these kids, so communication to get on the same page is so important" (Teacher). We heard that regular communication with families also helps build trust and establish a sense of teamwork and shared purpose. "If things pop up … they immediately come up with a strategy" (Parent).

Collaborative support for learning support needs

→ **Using equipment and resources that help students to access peer interactions.** One school has sourced (including by making some things themselves) a range of equipment to support a learner with limited mobility to join peers throughout the classroom environment. This learner can now join his friends at different levels, for different activities – standing, sitting at desks, kneeling at low tables and sitting on the mat. TAs and teachers worked with the learner's parents around how to support his movement between areas.

→ **Arranging the classroom to support positive peer interactions.** Teachers talk with TAs about what they are noticing around social dynamics and other triggers, and arrange seating in response. We heard examples like placing students with behaviour challenges far apart, and matching more talkative students with those who are building their skills and confidence. A number of schools affirm the value of having spaces and resources that act as natural behaviour supports in the classroom, for example, having sensory areas and quiet spaces.

> "Our end goal is for us to be out of a job. We're never going to be out of it! But it's about encouraging independence. What are they [TAs] doing today for the students that they can be doing less of tomorrow?"
>
> **SENCO**

> "Breaking away from a model of deployment where TAs are assigned to specific pupils for long periods requires more strategic approaches to classroom organisation."[87]
>
> **SHARPLES, WEBSTER, & BLATCHFORD, 2018, P.14**

→ **Arranging timetabling to support positive behaviour and relationship-building.** Several schools that we spoke with rotate TA support schedules so that learners have opportunities to build positive relationships with a number of TAs, who all use consistent strategies to support them to connect with peers (including using agreed language and prompts). One school finds it effective to have the principal do "walk-throughs" of classrooms at busy times, even very briefly, meaning there is less pressure to "manage" the class at those times.

4) Good practice example

Collaboratively supporting students with learning support needs

This Catholic school has established a team approach to supporting learners with support needs. For the principal, the recent TA pay equity work led by NZEI Te Riu Roa and the Ministry of Education "highlighted the importance of professional learning – that I have to make that happen." TAs now have regular opportunities to engage in PLD, often alongside teachers, focused on the specific needs of learners at the school. At other times, TAs present to their colleagues about their learning.

> "[They are] good at coming back, taking a wee chunk and sharing what they've learnt with the SENCO, the TAs, the LSC, teachers … They're released during school time so it's not another stress." **(TEACHER)**

Teachers and TAs meet together at least once a week to discuss learners. At the start of each term, careful timetabling of classes and rosters draws on the insights of the wider team.

> "It's about listening to what they have to say – they have valuable information." **(PRINCIPAL)**

Planning is online-based and used for daily communication, and all teaching resources are shared.

> "We have access to the drive so it's all at our fingertips … I know where the resources are in the school. I've been given keys to things, access throughout." **(TA)**

Leaders, teachers, and TAs share a focus on supporting autonomy, agency, and peer connections. They emphasise the importance of "not hovering" around students that need extra supervision – inside the classroom and out.

> "There are a few high health needs children who need playground support. TAs stay just on the outskirts. If there is an issue, the kids are solving the problems. Kids being kids, if they're having an argument with a friend, the TA doesn't come in. Otherwise, kids don't want to go there again because an adult comes in. Another child with a nut allergy, she doesn't sit with TAs – she's still sitting with her peers." **(TEACHER)**

Collaboratively supporting students with learning support needs

During planning and discussion times, the SENCO, teachers, and TAs talk about ways they can reduce their support over time. They've found that having a team brainstorm, and then deciding on clear shared strategies and regular communication, works best. They shared an example of supporting a young learner with complex needs to move towards eating with his friends.

> "For his first two years at school, [learner] had to be monitored at eating time. It was something he no longer needed, but wanted – because [adults] would talk to him or watch something on the iPad. There was a decision between the TA and I to transition away from that, for him to become a full member of the class. It did take a term. We took it in turns to wean ourself off. We would lessen the time that the TA would stay. Without him realising, the TA removed herself completely, but I was there. For the last two terms, lunchtime and morning tea he has no supervision. And he doesn't ask for it, because we did it so gradually." (TEACHER)

In interviews, TAs, teachers, and leadership at this school all expressed that a collegial, respectful culture is a big part of their success – and that this is consistently modelled by leadership.

> "TAs are an integral part of the school – we value each and every one as staff members and treat them as such. They come into a culture where they know that their contribution is highly valued." (PRINCIPAL)

5) Summary

In this section, we looked at three key ways that TAs can make a difference by collaboratively supporting students with learning support needs. We also looked at the ways that these good practices need to be enabled by teachers and leaders.

Good TA practices look like...	Good school practices look like...
TAs **working with teachers, specialists, and other experts** to understand and implement strategies, techniques, and resources.	Robust **training and support** around planned strategies, techniques, use of resources, and equipment. Good **communication with TAs, including meetings**.
TAs consistently **supporting learners' autonomy and agency**.	Leaders and teachers providing professional guidance, and **using a collaborative approach**, to support learners' autonomy and agency.
TAs **actively promoting learners' inclusion**, peer-to-peer learning, and friendships.	Leaders and teachers **carefully arranging timetables, classrooms, and learning contexts.**

Conclusion

Teacher aides can make a real difference for learners. They have a wide range of valued roles and responsibilities, and can enhance learner outcomes by drawing on positive relationships, good training, collaborative practices, and cultural expertise. But teacher aides can't do their best work without good support from their schools.

This research into good TA practice and support uses robust evidence to clarify 'what good looks like' in an Aotearoa New Zealand context.

Our understandings about good TA practice have changed over time

In the past, many TAs worked side-by-side with students with learning support needs, and these learners didn't spend much time with teachers or their friends. This model was put in place with good intentions: to provide lots of support from an adult that knows the learner well. But we now know that this wasn't the best thing for learners' education. These days, a robust evidence base shows that TAs can make a much more positive difference for learners by drawing on positive relationships, good training, collaborative practices, and cultural expertise.

TAs can make a big difference for learners through four key areas of practice

The national and international research highlights four key areas where TAs can have a positive impact on learners' wellbeing and learning outcomes:

1) Generalised classroom support

2) Delivering structured interventions

3) Te ao Māori cultural leadership and support

4) Collaboratively supporting students with learning support needs.

We found that TAs in Aotearoa New Zealand schools are doing incredible work in these four areas. This report captures their strategies and ideas for making these practices work.

Leaders need to help schools move on from traditional ideas about the TA role

It's hard to shift practices that have been around for decades. Research shows that classrooms that attempt to update TA practices can easily drift back into traditional side-by-side TA support, often due to time and resource pressures, or due to teachers' and TAs' perceptions of their roles. We heard that it was important for leaders to be clear, explicit, and persistent in their messages and expectations. These messages needed to be backed up with real action: setting up good communication systems, prioritising planning and discussion time for TAs, careful timetabling, and robust professional support school-wide.

> "The status quo in terms of TA deployment is no longer an option."[88]
>
> **SHARPLES, WEBSTER, & BLATCHFORD, 2018, P.13**

> "People in education, that's all they do all day long is find solutions to really tricky problems. And different ways will work differently at different schools."
>
> **TA**

Teachers and leaders need to set the scene for great TA practice

Responding to the diversity of learners in Aotearoa New Zealand classrooms takes real teamwork. This involves leaders and teachers making sure that they: share key information with TAs; discuss plans and strategies with TAs; value TAs' expertise, insights, and cultural perspectives; involve TAs in meetings and professional learning opportunities; and purposefully build a school culture of including, valuing, and collaborating with TAs. It's this sort of teamwork that enables and empowers TAs to make the biggest difference for learners.

> "Time is really valued in schools and having that time actually makes the difference for people to be able to have quality conversations that really make quality difference for kids. That's what we're all in this for, making the difference for kids. People can't do it on the hoof."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

Collaborating to enable great TA practice is worth the time and effort

The TAs, teachers, SENCOs, LSCs, senior leaders, and RTLBs that we spoke to acknowledged that moving on from traditional ideas about TA support wasn't easy at first. It took a big push to shift mindsets and expectations. However, we also heard that the shift was worth it. These schools were energised by the practices they'd put in place, and could clearly see their efforts paying off in the classroom and in their learners' outcomes.

This report can support schools to make practical improvements that have real benefits for learners

In this report, we put research and real life stories together to shine a light on the key ways that TAs, teachers, leaders, and other experts can make the most of the TA role. The evidence, and the experiences shared with us, show that making the most of TAs means making a real, positive difference for our learners.

> "You're seeing them achieve and it's just – it's fantastic. I love what I do. To see the progress and the joy and the smile on their face."
>
> **TA**

> "We could not run this school as successfully as we do without these amazing [TAs]. I call them my angels, because they are."
>
> **DP/SENCO**

ERO has made recommendations for the wider school system

This report has focused on the ways that TAs can be well supported at a **school level**.

ERO's report around education for disabled learners looks into the ways that the wider education system works to support learners with support needs, including the deployment of TAs. The report makes 19 **system level** recommendations in order to improve provision. This report is available on ERO's website, www.ero.govt.nz.

Useful resources

This guide is part of a suite of resources around good TA practice and support

ERO worked with the Ministry of Education and NZEI Te Riu Roa to produce a range of useful resources. These can all be downloaded for free from www.ero.govt.nz

Link	What's it about?	Who is it for?
Working together: How teacher aides can have the most impact	The **main report** goes into detail about what good TA practice looks like, and how schools have made this work in practice	TAs, teachers, leaders, and whānau Learning support staff, specialists, therapists, and the wider education sector
A practical guide for school leaders: What quality teacher aide practice looks like	This guide sets out what good TA practice looks like, and practical actions for **school leaders** to help make it happen	Principals, SENCOs, LSCs, and other school leaders at primary and secondary schools
A practical guide for teachers: What quality teacher aide practice looks like	This guide sets out what good TA practice looks like, and practical actions for **teachers** to help make it happen	Primary and secondary school teachers who work with TAs
A practical guide for teacher aides: What quality practice looks like	This guide sets out what good TA practice looks like, and what **TAs** can do to put these practices into action	TAs at primary and secondary schools
What you need to know about teacher aides: A guide for school boards	This brief guide for **school boards** explains what TAs can offer their school, and the supports that need to be in place for them	Board members at primary and secondary schools
What you need to know about teacher aides: A guide for parents and whānau	This brief guide for **parents and whānau** explains what they can expect from their school	Parents and whānau of children who have TA support, at primary and secondary schools

Other useful resources

Thriving at school? Education for disabled learners in schools: ERO, in partnership with the Human Rights Commission and the Office for Disability Issues, looked at how well the education system is supporting disabled learners in schools. ERO found that we need to improve education for disabled learners so they can thrive. Along with a comprehensive report about what we found, ERO also produced a range of resources, including summaries and good practice guides for teachers, school leaders, and parents and whānau.

https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/category/education-for-disabled-learners-in-new-zealand

Teachers and teacher aides working together is a set of modules produced by the Ministry of Education for teachers and teacher aides to complete together to strengthen working relationships, improve role clarity, and build knowledge of inclusive practice that supports student learning.

There is also a self-review tool for school leaders to use to understand where their school is at and what they should do next in supporting teacher aides to be effective in their roles.

https://seonline.tki.org.nz/Teachers-and-teacher-aides/

Supporting effective teacher aide practice is a Ministry of Education site which has short articles, videos, and practical resources around good teacher aide practice and support. It is primarily aimed at school leaders, but may be of interest to teachers and teacher aides too.

https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/supporting-effective-teacher-aide-practice/

These ***inclusive education guides***, put together by the Ministry of Education, provide useful information to recognise, plan for, and meet the needs of a wide range of diverse learners.

https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/

Poutama reo, developed by ERO, comprises a range of resources to support English medium schools to review and improve their provision of te reo Māori school wide, including self-review tools.

https://ero.govt.nz/about-us/our-structure/te-tahu-whare-evaluation-and-review-maori/tools-and-resources/poutama-reo

Tātaiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners looks at ways that teachers can support the learning of Māori learners. Although this resource is aimed at teachers, TAs who work with Māori learners may find this a valuable resource.

https://teachingcouncil.nz/resource-centre/tataiako-cultural-competencies-for-teachers-of-maori-learners/

Tapasā: Cultural competencies framework for teachers of Pacific learners looks at ways that teachers can support the learning of Pacific learners. Though this resource is aimed at teachers, TAs who work with Pacific learners may find this a valuable resource.

https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Tapasa/Tapasa-Cultural-Competencies-Framework-for-Teachers-of-Pacific-Learners-2019.pdf

The **Teacher Aide pay equity claim report** and **Pay equity work matrix** were put together by the Ministry of Education and NZEI Te Riu Roa in 2020. Although these resources are primarily focused on pay equity matters, they also provide useful insights into the day-to-day work and diverse capabilities of the teacher aide workforce.

https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Uploads/Teacher-Aide-pay-equity-claim-report-2020.pdf

https://www.education.govt.nz/school/people-and-employment/pay-equity/teacher-aide-pay-equity-claim/the-work-matrix/

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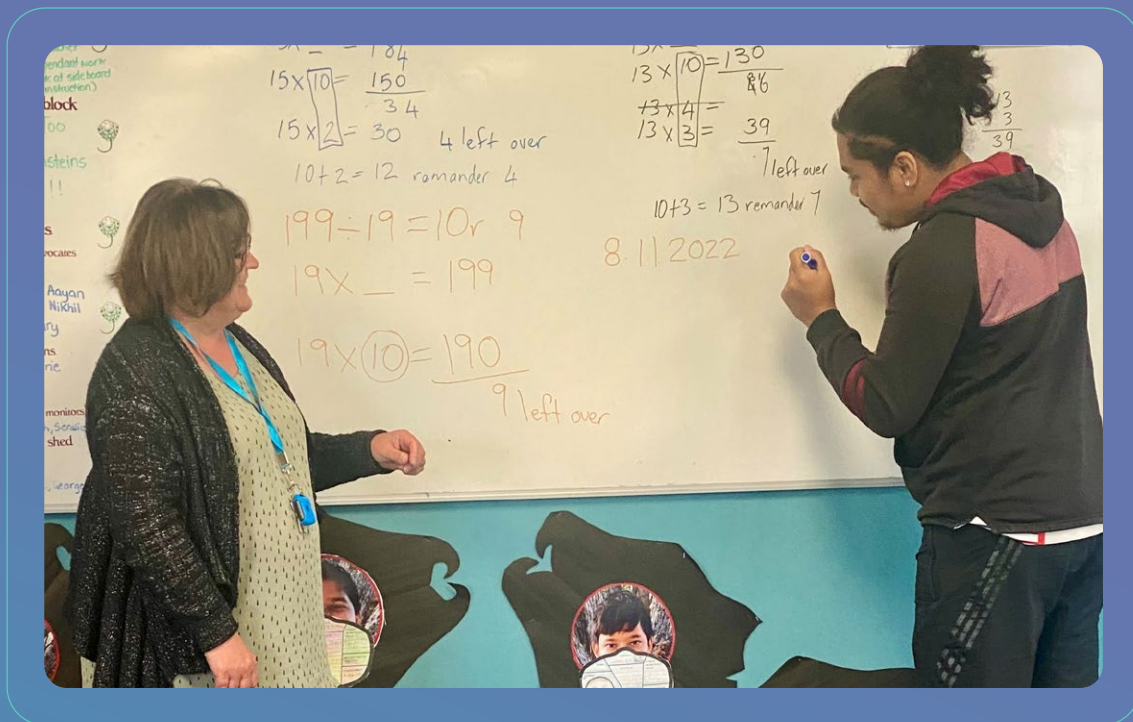
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