



# Working Together: How Teacher Aides Can Have The Most Impact

## SUMMARY



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.

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 summary gives an overview of what we learnt.

## ERO looked at teacher aide practice and support

Teacher aides (TAs)<sup>1</sup> have been vital members of Aotearoa New Zealand schools for more than fifty years. We've learnt a lot about what good education looks like over that time, and we also know more about how TAs can have the most impact.

This study is all about good TA practice and support. We started with a deep dive into the evidence base, looking at a wide range of research about TAs from Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas. Then 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 wanted to hear about how they've put quality TA practices into action.

This research builds off recent 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, to fund their professional learning, and improve their access to career pathways.

ERO's research into good TA practice and support will support schools by using robust evidence to clarify 'what good looks like' in an Aotearoa New Zealand context.

1. 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.

## What are the main things to know about good TA practice and support?

### 1. Side-by-side TA support isn't the best thing for most learners

In the past, many TAs worked side-by-side with students with learning support needs, and those 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 who knows the learner well. However, we now know that this isn't the best thing for learners' education and is strongly linked to poor learning and wellbeing outcomes. It works much better for these learners to have times where they work with the classroom teacher, times where they work with a TA, times when they work with their peers, and times working by themselves. Even for learners that need constant support, this should come from more than one person, including the teacher.

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

The national and international research shows that there are 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 individuals with learning support needs

The TA role is diverse. Not all TAs will work in these four key areas, and some TAs may work across a combination of them.

We found that TAs in Aotearoa New Zealand schools are doing incredible work in these four areas. We collected their strategies and ideas about how they make these practices work.

### 3. 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 side-by-side support, often due to time and resource pressures, or due to teachers' and TAs' perceptions of their roles. School leaders can promote lasting change through clear and explicit professional guidance, and practical supports like good training, careful timetabling, and opportunities to collaborate.

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

Responding to the diversity of learners in Aotearoa New Zealand classrooms takes 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, and involve TAs in meetings and professional learning opportunities. It's this sort of teamwork that enables and empowers TAs to make the biggest difference for learners.

### 5. 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, they affirmed that it 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.

## What does good TA practice and support look like, across the four key areas of practice?

### 1. Generalised classroom support

TAs make a difference for learners by working with the wider class, rather than focusing on learners with learning support needs. This enables teachers to spend more time with learners who need extra support.

| Good TA practices look like...  | Good school practices look like...   |
|---|--|
| TAs <b>focusing most of their interactions on the wider class.</b>  | Leaders and teachers valuing and <b>embedding a generalised approach</b> to TA support.<br><b>Teachers being confident</b> and capable to support the diverse range of learning needs in their class.                        |
| TAs having a good <b>understanding of lesson plans</b> and objectives, intended learning outcomes, and feedback requirements. | Leaders and teachers <b>sharing information with TAs</b> , and prioritising time for teachers and TAs to discuss lesson plans and objectives.  |
| TAs consistently and capably <b>using good teaching interaction practices</b> , including culturally responsive practices.    | Leaders and teachers <b>providing TAs with sufficient training and support</b> for quality TA-student interactions.<br>Leaders and teachers <b>maximising the diverse languages and cultures of TAs</b> to support learners. |

### 2. Delivering structured interventions

TAs make a difference for learners by holding brief, focused sessions with individuals and small groups, using evidence-based interventions or programmes.

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

To understand what good really looks like in Aotearoa New Zealand classrooms, ERO talked to schools that have put quality TA practices into action. Below is a summary of what we learnt about making the four key areas of practice work well for learners. We set out what good TA practices look like, along with the school practices that need to be in place to support TAs to do their best work.

### 3. Te ao Māori cultural leadership and support

Māori TAs make a difference for learners by supporting staff and students with their cultural expertise.

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

### 4. Collaboratively supporting students with learning support needs

TAs make a difference for learners by using a highly collaborative, autonomy-focused approach, to contribute to the wellbeing and learning of students with learning support needs.

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

## What next?

To find out more about these good practice and support strategies, check out our main research report and practical guides which can be downloaded for free from ERO's website, [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz). These resources have been designed to be practical and useful, to help schools with manageable shifts in practice that will make a real difference for learners.

### ERO's suite of TA practice and support resources

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

We appreciate the work of all those who supported this research, particularly the teacher aides, teachers, school leaders, sector experts, learners, and whānau who shared with us. Their experiences and insights are at the heart of what we have learnt. In interview after interview, we heard evidence that TAs are working alongside schools, experts, and whānau to do innovative, thoughtful, life-changing work for our learners – every day.





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