TEACHER ASSISTANTS IN CANADIAN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THEIR DEPLOYMENT, PREPAREDNESS, AND IMPACT

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Abstract

Current trends in Canada and the world reflect a gradual increase in the utilization of Teacher Assistants (TAs; otherwise known as education assistants, learning support assistants, or paraprofessionals, hereafter TAs) in inclusive classrooms to support students with special educational needs. Due to the increased number of TAs in schools, teachers will likely encounter and work with TAs in their own classrooms and likewise, students are likely to be supported by them. Seemingly, the purpose of TAs is to provide support for students with special educational needs thereby increasing their academic achievement and social inclusion. However, research internationally has found that TA support is not always fulfilling this purpose; instead, increased TA support can lead to lower academic achievement and social exclusion for these students. Studies internationally have identified a number of factors as contributing to ineffective TA support. However, research on TA support in Canada is sparse. The current study employed an online survey within British Columbia completed by 329 TAs and 48 teachers to gain a better understanding of the roles of TAs from the perspective of teachers and TAs including, how prepared they are for their work, and the impact they are perceived to be making on student outcomes. Findings suggested that the TA's role is ever changing and diverse, but most of their time is spent working one-to-one with students with special educational needs. They report that they are well-trained initially and have much experience, but lack ongoing professional development opportunities in areas such as instruction and decision-making about student work. Issues were raised throughout the study such as the lack of collaboration and communication between TAs and teachers and little respect, appreciation, and recognition for TAs. This research is one of the first in Canada on this topic and has provided insights into changes that can be made to how TAs are deployed and prepared in order to maximize their impact on student outcomes.

Lay Summary

In the last 30 years, there has been a rise in the numbers of students with special educational needs in regular classrooms (Giangreco, 2013; Webster & Blanchford, 2015). As a result, staff [often are referred to as Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Education Assistants (EAs)] thereafter referred to as TAs] to support these students has increased in classrooms in Canada and the world. This study was a way to help better investigate TA work in Canada. Using a web-based survey, teachers, and TAs in British Columbia were asked about their experiences in inclusive classrooms. The results suggest that the TA's role is diverse and always changing. Many issues were raised throughout the study including the lack of collaboration, communication, respect, appreciation, and recognition for TAs. This research has provided insights into changes that can be made to how TAs are used and prepared in order to maximize their impact on student outcomes.

Preface

Ms. Dmyterko is the sole author of this thesis. She conceptualized the study, with guidance and feedback from Dr. Laurie Ford and Dr. Sterett Mercer. Ms. Dmyterko conducted all data collection, analysis, and writing. This project titled: Teacher Assistants in Canadian Inclusive Classrooms: An Investigation into Their Deployment, Preparedness, and Impact, received approval from the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) on November 20, 2017 (Certificate number: H16-03040).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

With the adoption of inclusion in mainstream schools in the last 30 to 40 years, there are more students with special educational needs in regular classrooms that require additional support than was previously needed in this context (Giangreco, 2013; Webster & Blanchford, 2015). As a result, Canada and the world have seen a gradual increase of teacher assistants [TAs; otherwise known as education assistants (EAs), learning support assistants (LSAs), special education assistants (SEAs) or paraprofessionals, hereafter TAs] in elementary and secondary school classrooms to support these students (Giangreco, 2013; WorkBC, 2018). In Canada, approximately every second classroom has a TA (one TA to 57 students or one TA to every two teachers), therefore, it is likely that the majority of students will encounter TAs during their school years and teachers will work with TAs at some point during their career (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2009; Vancouver School Board, 2013).

Teachers and students alike believe that TAs provide valuable support (Bland & Sleightholme, 2012; Fraser & Meadows, 2008; Webster et al., 2010). However, researchers internationally have found a negative relationship between TA support and student academic progress (Webster et al., 2010). In a large-scale study, researchers observed that more TA support results in less direct teacher instruction and in turn, the more TA support students received, the less academic progress they made, resulting in minimal or no academic progress (Webster et al., 2010). Further, Symes, and Humphrey (2012) observed that TAs can prevent interactions between students with special educational needs and their teachers and peers. This resulted in students with special educational needs having significantly lower levels of social inclusion than their typical peers (Webster, 2014). Given these potential negative impacts on the

most vulnerable learners, studies internationally have identified various factors that contribute to ineffective TA support including: lack of training, insufficient collaboration with teachers, undefined role, and low self-efficacy (Higgins & Gulliford, 2014; Symes & Humphrey, 2012; Unison, 2014; Webster et al., 2010).

In Canada, there is a paucity of research focusing on the Canadian context with regards to issues surrounding TAs. Literature searches including the terms "teacher assistant", "education assistant", "learning support assistant", "special education assistant" or "paraprofessionals" yielded limited results from researchers focusing on these professionals in Canadian schools. Although research focusing on this topic exists in the literature regarding schools in other countries, the differences that exist between Canadian and international education systems means that research on TAs across the world may not be entirely generalizable to the Canadian education system. As such, it is vital that research exploring teaching assistants in Canadian schools is conducted.

Definition of Key Terms

Teacher Assistant. A teacher assistant is a member of the school support staff whose job is primarily, but not limited to, working with teachers to support students with special educational needs. Their role can differ depending on the school district, school and/or classroom in which they work. Their duties often include: pedagogical planning, teaching and decision-making, monitoring and supporting behavioural issues, providing emotional support, promoting independence, completing clerical work, providing personal care to students, and supervising students (this list is not exhaustive). These individuals are also often referred to as education assistants (EAs), learning support assistants (LSAs), special education assistants (SEAs) or paraprofessionals, although their job title doesn't necessarily dictate their role in the school and

classroom and these titles are for the most part, interchangeable. For the purpose of the present study the term "teacher assistant" will be used to refer to any person in the schools with one of these job titles, completes any of the above-mentioned tasks, and is not a teacher.

Teacher. A teacher is a member of the school staff responsible for identifying student needs, planning and implementing educational programs, and evaluating and reporting student progress (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2009). Often times, this is a classroom teacher who is in charge of a classroom of students, however, this can also refer to special education teachers who provide extensive specialized teaching to students with a diverse range of learning needs.

Deployment. The term "deployment" is used to describe how TAs are organized and used in schools. This includes their assigned roles and responsibilities and what they are actually doing on a daily basis.

Preparedness. The knowledge and skills that TAs have in order to complete their job is referred to as "preparedness" in the present study. This includes postsecondary training and on-the-job professional development. It also refers to their knowledge and understanding of class content and role(s) in the classroom on a day-to-day basis.

Professional Development. When staff engages in on-the-job training; including taking courses from an educational institution or attending and/or participating in lectures or workshops on particular job related topics, these activities are called "professional development".

Inclusive Education. When all students are welcome to attend regular classes with their same age peers, this is referred to as "inclusive education". Every student's learning is supported and participation in all aspects of school life is fostered (Inclusion BC, 2017; Inclusive Education Canada, 2017).

Inclusive Classroom. A classroom that includes all students, with these students having a diverse range of learning needs is called an "inclusive classroom. All students are supported to learn and engage within these classrooms (Inclusion BC, 2017; Inclusive Education Canada, 2017).

Summary

The majority of previous research on issues related to TAs has been conducted outside of Canada and as a result, the literature on this topic focusing on Canadian schools is sparse. Even though there are similarities between Canadian and international education systems, studies focusing on TA support in a Canadian context are needed to (a) identify Canadian TAs' roles, preparedness, and impact and (b) determine how findings in other countries overlap with Canada's. This will enable Canadian schools to target areas for improvement in TA roles, preparedness, and impact to utilize strategies found to be effective internationally for similar issues. Given their continued presence in Canadian classrooms, it is crucial to gain a better understanding of TA support in Canada to identify areas in which their work can be improved so that the effectiveness of their work can be maximized. A more comprehensive review of the literature is provided in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Overview

Since the introduction of inclusive education in western countries, schools have gradually increased their employment of support staff in general education classrooms with the purpose of assisting teachers and helping students with special educational needs to be included and fully participate (Giangreco, 2013). These support staff go by many titles [education assistants (EAs), learning support assistants (LSAs), special education assistants (SEA) or paraprofessionals, hereafter teacher assistants (TAs)] even though they tend to be employed to serve this similar purpose. Internationally, studies have investigated many issues surrounding work of teacher assistants, however, there is currently a paucity of research focusing on this supporting position in inclusive classrooms within Canada. Although commonalities exist between the education system in Canada and other countries worldwide, it is important to also recognize the differences. For example, the ongoing global trend towards inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools has resulted in education systems across the world creating policies of inclusion for their schools (Meijer, Soriano, & Watkins, 2007). This trend has also resulted in the widespread utilization of TAs worldwide to support students that would not have otherwise attended mainstream schools, such as those with special educational needs. However, despite these documented similarities across international education systems, meaningful differences also exist. For example, the ways in which inclusion has been interpreted and implemented across countries across the world varies (Meijer, Soriano, & Watkins, 2007). Some countries endeavor to include all students in mainstream schools, while others have a two-track approach, which translates to varying levels of inclusion for students with special educational needs in mainstream schools with some students not being included at all, attending

only special schools (Meijer, Soriano, & Watkins, 2007). Given these differences in the ways in which inclusion is implemented worldwide, Canadian research is needed to identify any issues surrounding TA work in Canada. In addition, understanding how these issues overlap with international findings are important to determine steps towards improving inclusive education in Canada. Given that research to date is limited on this topic in Canada, the research outlined below is focused on published studies in other western countries such as England and the United States, countries that have similar education systems (i.e., inclusive education systems) to Canada.

Teacher and Student Views of Teacher Assistants

Findings from previous studies suggest that teachers believe that TAs provide valuable support to students, enhancing outcomes, and supporting inclusion (Webster et al., 2010). In a survey of approximately 20,000 primary, secondary and special teachers in England and Wales teachers reported that TAs positively effect the learning and behaviour of students (Blatchford, et al., 2009). Further, teachers also reported that TAs also have a positive impact on teachers themselves. Two-thirds of the teacher respondents reported that TAs increased their job satisfaction and decreased their stress (Blatchford, et al., 2009).

Moreover, studies that have collected student views of TAs have consistently found that students perceive that TAs contribute to the development of their confidence and autonomy and provide valuable support with academic subjects. In a previous study, fifth and sixth grade student views (n=28) were collected using questionnaires and a written task that explored what students thought were valuable characteristics of TAs and what qualifications TAs should have (Bland & Sleightholme, 2012). These students indicated that they preferred to have TAs in their classes and that this support increased their confidence. Another study, which employed

questionnaires (n=419) and interviews (n=86), explored how children aged 8-11 viewed TAs (Fraser & Meadows, 2008). Overall, the children in this study expressed that TAs' work is valuable and stated that TAs help them with their reading, writing, and mathematics as well as with their comprehension of instructions and clarification of tasks (Fraser & Meadows, 2008). In a study of five secondary school students with varying degrees of impaired sight in Australia, they perceived that when TAs provided "light" support (i.e., discrete support in the classroom, assistance with assistive technologies and resources, and braille transcription), student inclusion in the regular classroom was facilitated and their autonomy was increased (Whitburn, 2013).

Previous Research on the Impact of Teacher Assistants

The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project, the Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA) project, the Making a Statement (MAST), and the Special Educational Needs in Secondary Education (SENSE) studies in the United Kingdom (UK) evaluated the learning and experiences of students with special educational needs as well as TA work and strategies to improve it (Blatchford, et al., 2009; Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2014). The DISS project took place from 2003-2008, across England and Wales, and consisted of two strands. During strand one, large-scale surveys were employed with 20,000 questionnaires collected from administrators, teachers, and support staff. Strand two consisted of several elements; researchers (1) surveyed 8200 students from elementary and secondary schools to understand the impact of TA support on students, (2) observed of TA-student and teacher-student interactions, and (3) conducted 95 interviews. The EDTA project took place over the 2010-2011 academic year and was designed to address issues that were raised by the DISS project discussed in detail later in this chapter. Data collection consisted of surveys, structured observations, and interviews of 10 school administrators and 20 teacher-TA

dyads (n=50) across 10 schools in England. The study design included pre- and post-intervention analysis to determine if and what interventions on TA support were effective. Researchers engaged in consultation with school staff and developed strategies in existing school conditions to improve areas that they identified in the DISS project, as contributing to ineffective TA support. The MAST study, which took place in the 2011-2012 school year, followed 48 students in Grade 5 with the highest level of special educational needs (moderate learning difficulties or behaviour, emotional, and social difficulties). Data was collected via interviews with special educational needs coordinators, teachers, TAs, and parents/caregivers of students, and direct observations of students in school over the course of one week. In the 2015-2016 academic year, 60 students with special educational needs and 112 average-attaining 'comparison' students from 43 schools across England who were in Grade 9 participated in the SENSE study. Data collection included extensive systematic observations, individual case studies, and 295 interviews with school staff, families, and students themselves. The SENSE study's also had a longitudinal component, as 30 of these students were originally part of the MAST study allowing researchers to evaluate the experiences of these students between 2011 and 2016.

The aforementioned positive teacher and student views of teacher assistants found in previous research (Bland & Sleightholme, 2012; Blatchford, et al., 2009; Fraser & Meadows, 2008; Whitburn, 2013) seem to contradict the primary findings of the DISS study. In this study, TA support was found to have a negative relationship with student achievement; that is, the more TA support a student received, the lower their academic progress tended to be (Webster et al., 2010). As such, the students with the most severe special educational needs who received the most TA support were most significantly impacted and made significantly less progress than their typical achieving peers (Webster et al., 2010). These researchers used multi-level regression

and controlled for factors known to effect progress including the students' special educational needs, prior attainment, eligibility for free school meals, English as additional language, deprivation, gender and ethnicity. This finding suggests that the long held "commonsense" perception that more TA support is better might be a misconception. Webster, Blatchford, and Russell (2013) propose that students who have more severe special educational needs receive less direct teacher instruction because they have more TA support, as a result the students made minimal progress.

The MAST study highlighted the ways in which TA support may contribute to the separation of students with special educational needs from their peers, inadvertently negatively impacting those students' social inclusion (Webster & Blatchford, 2014). Students with special educational needs spent over 25% of their day at school outside of the regular classroom with a TA. They were less likely to have peer interactions and had fewer peer interactions than their classmates. When they were in the classroom, often they were physically segregated from the rest of the class, working with a TA at a workstation or desk to the side, or at the back of the classroom.

In the SENSE study, researchers compared the learning and experiences of students with special educational needs from elementary to secondary school. Even though the proportion of time these students spent with TAs was less in secondary school compared to elementary (18% vs. 27%), TAs continued to be a consistent and central feature of their educational experiences in mainstream schools (Webster & Blatchford, 2017). One-fifth of their interactions were with TAs, while their typical achieving peers had almost none. In addition, both the MAST and SENSE studies highlighted an overwhelming tendency for TAs to differentiate for these students; often making decisions about differentiation independently and in the moment (Webster & Blatchford,

2017). Similar findings were reported by Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, and Macfarland (1997) in their study of 11 students with multiple disabilities and the 134 educational team members who supported them [i.e., service providers (e.g., speech and language pathologists, nurses), special educators, teacher assistants, parents, general classroom teachers, and school administrators]. Through observations and interviews, researchers found that the TAs tended to have an ongoing close proximity to the students with special educational needs that they were working with, while other students in the class perceived the student and their aid as a "package deal"; interacting with the student meant also interacting with their TA (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & Macfarland, 1997). The TAs in this study were observed consistently creating barriers for students with special educational needs and their peers to interact and physically separating these students from the class group (e.g., taking the student to another room to work and keeping the student physically at the fringe of the group; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & Macfarland, 1997). In Whitburn's (2013) study of five secondary school students with varying degrees of impaired sight, the students described being assigned to a TA like being "in mainstream (education) with a chaperone" (pg. 153) and that having the constant presence of a TA caused them embarrassment and feelings of exclusion which resulted from having to always sit with the TA and away from their peers. In addition, the students also reported that, at times, they felt that TAs intruded on their independence and took over their responsibility to learn (e.g., completing all the writing for a student when the student felt capable of writing for themselves). This approach has been referred to this as the "Velcro TA model of special educational needs provision" (Webster, 2014, pg. 235). Such constant TA presence and support lead to learned helplessness, decreased confidence, and dependence on adults (Saddler, 2014; Symes & Humphrey, 2012).

Webster, Blatchford, and Russell (2013) emphasize that these academic and social impacts on students are not the fault of TAs but are the result of systemic and structural issues in education systems, over which TAs have no control. The DISS and EDTA projects, and the MAST and SENSE studies have helped these researchers to identify three keys areas attributing effective TA work, areas, which they argue, are in need of change at systemic levels including deployment, preparedness, and practice (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013).

Deployment

Researchers have identified the role of the TA as being multifaceted and widely varying, often undefined, and one that includes pedagogical planning, teaching and decision-making, monitoring and supporting behavioural issues, providing emotional support, promoting independence, completing clerical work, providing personal care to students, and supervising students (Giangreco, 2013; Webster & Blanchford, 2014). Giangreco (2013) cautioned educators that this lack of clarity in the role of the TA can lead to negative consequences in schools such as over reliance of TAs to do work that they are not qualified to do, thus, resulting in little academic and social progress of students. This assertion was supported by the DISS project finding that TA support can lead to lower academic achievement when TAs are providing most of the instructional support to students with special education needs instead of teachers (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013). The ways in which TAs are deployed in classrooms was key to improving their impact in student outcomes. Webster, Russell, and Blatchford (2015) proposed that TAs roles and duties are generally encompassed by two categories: (1) non-pedagogical and (2) pedagogical.

Non-pedagogical Roles. In the DISS project, it was found that when engaged in non-pedagogical roles in inclusive classrooms, TA work highly benefited teachers. Administrative

tasks that TAs completed to support teachers increased teachers' job satisfaction, decreased their stress, and lessened their workload (Webster, Russell, & Blatchford, 2015). Furthermore, TAs were "extra eyes and ears", assisting teachers with behavioural and classroom management, allowing teachers to expend less time in this area and focus on instruction (Webster, Russell, & Blatchford, 2015). However, Giangreco and Broer (2005) cautioned against relying too much on TAs for behavioural and classroom management, as many TAs lack the training and confidence to be effective in task. To ensure the inclusion of students with physical disabilities, TA support is essential. TAs provide vital support to students who may otherwise have to attend a special school by ensuring accessibility through physical handling, physiotherapy techniques, sign language, and use of special equipment. However, researchers have suggested that when TAs provide specialized support to assist with accessibility, they often fall into the "training trap"; teachers assume that TAs have specialized training that they may not have and relinquish all work with the student with special educational needs, including instruction, to the TA who may be unqualified to do so (Giangreco, 2003).

Pedagogical Roles. Both the DISS and EDTA projects discovered that in general, many TAs assumed responsibility for the education of students with special educational needs, rather than teachers (Webster, Russell, & Blatchford, 2015). The commonsense views that TAs provide *additional* support to students with special educational needs is disputed by these researchers. Giangreco (2003) argues that students with special educational needs are actually receiving *alternative* support, getting less direct educational input from teachers in exchange for more from TAs, who are less qualified to do so. It has been argued that this is an implicit form of discrimination against and a disservice to students with special educational needs, who received the majority of their instruction and support from the individuals who are the least qualified

despite their needing more intensive educational supports given their special education designation (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013). The MAST and SENSE studies also highlighted that TAs often differentiate work for students in the moment, rather than the teacher (Webster and Blatchford, 2017). Research indicates, however, that conducting interventions, one-to-one and in small groups, is one pedagogical role that, if TAs are properly trained and utilizing an evidence-based intervention, can positively impact students' progress (Alborz, Pearson, Farrell, & Howes, 2009; Savage & Carless, 2005; Wasburn-Moses, Chun, & Kaldenberg, 2013; Webster, & Blatchford, 2015).

Preparedness

A recurrent theme in the literature on the deployment of TAs is the need for training. Beyond the DISS and EDTA projects, other studies have identified training as impacting the quality of TA support (Abbott, McConkey, & Dobbins, 2011; Giangreco, 2013; Martin & Alborz, 2014; Webster, Russell, & Blatchford, 2015; Webster and Blatchford, 2017). Literature on TA training has identified two areas of concern regarding TAs' preparedness to engage in their role effectively in the classroom: (1) their overall training and skills and (2) their day-to-day preparedness to work in the classroom. Many TAs may lack skills, knowledge, self-efficacy and confidence to engage in their role successfully given their lack of preparedness in these two areas (Abbott, McConkey, & Dobbins, 2011; Symes & Humphrey, 2012).

Overall Training and Skills. Overall, researchers indicated that TAs often do not have the training that they need to support students in the classroom to the extent that they do (Giangreco, 2013). When TAs are assigned to support students with special educational needs, teachers sometimes assume that they have specialized training to support these students. However, they often are not trained to the extent that teachers are, and are unable to provide the

quality of instruction provided by a trained teacher (Giangreco, 2003). TA training varies widely; some have university degrees in content areas, some have teacher assistant or early childhood development training, while some have little or no post-secondary training (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013). Furthermore, many of the tasks that TAs are required to engage in require training in a variety of areas such as knowledge and strategies for working with specific types of special educational needs (e.g., physical, learning or behavioural, emotional or social needs/disabilities/disorders) versus curriculum-based assistance or interventions in reading, writing, or math or working with the entire class or in content area classes such as science or social studies. For example, training to implement a successful small group reading intervention differs from training to assist with classroom management or training to support students with behaviours or specific neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism or ADHD (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013).

Day-to-Day Preparedness. On a daily basis, TAs reported that they lacked time for collaboration with teachers to plan and get/give feedback and adequate time to plan for lessons (Webster, Russell, & Blatchford, 2015). TAs described themselves as going into classrooms "blind" on a daily basis, given their unawareness of what the teacher has planned for the lesson (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013). Many TAs relied upon listening to the teacher's lesson to gain an understanding of the lesson content requiring them, in the moment, to decide how to support students with their learning outcomes (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013). Making it the TAs' responsibility to ensure adaptations or accommodations are being properly implemented to support designated students is problematic. As such, this can lead to less than optimal support from TAs, leading to the negative outcomes similar to those found in the DISS study. When TAs were given more time to collaborate with teachers and had planned adequately

for lessons, they reported higher levels of confidence in their abilities and were more aware of how to assist in the classroom (Webster, Russell, & Blatchford, 2015).

Practice

Given TAs' lack of training reported in research, it is not surprising that their practice in the classroom sometimes falls short. Specifically, the DISS project highlighted that interactions that TAs were having with students, were often not optimal (Webster, Russell, & Blatchford, 2015). For example, the researchers observed that TAs were more likely to prompt students to complete work rather than support their learning. Further to this, they saw that when teachers assisted students their questioning tended to be more open-ended than TAs', promoting extended thinking and learning while the questioning TAs used was often closed, shutting down extended thinking and learning (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013). Moreover, when assisting students, TAs often engaged in what Blatchford, Russell, and Webster (2012) coined as "stereo teaching", where TAs repeated to students they were supporting, often word for word, exactly what the teacher had said during the lesson to the class. This illustrates how the lack of training in content areas and pedagogical knowledge and skills TAs have influences the quality of support that they are able to provide.

Current Study Rationale

Given the findings of previous studies highlighting the potential negative impact that TA deployment and preparedness may have on student outcomes, it is important that the work of TAs be better understood in the Canadian context. As there is a paucity of research in this area in Canada, the current study was a preliminary study in Canada, specifically focusing on one geographical area of Canada: British Columbia (BC). It was hoped that this study would identify issues unique to the Canadian classroom context. It is hoped that the findings from this study will

help to inform ways to improve support for TAs in British Columbia, and possibly Canada as well, and to help them utilize strategies that have been proven effective for similar issues in schools in other countries.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

Currently, there is limited empirical understanding of how TAs are deployed, how prepared TAs are or their impact on student outcomes in Canadian inclusive classrooms. This study contributes to the research base in Canada on this topic to address this gap in the literature, focusing on BC. Survey methods were utilized to obtain information on the current teacher and TA perceptions and experiences of deployment, preparedness, and impact of TAs within BC school settings. The research purpose, research questions, methodology and the approach to data analysis are outlined in this chapter.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore TA and teacher perceptions and experiences of TAs in BC inclusive school settings regarding (1) how TAs are deployed, (2) how prepared TAs are overall and on a daily basis, and (3) the impact TAs have on learning and development of students.

Research Questions

In this study, the following questions were posed:

(1) What are TAs' and teachers' experiences and perceptions of how TAs are deployed in BC inclusive classrooms?

(2) How prepared do TAs and teachers perceive TAs who work in BC inclusive classrooms are?

(a) How prepared are TAs overall (i.e., training, experience)?

(b) How prepared do teachers and TAs perceive TAs are on a daily basis (i.e., role in lesson, who they will support, and having instructional and subject matter knowledge)?

(3) What impact do teachers and TA perceive that TAs are having on students' learning and development (i.e., confidence, motivation, distraction, and independence)?

Method

The current study utilized survey methods including a cross-sectional Internet-based survey to collect the experiences and perceptions of TAs and teachers currently working within inclusive classrooms in BC. This method allowed for data on deployment, preparedness, and impact to be collected. It also enabled researchers to collect data more easily over greater distances and allowed for multiple methods of participant recruitment.

University Ethics and Research Approvals

UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB). To obtain ethics approval, an application was submitted to the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) at UBC. The application included a description of the current study and copies of the consent, survey, letters, and advertisements that were used in this study. This study complied with the guidelines for ethical research as outlined by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Office and specified in the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Treatment of Human Subjects (CIHR, NSERC, & SSHRC, 2010).

School District Research Approval. After the BREB application was approved, the researcher contacted a school district in the lower mainland of British Columbia to discuss completing this study within their school district. A school district representative consulted with the teacher and TA union representatives to ensure that they were informed about the survey and

to obtain their approval of the project. Once approval was obtained from union representatives, a representative of the school district then wrote a letter to UBC stating the school district's support of the project within the district.

Teacher and TA Union Approval. Initially, the research sought to recruit participants for the study through the teachers' union, British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) and the TAs' union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia (CUPE BC). Emails were sent to the research team at BCTF and several email addresses listed on the CUPE BC website. Emails from BCTF were returned but BCTF ultimately declined to participate in the study. A response from CUPE BC was never received. As such, it was decided to pursue other avenues for participant recruitment.

Recruitment

School District Recruitment. Once the school district agreed to participate in the study and BREB approved the final revision of the study, teacher and TA recruitment began. The school district contact was sent an email to be forwarded to teachers and TAs in the district (see Appendix A for email template). This email briefly explained the study and contained the web link to the study's survey. Given that the survey was web-based, respondents were self-selected. Previous research found that when emails were personalized when requesting participation in a survey, response rate increased (Baruch & Holtom, 2008; Edwards et al., 2009; Fincham, 2008; McPeake, Bateson, & O'Neill, 2014; Sánchez-Fernández, Muñoz-Leiva, & Montoro-Ríos, 2012). Therefore, emails in the present study were personalized to address the school district. One email was sent to each of the target groups: teachers (approximately 1325; Province of British Columbia, 2018) and TAs (approximately 662; Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2009). When respondents were offered the incentive of having the results of the study shared with them at a

later date, response rates doubled in previous research (Baruch & Holtom, 2008; Edwards et al., 2009). As such, at the end of the present survey, participants were given an email address to contact if they would like the results to be shared with them at a later date and/or to be entered in a draw to win a $50 gift certificate. Posters were also provided to schools and hung in the staff room to encourage participation (see Appendix B for poster). The response rate for school district recruitment was 0.3% for teachers and 12% for TAs.

Social Media Recruitment. An additional area of recruitment via social media, specifically, Facebook, was used. The researcher established a page for the study on Facebook, explaining its purpose and containing the link to the survey. Facebook advertising was utilized to target particular people to advertise the study to, specifically: location (British Columbia) and occupation (teacher and teacher assistant/education assistant). Two separate ads were used with different text and pictures, as research has shown that participation in online research can vary depending on how the research is marketed, (i.e., pictures and text; see Appendix C for advertisements; King, O'Rourke, & DeLongis, 2014). Both advertisements were run for a week each on alternating weeks. The advertisement that garnered more responses between the two was then renewed every week with the final expiration date of June 30, 2018. Costs were calculated per click on the advertisements with 345 clicks overall. The advertising costs overall were $105 USD. Facebook also provided an estimate for number of people reached (i.e., the number of people who viewed the advertisement) and 12,608 people total viewed one of the two advertisements. The response rate for social media recruitment was 2.3% total (how many teachers and TAs was not calculated by Facebook).

Participants

Overview. Participants were teachers and TAs working within schools that have inclusive classrooms within BC. The initial recruitment goal was a minimum of 100 teachers and 100 TAs. The final number of participants included 101 teachers and 387 TAs in the 2017-2018 school year. Four teachers and 13 TAs were excluded because they were not from British Columbia while 40 teachers and 45 TAs were excluded because they did not complete, in full, the demographic questionnaire or start the study's survey questions. Completing the demographic questionnaire in full provided enough information to answer at least one research question. The decision was made to include as many participants as possible to collect as many diverse perspectives as possible for the questions posed. Thus, all participant responses obtained were used to answer the research questions, regardless of whether the entire survey was completed. It was hoped that this study would give a voice to those that are not often heard (i.e., professionals in supporting roles in schools). As such, the researcher believed it was important to include as many responses in the results as possible. The final sample included 48 teachers and 329 TAs. However, these respondents did not answer all of the questions in the survey. Table 3.1 provides the summary of demographic information for the TA and the Teacher samples.

Table 3.1

Demographic Information

Demographic Variables[1]	Teachers n (%)	TAs n (%)
All Persons (N)	48	329
Gender		
Female	47 (98%)	317 (96%)
Male	1 (2%)	9 (2.7%)
Other	0 (%)	2 (0.6%)
Prefer not to answer	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Demographic Information

Demographic Variables[1]	Teachers n (%)	TAs n (%)
Age		
18-24	0 (%)	12 (4%)
25-34	16 (33%)	46 (14%)
35-44	17 (35%)	109 (33%)
45-54	12 (25%)	102 (31%)
55-64	3 (6%)	58 (18%)
65+	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)
Years of Experience		
Less than 1 year	2 (4%)	4(1%)
1-5 years	10 (21%)	85 (26%)
6-10 years	11 (23%)	77 (23%)
11-20 years	18 (38%)	96 (29%)
20+ years	7 (15%)	67 (20%)
Level of Education		
High school graduate or the equivalent	0 (%)	3 (0.9%)
Some college	0 (%)	7 (2.1%)
Certificate/Diploma	0 (%)	248 (75%)
Associate Degree	0 (%)	5 (1.5%)
Two or more Certificates/Diplomas	0 (%)	30 (9%)
Bachelor's Degree	20 (42%)	29 (8%)
Certificate/Diploma and Bachelor's Degree	7 (15%)	30 (9%)
Associate Degree and Bachelor's Degree	2 (4%)	0 (%)
2+ Certificates/Diplomas & Bachelor's Degree	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)
Master's Degree	19 (39%)	5 (1.5%)
Prefer not to answer	0 (%)	2 (0.6%)
Type of School of Employment		
Public	39 (81%)	309 (94%)
Private	9 (19%)	20 (6%)
Grades of School of Employment		
Preschool to Grade 3	0 (%)	3 (0.9%)
Preschool to Grade 7	2 (4%)	0 (%)
Kindergarten to Grades 4, 5, or 6	13 (1%)	82 (24.2%)
Kindergarten to Grades 7, 8 or 9	18 (38%)	113 (34.6%)
Kindergarten to Grade 12	3 (6%)	30 (9%)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Demographic Information

Demographic Variables[1]	Teachers n (%)	TAs n (%)
Middle School (Grade 7, 8 and 9)	3 (12%)	25 (7%)
Middle and High School (Grades 7, 8 or 9 to 12)	6 (4%)	66 (20%)
High School (Grades 10 to 12)	2 (2%)	5 (1.5%)
All Grades (Substitute or District-Level)	1 (2%)	5 (1.5%)
Geographical Area of School of Employment		
Abbotsford	1 (2%)	24 (7%)
Alberni	1 (2%)	0 (%)
Bulkley Valley	2 (4%)	0 (%)
Burnaby	1 (2%)	6 (1.8%)
Campbell River	0 (%)	6 (1.8%)
Cariboo-Chilcotin	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)
Central Coast	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)
Central Okanagan	5 (10%)	8 (2.4%)
Chilliwack	0 (%)	22 (6%)
Coast Mountains	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)
Comox Valley	4 (8%)	2 (0.6%)
Coquitlam	0 (%)	6 (1.8%)
Cowichan Valley	0 (%)	8 (2.4%)
Delta	0 (%)	2 (0.6%)
Fort Nelson	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)
Fraser-Cascade	0 (%)	2 (0.6%)
Gold Trail	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)
Greater Victoria	3 (6%)	10 (3%)
Kamloops/Thompson	0 (%)	9 (2.7%)
Kootenay Lake	2 (4%)	1 (0.3%)
Kootenay-Columbia	8 (17%)	0 (%)
Langley	4 (8%)	80 (24%)
Maple Ridge	5 (10%)	2 (0.6%)
Mission	0 (%)	8 (2.4%)
Nanaimo-Ladysmith	1 (2%)	5 (1.5%)
Nechako Lakes	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)
New Westminster	0 (%)	4 (1.2%)
Nicola-Similkameen	0 (%)	2 (0.6%)
North Okanagan-Shuswap	0 (%)	7 (2.1%)
North Vancouver	0 (%)	12 (4%)
Okanagan Skaha	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)
Peace River North	1 (2%)	3 (0.9%)
Peace River South	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Demographic Information

Demographic Variables[1]	Teachers n (%)	TAs n (%)
Powell River	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)
Prince George	0 (%)	5 (1.5%)
Qualicum	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)
Quesnel	2 (4%)	7 (2.1%)
Richmond	0 (%)	18 (5%)
Saanich	0 (%)	1 (0.3%)
Sea to Sky	0 (%)	3 (0.9%)
Sooke	0 (%)	5 (1.5%)
Southeast Kootenay	0 (%)	3 (0.9%)
Sunshine Coast	1 (2%)	1 (0.3%)
Surrey	5 (10%)	28 (9%)
Vancouver	1 (2%)	5 (1.5%)
Vancouver Island North	1 (2%)	1 (0.3%)
Vernon	0 (%)	4 (1.2%)
Prefer Not to Answer	0 (%)	0 (%)
Title		
Education(al) Assistant (EA)		201 (61%)
Certified Education(al) Assistant (EA)		20 (6%)
Special Education Assistant (SEA)		84 (26%)
Teacher Assistant (TA)		10 (3%)
Other		14 (4%)
Full-Time or Part-Time		
Full-Time (30+ hours)		137 (42%)
Part-Time (Between 15-29 hours)		176 (53%)
Part-Time (Less than 15 hours)		14 (4%)
On-call or Temporary		2 (0.6%)

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded.

Teaching Assistants. The majority of TA respondents were female (96%) and over the age of 35 (82%). Most had a certificate or diploma (75%) and had 11-20 years of experience in their role (29%). Twenty percent of the respondents had at least four years of post-secondary education. The words "Education Assistant" were in the job title of 93% of the TA respondents. Just over half of the TA respondents (53%) worked 15 to 29 hours a week while 42% reported that they worked over 30 hours a week.

Most of the TA respondents worked in public schools (94%) in the lower mainland of BC (64%) with 5% from urban centres outside the lower mainland. Most of the TA respondents were employed in Elementary schools (53%) while 28.5% of TAs worked in Middle and/or High schools. Thirty-two respondents worked in schools with grades levels ranging from Elementary to Middle and High school (Kindergarten to Grade 9 and Kindergarten to Grade 12).

Teachers. The teacher respondents were primarily female (98%) and under the age of 44 (69%). Most of the teachers had 11-20 years of experience (38%) although experience overall ranged from less than a year to over 20 years. Forty-two percent had Bachelor's Degree while 58% had education beyond the Bachelor degree with 39% reporting that they had a Master's Degree.

Eighty-one percent of the teacher respondents worked in public schools while 9% worked in the private sector. The majority were employed in the lower mainland (45%) while 20% were from medium to large urban centers outside of the lower mainland and 35% were from small population centres and rural communities. The majority (45%) worked in Elementary schools (43%) while 18% worked in Middle (Grades 7 to 9) and High school (Grades 10 to 12) combined.

Data Collection

Overview. A recruitment email was sent to the school district contact to forward to all of the teachers and TAs in the district. This email included the link to the study's survey. The Facebook portion of the study had the same survey link on its advertisements and Facebook page. Upon clicking on the link, teachers and TAs were directed to a website, where the study was explained and electronic consent was obtained (see Appendix D for Informed Consent). Once consent was received, teachers, and TAs were asked to complete the survey.

Measures. A survey and a demographic questionnaire in one online document were used in the present study. The researcher created a demographic questionnaire including questions about gender, age, education level, level of experience, school location, and school grade levels. Education level and level of experience were used to explore overall preparedness. This questionnaire was the same for both TAs and teachers (see Appendix E for Demographic Questionnaires). The current study's survey was adapted, with permission of the author, from the Maximizing the Impact of Teaching Assistants Staff Survey (MITA, n.d.). These surveys were used in the current study to obtain TA and teacher experiences perspectives of TA preparedness, deployment, and impact on student outcomes (see Appendix F for Survey). The survey was hosted on the University of British Columbia's survey tool at: https://ubc.ca1.qualtrics.com. Prior to beginning data collection the survey was piloted with five individuals to determine the approximate time it would take to complete the survey and any items in need of adjustment.

Confidentiality and Privacy. Confidentiality was maintained for all of the participants, as this survey was anonymous. At the end of the survey, participants were asked to email the researcher if they were interested in the results of the study, and/or to be entered into a draw for a $50 gift card. All digitalized data was backed up and encrypted or password protected for security.

Data Analysis

Research Question One. How do TAs and teachers perceive TAs as being deployed in BC inclusive classrooms? To understand how TAs and teachers perceive TAs as being deployed in BC inclusive classrooms, descriptive statistics were used to highlight reports of (A) what TAs are doing in lessons (i.e., working one-to-one with a student, working with a pair or group of students, walking around the classroom (monitoring), listening to the teacher teach, leading or

teaching the class, or other (admin, marking, etc.) and (B) which students they are spending their time with/supporting [higher attaining students, average attaining students, lower attaining students, students with special educational needs, mixed (students with different levels of attainment)]. Microsoft Excel was used to sort the data and analyze the number and percentage of respondents for each question. In addition, an open-ended question allowed TAs and teachers to comment on additional tasks that TAs complete beyond those identified in the survey for ranking. These responses were coded according to common themes and then categorized into (1) pedagogical tasks (e.g., supporting learning by working directly with students or preparing materials to use with students), (2) non-pedagogical tasks that are student-focused (e.g., supporting social emotional needs or supervising students), or (3) non-pedagogical tasks (e.g., admin work such as photocopying or break coverage).

Research Question Two. How prepared do TAs and teachers perceive TAs who work in BC inclusive classrooms are? In order to explore how prepared TAs who work in BC inclusive classrooms are (A) overall (i.e., level of education and experience) descriptive statistics were utilized. Professional development taken was evaluated with thematic analysis. In addition, to investigate perceptions of how prepared TAs are (B) on a daily basis (i.e., knowing their role in the lesson including who they will support, what they will do, what will be covered, and ensuring they have the instructional and subject matter knowledge to assist) descriptive statistics were utilized. The data was sorted and analyzed by the number and percentage of respondents for each question in Microsoft Excel.

Research Question Three. What impact do teachers and TA perceive that TAs are having on students' (1) learning and (2) development (i.e., confidence, motivation, distraction, and independence)? To determine how TAs and teachers perceive TAs are impacting student

learning and development, descriptive statistics were used. Microsoft Excel was used sort and analyzed the data for each question posed.

Additional questions. To evaluate other factors that may influence the deployment, preparedness, and impact of TAs, additional survey questions were asked beyond the research questions to gather additional information. Microsoft Excel was used to calculate descriptive statistics and thematic analysis was conducted by the researcher to summarize the results of these questions. See Appendix F for additional questions.

Summary

An online survey was employed in this study that obtained the experiences and perspectives of TAs and teachers to contribute to building an understanding of how TAs are deployed in BC classrooms, how prepared they are (overall and on a daily basis), and what impact they are making on student learning and development. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to highlight this information, which is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

Overview

The purpose of this study was to build an understanding of (1) how TAs are deployed in BC classrooms, (2) how prepared they are overall and on a daily basis, and (3) what impact they are making on student learning and development. In this chapter, the results are summarized by research question.

Research Question One: Deployment

Two questions were posed to both TAs and teachers in relation to deployment; (1.A) what are TAs spending their time doing in classrooms? and (1.B) which students are they spending their time with? Descriptive statistics were used to answer these questions are presented below.

Descriptive Statistics, Research Question 1.A. TA and teacher respondents were asked to think about what activities they (TAs) typically do in a lesson and rank order them from one to six with one being the activity the TA spent the most time doing, and six the activity the TA spent the least time doing. This information is summarized in Table 4.1. In addition, TAs and teachers were asked to add up, out of 100%, how much of their (TAs') time was spent on each of these tasks, which is summarized in Table 4.2. TAs and teachers were also provided space to comment on any other tasks they (TAs) complete that were not provided. Most common additional tasks completed by TAs reported are summarized in Table 4.3.

Table 4.1

Rank Order of Tasks Completed by Teacher Assistants[1]

Rank Order	Working with One Student		Working with 2+ Students		Monitoring Class		Listening to the Lesson		Leading the Class	
	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
1	28 (61%)	128 (61%)	13 (28%)	53 (25%)	3 (7%)	14 (7%)	1 (2%)	14 (7%)	0 (%)	0 (%)
2	16 (35%)	64 (30%)	22 (48%)	81 (38%)	4 (9%)	34 (16%)	2 (4%)	18 (9%)	0 (%)	8 (4%)
3	2 (4%)	11 (5%)	7 (15%)	46 (22%)	24 (52%)	85 (40%)	7 (15%)	41 (19%)	1 (2%)	16 (8%)
4	0 (%)	6 (3%)	4 (9%)	26 (12%)	13 (28%)	63 (30%)	23 (50%)	80 (38%)	5 (11%)	20 (9%)
5	0 (%)	2 (1%)	0 (%)	3 (1%)	0 (%)	15 (7%)	11 (24%)	43 (20%)	23 (50%)	97 (46%)
6	0 (%)	0 (%)	0 (%)	2 (0.95%)	0 (%)	0 (%)	2 (4%)	15 (7%)	17 (37%)	70 (33%)

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded.
Note: Teachers, N=46, TAs, N=211

Table 4.2

Average Time Teacher Assistants Spend on Tasks[1]

	Average Time Spent on Task in Classroom	
	Teachers	TAs
Tasks	n%	n%
Working with One Student	45%	46%
Working with 2+ Students	27%	23%
Monitoring Class	8%	12%
Listening to the Lesson	8%	9%
Other	6%	5%

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded.
Note: Teachers, N=48, TAs, N=240

Table 4.3

Additional Tasks Performed by Teaching Assistants

	Teachers	TAs
Tasks	n (%)	n (%)
Pedagogical Tasks		
Preparing and differentiating lesson plans and learning support materials	5 (14%)	46 (26%)
Helping all students/whole class	0 (%)	10 (5.5%)
Non-Pedagogical Tasks, Student-Focused		
Personal care and physical support	2 (6%)	34 (19%)
Supervising Students	2 (6%)	27 (15%)
Behaviour (out of class, sensory breaks, behaviour intervention)	10 (29%)	15 (8%)
Social-Emotional support	2 (6%)	13 (7%)
Driving students, off site with students (e.g., work experience)	0 (%)	8 (4.5%)

Table 4.3 (continued)

Additional Tasks Performed by Teaching Assistants

Tasks	Teachers n (%)	TAs n (%)
Non-Pedagogical Tasks		
Admin work (photocopying, laminating, bulletin boards, marking)	10 (29%)	32 (18%)
Data collection/documenting student's day and/or behaviour	4 (11%)	11 (6%)
First Aid	0 (%)	7 (4%)
Collaborating with teachers or other staff	0 (%)	5 (3%)
Break Coverage	2 (6%)	3 (2%)
Equipment support/trouble-shooting (e.g., for deaf students)	0 (%)	2 (1%)
Support for Assessments	0 (%)	2 (6%)

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded and some respondents commented more than once.
Note: Teachers, N=35, TAs, N=177

Overall, both TAs and teachers reported that TAs spend most of their time supporting students, either one-to-one or in a pair or small group; the combined estimate was 69% and 72% of their time, respectively. The majority of TAs and teachers (61% of both groups) responded that TAs spent most of their time in a typical lesson working one-to-one with a student, 46% and 45% of their time for TAs and teachers, respectively. Besides working with students, TAs and teachers agreed that TAs spent a small percentage of their time on tasks that do not involve working with students; on average, approximately a quarter of their time.

TAs and teachers both identified additional tasks that TAs complete beyond those identified in Table 4.1. Tasks categorized as non-pedagogical tasks that are student focused were

there most commonly identified tasks by teachers and TAs, 47% and 53.5%, respectively. Non-pedagogical tasks unrelated to students were the second most commonly reported tasks that TAs complete. More than twice as many TAs than teachers reported that TAs complete pedagogical tasks.

Descriptive Statistics, Research Question 1.B. TA and teacher respondents were asked to think about a typical lesson, and rank five groups of students from one to five. One represented the students they (TAs) spent the most time supporting while five represented the students they (TAs) spent the least time supporting in a typical class. The groups of students that respondents ranked were: Higher attaining students, average attaining students, lower attaining students, students with special educational needs, or mixed attainment. TA and teacher rankings are summarized in Table 4.4. In addition, TAs and teachers were asked how much of their (TAs') time in a class is spent working with each of these groups of students. This information is summarized in Table 4.5.

Table 4.4

Rank Order of Groups of Students Teacher Assistants Spend Their Time With[1]

Rank Order	High Attaining Students		Average Attaining Students		Low Attaining Students		Students w/ Special Educational Needs		Mixed Attainment Students	
	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
1	1 (2%)	13 (6%)	1 (2%)	3 (1%)	6 (13%)	25 (11%)	36 (75%)	168 (76%)	4 (8%)	12 (5%)
2	2 (4%)	5 (2%)	2 (4%)	16 (7%)	32 (67%)	137 (62%)	6 (13%)	24 (11%)	6 (13%)	39 (18%)
3	5 (10%)	11 (5%)	15 (31%)	56 (25%)	8 (17%)	44 (20%)	3 (6%)	12 (5%)	17 (35%)	98 (44%)
4	5 (10%)	23 (10%)	24 (50%)	126 (57%)	2 (4%)	10 (5%)	2 (4%)	12 (5%)	15 (31%)	50 (23%)
5	35 (72%)	169 (76%)	6 (13%)	20 (9%)	0 (%)	5 (2%)	1 (2%)	5 (2%)	6 (13%)	22 (10%)

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded.
Note: Teachers, N=46, TAs, N=211

Table 4.5

Average Time Teacher Assistants Spend With Certain Groups of Students

Students	Average Time Spent Working with Students	
	Teachers n%	TAs n%
High Attaining Students	4%	4%
Average Attaining Students	7%	8%
Low Attaining Students	26%	21%
Students w/ Special Educational Needs	57%	60%

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded.
Note: Teachers, N=48, TAs, N=240

Seventy-six percent of TA respondents and 75% of teacher respondents indicated that TAs spent the most time working with students with special educational needs; 60% (TAs) and 57% (teachers) of their average overall time. Both groups reported that TAs spent a small percentage of their time, on average, working with average and high attaining students. Combined, TAs reported that they spent 12% of their time with average and high attaining students while teachers reported that TAs spent 11% of their time working with these students.

Research Question Two: Preparedness

Preparedness was evaluated on (1) an overall level and (2) a daily basis. Only TAs were asked questions about their overall preparedness including their level of education, professional development, and years of experience. Both TAs and teachers were asked about TA preparedness on a daily basis with one question that queried TA preparedness/knowledge before going into a lesson including, who they support, what was be covered in the lesson, what subject-matter and instructional knowledge they (TAs) had to support in the lesson, if they knew expected outcomes for students, and what feedback the teacher required.

Descriptive Statistics, Research Question 2.A. Demographic questions regarding level of education, professional development, and years of experience were used to answer the research question about TAs' level of preparedness overall. TAs were asked their highest level of schooling completed and all degrees and/or certificates that they had obtained. Table 3.1 presents TAs' level of education. TAs indicated any additional training or professional development that they had that was relevant to their role as an educator. Many TAs reported having attended more than one professional development activity, and all of the reported activities counted towards the total additional on-the-job training the TAs reported (presented in Table 4.6). Finally, TAs reported how many years and months of experience they had in education, including in their current position which is summarized in Table 3.1

Approximately 97% of TA respondents had at least one certificate, diploma, or degree while only 3% of the sample did not. Nine percent of the TA respondents had two or more certificates or diplomas. Approximately 25% of the TA participants had a Bachelor's degree and about 2% had a graduate degree.

Table 4.6

Professional Development Teacher Assistants Have

Training	n (%)
Skills	
Nonviolent Crisis Prevention and/or Intervention	261 (86%)
First aid/Emergency First Responder	214 (70%)
Physical or Health Care (e.g., safe lifting, seizure management)	48 (16%)
Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)	46 (15%)
Food Safe	27 (9%)
Knowledge about Special Populations	
Autism classes or workshops	109 (36%)

Table 4.6 (continued)

Professional Development Teacher Assistants Have

Training	n (%)
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder classes or workshops	22 (7%)
Mental Health	14 (4.5%)
Program specific	
Social-Emotional (e.g., Zones of Regulation)	25 (8%)
Specific reading programs (e.g. Reading Recovery)	15 (5%)
Specific math programs (e.g. Touch Math)	22 (7%)
Skills to work with specific populations	
Behaviour	24 (7.5%)
Sign Language	9 (3%)
Braille	7 (2.5%)
Augmented and Alternative Communication	7 (2.5%)

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded and some respondents commented more than once.
Note: TAs, N=304

The most common professional development that TAs reported obtaining was Nonviolent Crisis Prevention and/or Intervention (n=261), closely followed by First aid/Emergency First Responder (n=214). One hundred and nine TA participants attended classes/workshops focusing on Autism. TA respondents reported attending training topics that ranged from particular programs (e.g., reading, math, and social-emotional development) to knowledge about certain conditions (e.g., FASD, mental health), skills to work with certain populations (e.g., ABA, sign language, braille) and practical skills (e.g., first aid, technology, food safe).

The TAs' experience ranged from one year to over 20 years. Approximately 20% to 30% of the respondents were in each years of experience group, indicating that there was no clear

trend in terms of years of experience. However, the majority of TAs indicated that they had 11-20 years of experience (n=96) while only four had less than one year of experience.

Descriptive Statistics, Research Question 2.B. Both teachers and TAs were asked about TA preparedness on a daily basis, that is, knowledge that TAs may or may not have before going into a lesson including: which student(s) they will support, the educational needs of the student(s) they will support, which topic will be covered in the lesson, what subject knowledge they need to provide support effectively, what instructional knowledge they need to provide support effectively, the expected outcomes for the student(s) they will support, and what feedback the teacher requires from them. For each of these areas, teachers and TAs were asked to rate about how prepared they (TAs) were, on average, (fully prepared, fairly well prepared, partially prepared, not well prepared, and unprepared). See Table 4.6 for the summary of this information.

Table 4.7

How Prepared Teacher Assistants are on a Daily Basis[1]

	Fully Prepared		Fairly Well Prepared		Partially Prepared		Not Well Prepared		Unprepared	
	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs
Knowing…	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
student(s) to support	17 (39%)	122 (55%)	18 (41%)	74 (34%)	8 (18%)	23 (10%)	1 (2%)	1 (0.4%)	0 (%)	3 (1%)
educational needs of their student(s)	15 (34%)	98 (44%)	23 (52%)	73 (33%)	5 (11%)	42 (19%)	1 (2%)	4 (2%)	0 (%)	2 (0.8%)
the topic of the lesson	2 (5%)	41 (18%)	15 (34%)	77 (35%)	16 (36%)	62 (28%)	9 (20%)	36 (16%)	2 (5%)	4 (2%)
instructional knowledge	5 (11%)	50 (22%)	11 (25%)	93 (42%)	19 (43%)	51 (23%)	7 (16%)	21 (9%)	2 (5%)	6 (3%)
expected outcomes	10 (23%)	57 (26%)	17 (39%)	80 (36%)	12 (27%)	53 (24%)	4 (9%)	24 (11%)	1 (2%)	8 (3.5%)
feedback required	6 (14%)	60 (27%)	19 (43%)	66 (30%)	13 (30%)	59 (26%)	5 (11%)	26 (12%)	1 (2%)	9 (4%)

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded.
Note: Teachers, N=44, TAs, N=223

The majority of TAs and teachers agreed (75%) that TAs are fairly to fully prepared in knowing which students they will support and what their students' educational needs are. The majority of TA and teacher respondents indicated that TAs are generally fairly to partially prepared when it comes to what instructional knowledge they need for the lesson. Overall, both groups of respondents reported that they perceived TAs as being fairly prepared in terms of knowing the expected learning outcomes and what feedback the teacher needs from the lesson. However, expected learning outcomes and what feedback the teacher requires were the top two highest rated areas that TAs and teachers rated TAs as being unprepared for. In addition, both groups agreed that TAs tend to be not well prepared in knowing the topic for the lesson.

Research Question Three: Impact

The impact of TA work in the classroom was explored by looking at perceptions of impact on learning and development. Development included confidence, motivation, distraction, and independence. TAs and teachers were both asked to estimate how much impact they perceived TAs were making on students' learning and development in inclusive classrooms.

Descriptive Statistics, Research Question 3.A. Both TAs and teachers were asked, the impact, on average, that they perceive that TAs make on student learning using a 6-point Likert rating ranging from significant positive impact to negative impact. Table 4.8 summarizes the TA and teacher responses.

Table 4.8

Perception of Teacher Assistant Impact on Learning[1]

Impact on Learning	Teachers n (%)	TAs n (%)
Significant positive impact	130 (54%)	22 (47%)
Mostly positive impact	100 (42%)	19 (40%)
Small positive impact	10 (4%)	4 (9%)
Negligible impact	0 (%)	2 (5%)
Negative impact	0 (%)	0 (%)

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded.
Note: Teachers, N=47, TAs, N=240

Approximately 50% of both TA and teacher respondents agreed that TAs make a significant positive impact on student learning while about 40% of the respondents overall indicated that TAs make a mostly positive impact on student learning. A minority of respondents reported that TAs make a small or negligible impact of student learning while none of the respondents indicated that they (TAs) negative impact on student learning.

Descriptive Statistics, Research Question 3.B. Both TAs and teachers were asked, the impact that they perceived that TAs make on student development, on average. Development in this survey encompassed students' level of confidence, motivation, distraction and independence. A Likert scale was again used to determine the perception of level of impact TAs have (significant positive, mostly positive, small positive, negligible, and negative). The TA and teacher responses are summarized in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

Perception of Teacher Assistant Impact on Development

	Confidence		Motivation		Distraction		Independence	
	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs	Teachers	TAs
Impact on Development	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Significant positive impact	17 (36%)	100 (42%)	15 (32%)	83 (35%)	17 (36%)	54 (23%)	8 (17%)	51 (21%)
Mostly positive impact	25 (53%)	121 (50%)	23 (49%)	121 (50%)	21 (45%)	124 (52%)	19 (40%)	129 (54%)
Small positive impact	3 (6%)	16 (7%)	7 (15%)	20 (8%)	7 (15%)	54 (23%)	12 (26%)	49 (20%)
Negligible impact	2 (4%)	0 (%)	2 (4%)	1 (0.4%)	1 (2%)	1 (0.4%)	5 (11%)	1 (0.4%)
Negative impact	0 (%)	0 (%)	0 (%)	0 (%)	1 (2%)	0 (%)	3 (6%)	0 (%)

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded.
Note: Teachers, N=47, TAs, N=240

Across the four categories of development the majority of the TA (40%) and teacher respondents (54%) indicated that TAs make a mostly positive impact. However, TAs reported their impact was significant and positive in the area of independence while 21% of teachers indicated that TAs their positive impact in this area was small and 17% reported that their impact on independence was negligible or negative.

Additional Questions

To explore other factors that influence the deployment, preparedness, and impact of TAs, there were additional survey questions regarding TA communication with teachers, TA confidence, how TAs obtain subject matter knowledge, school policy regarding TA work, and courses teachers had regarding TAs during their training. An open-ended question eliciting suggestions they (teachers and TAs) would make to improve the way TAs are used in classrooms was also included. These results of these questions are summarized below.

TA and Teacher Communication. Both TAs and teachers were asked to choose the statement that best describes their communication with each other from the following list: My communication with teachers/TAs before and/or after lessons is brief (e.g. a couple of minutes), I/TAs come into school early and/or stay behind after school in order to meet with teachers, the teacher(s) and I/TAs have scheduled time to meet each week, There is no opportunity or time to communicate with teachers/TAs, and other (see Table 4.10). TAs were also asked to estimate, within a typical week, how much time they (TAs) spent communicating with teachers.

Table 4.10

Communication Between Teacher Assistants and Teachers[1]

Communication	Teachers n (%)	TAs n (%)
Communication before and/or after lessons is brief	98 (44%)	22 (50%)
TAs come in early and/or stay after school to meet with teachers	89 (40%)	8 (18%)
Have scheduled time to meet	10 (4%)	5 (11%)
No opportunity or time to communicate	19 (8%)	4 (9%)
Other	10 (4%)	5 (11%)

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded.
Note: Teachers, N=44, TAs, N=225

Communication between TAs and teachers tends to be brief and only takes place directly before or after lessons, as per the TA and teacher respondents' reports. The TAs that communicate regularly with teachers often go into work early and/or stay after school to meet with teachers (40%) as less than 10% reported that they have a scheduled time to meet to communicate. Twenty-three respondents reported having no time to communicate at all.

Confidence. All respondents were asked how confident they/TAs are about carrying out their role effectively in the classroom. Their perspectives were gathered using a Likert scale with levels of confidence ranging from fully to not confident.

Overall, TA respondents indicated that they were fairly (30%) to fully (67%) confident in their abilities to carry out their role effectively in the classroom. In contrast, teachers tended to report that they perceived that TAs were fairly (45%) or partially (21%) confident. Six percent of the teachers perceived TAs as being not very confident.

Subject Matter Knowledge. TAs respondents were asked to indicate how often, on average, they acquire subject knowledge by common methods including their own research and

reading, listening to the teacher teach, lesson plans and other documents, talking to other TAs, talking to teachers, and training and in-house professional development. For each of these methods, TA respondents were asked to rate how often they use each method to gain subject matter knowledge on a Likert scale (always or almost always, often, occasionally, very rarely, and never). Table 4.11 summarizes the responses to this question.

Table 4.11

How Teacher Assistants Acquire Subject Matter Knowledge

	Always or almost always	Often	Occasionally	Very Rarely	Never
Methods Used	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Own research and reading.	73 (32%)	83 (37%)	51 (23%)	13 (6%)	4 (2%)
Listening to the teacher teach.	80 (35%)	97 (43%)	36 (16%)	9 (4%)	3 (1%)
Lesson plans and other documents.	28 (12%)	78 (25%)	61 (27%)	42 (19%)	15 (7%)
Talking to other TAs.	52 (23%)	86 (38%)	52 (23%)	23 (10%)	3 (1%)
Talking to teachers.	65 (29%)	96 (42%)	50 (22%)	13 (6%)	0 (0%)
Professional development.	39 (17%)	50 (22%)	78 (35%)	40 (17%)	18 (8%)

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded.
Note: TAs, N=226

The most common method of obtaining subject matter knowledge, as endorsed by TA respondents, was listening to the teacher teach, with 78% of the sample reporting that they use this method always/almost always or often. TA respondents also reported that they gain subject matter knowledge by talking to teachers (71%) and their own research and reading (69%). The least common methods of obtaining subject matter knowledge reported were professional development and lesson plans and other documents.

TA Policy or Guidance. TAs and teachers were asked if their school has a written and up-to-date policy or guidance on the roles and duties of TAs. Respondents were given the following options to choose from: yes, no, and not sure. Almost half of the TAs and teachers (53% and 45%) indicated that their school does have a written and up-to-date policy or guidance on the roles and duties of TAs while 15% of participants reported that their school does not.

Courses in Teacher Training Regarding TAs. Teacher respondents were asked how many courses and how many hours during their teacher-training program addressed the role of the TA or how to work with them. Most of the teacher respondents (74%) indicated their teacher-training program had no courses that focused on the role of the TA or how to work with them.

Suggested Improvements. Both TA and teacher respondents were asked what suggestions they had to improve the way TAs are used in classrooms. Responses were coded according to common themes. Table 4.12 highlights the most common themes from the TA and teacher responses.

Table 4.12

Improvements Suggested by Teacher Assistants and Teachers

Suggested Improvements	Teachers n (%)	TAs n (%)
More collaboration between EA and teachers and paid time to do it	5 (12%)	30 (15%)
Need more EAs (i.e., all students get too little support, have fewer children to support)	5 (12%)	29 (14.5%)
Preparation time	0 (%)	20 (10%)
Better communication from/with administrators and teachers	7 (17%)	19 (9.5%)

Table 4.12 (continued)

Improvements Suggested by Teacher Assistants and Teachers

Suggested Improvements	Teachers n (%)	TAs n (%)
More respect, appreciation, recognition from students, teachers, and administrators	3 (7%)	18 (9%)
Teacher preparation in terms differentiated/adapted work provided for EA to use with students	1 (2%)	17 (8.5%)
More training that is relevant to EAs specifically and more available	8 (19%)	13 (6.5%)
Team approach to supporting students	1 (2%)	12 (6%)
Teacher training in how to work with EAs, specific disorders, and how to adapt/differentiate student work	3 (7%)	10 (5%)
Be included in decisions or discussions about students and asked for feedback/input about students more often.	0 (%)	9 (4.5%)
Including EAs in meetings relevant to their role (e.g., IEP, SBT, etc)	0 (%)	9 (4.5%)
Better understanding of EA role (students, teachers, and administrators	4 (10%)	8 (4%)
Guidance on what teachers want	0 (%)	8 (4%)
Utilizing EAs and their strengths in appropriate settings and placements	2 (5%)	6 (3%)
Consistent daily schedule	4 (10%)	6 (3%)
More work hours to do what they (TAs) need to	1 (2%)	6 (3%)
Whole class focus vs. "Suzy's" EA	4 (10%)	5 (2.5%)
Different roles for different EAs (i.e., academic vs. behaviour), more specificity in role	2 (5%)	5 (2.5%)

Table 4.12 (continued)

Improvements Suggested by Teacher Assistants and Teachers

Suggested Improvements	Teachers n (%)	TAs n (%)
Access to resources and supplies	1 (2%)	4 (2%)
More responsibility to help support learning	0 (%)	4 (2%)
Better wages/pay	3 (7%)	3 (1.5%)
Fill-up any dead time with other responsibilities	0 (%)	3 (1.5%)
Each class should have a full time EA	5 (12%)	3 (1.5%)
Use less as an enforcer or "bad guy" or used only to deal with behaviours	0 (%)	3 (1.5%)
Teachers being prepared to make the best use of TA time in the classroom	0 (%)	2 (1%)
Design programs according to individual needs/abilities (administration)	0 (%)	2 (1%)
Strong leadership and guidance from resource teachers	0 (%)	2 (1%)
Not doing teacher errands	2 (5%)	2 (1%)
An area designated for TAs to work with students	0 (%)	2 (1%)
Having TA substitutes and written instruction/information for them	0 (%)	2 (1%)

[1]Totals in each column do not add up to 100% because numbers were rounded and some respondents commented more than once.
Note: Teachers, N=42, TAs, N=200

Themes that arose from TA and teacher responses were fairly consistent. Overall, several respondents, both teachers and TAs, indicated that better communication between school staff and more collaboration is needed in inclusive classrooms. Comments aligning with these notions were that teachers and TAs should work as a team to support the whole class together and that every classroom should have a TA to enable these practices to become commonplace. Concerns

were raised about the amount of respect, appreciation, and recognition that TAs receive from students, teachers, and administrators. Further to this, TAs suggested that they could do their jobs more effectively if they were more included (e.g., in meetings or decision-making). Both TAs and teachers suggested that training on how to work together effectively, specific disorders, and how to adapt/differentiate student work were needed.

Summary

A number of key messages emerged in this study. TAs tend to work one-to-one with students with special educational needs. The majority of TAs had at least one certificate, diploma, or degree and experience as a TA ranged from less than a year to over 20 years of experience with 11-20 years being the most common amount of experience of the participants in this study. Most of the TA respondents had engaged in professional development with Nonviolent Crisis Prevention and/or Intervention and First aid/Emergency First Responder training the most common. Most of the participants reported that TAs are fairly to fully prepared in knowing which students they will support and what their students' educational needs. TA respondents indicated that they were more prepared of what instructional knowledge they needed for the lesson than the majority of teacher respondents perceived. Knowing the topic of the lesson, expected learning outcomes, and what feedback the teacher needs, were the areas that participants reported TAs preparation. TA and teacher perspectives about the impact that TAs make on student learning and development was elicited. The vast majority of respondents agreed that TAs make a significant, mostly positive impact on student learning. However, some teachers indicated that the positive impact that TAs make on student independence is small or even negligible, or negative. Additional results revealed that communication between TAs and teachers is usually brief or nonexistent, TAs report confidence in their role, with listening to the

teacher teach their most common way of obtaining subject matter for their own teaching. Further, respondents revealed that about half of their schools have a written and up-to-date policy or guidance on the roles and duties of TAs, that teachers tend to have no or very minimal training on the TA's role or how to work with TAs, and that TA and teacher respondents think that there should be more collaboration, communication, TAs generally, preparation time, and training specifically for TAs.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore TA and teacher perceptions and experiences of TAs in BC inclusive school settings specifically related to deployment, preparedness (overall and on a daily basis), and perceptions of impact TAs have on the learning and development of their students. Additional questions related to these factors were also asked. TA and teacher participants were surveyed via an online survey that was advertised on Facebook and through a school district in the BC lower mainland. This chapter includes a discussion of the results, implications for school professionals, consideration of the study's strengths and limitations, and future directions for research.

Research Question One: Deployment

Consistent with previous research, in the current study it was found that the role of the TA in BC classrooms is multifaceted and varies widely. Researchers internationally have observed that TAs engage in a wide range of tasks including pedagogical planning, teaching and decision-making, monitoring and supporting behavioural issues, providing emotional support, promoting independence, completing clerical work, providing personal care to students, and supervising students (Giangreco, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2014). This was also found in the current study. However, TAs in the present study also emphasized that their role is ever changing and evolving and that flexibility and adaptability are key characteristics of TAs in BC schools. One TA commented, "the days vary. My position requires me to be flexible, and cover situations as they arrive. All estimations of percentages (of time spent on particular tasks) varies daily." Other respondents highlighted the reality of their roles currently; that TAs are generally expected to engage in many or all of these tasks, and the ability to juggle responsibilities is a necessary

part of the role as one respondent noted, “I multitask! While I am listening to the teacher teach, I am also monitoring the behaviour of several students, calling them to focus, documenting disruptive behaviours.”

TAs in this study repeatedly underscored the variability of their jobs on a daily basis, and that their role is often to cover everything and anything that is required of them. For example, they may be assigned to work with a particular class or student, but is then called away to deal with a behaviour difficulty, or cover a student when another TA needs a break or is away. Several respondents referred to this as being used to “put out fires”, and expressed that being used in this way undermined their abilities and skills, but also disregarded the purpose of their role: to help students. A possible reason for this may be that TAs are being spread too thin, which results in no student getting the support they need. Both TAs and teachers in the study raised this concern. Inconsistent schedules make planning for supporting students almost impossible. Consistent with previous research, the BC TAs in this study highlighted the challenges of their utilization in this way – they seem to be often making moment-by-moment decisions as situations arise, and adapting as best they can. This way of working is stressful, and many TA respondents indicated that it is why retention of employees in this role is so difficult and burnout among this population is common.

These professionals acknowledged that the common practice of using TAs for everything and anything means that they are not given the opportunity to use the knowledge and skills that they do have. Also, being responsible for such a wide range of tasks has other challenges. For example, it is difficult for TAs to be trained in every single area that they are used in, as many of these areas are so different. As such, the concept of developing particular specializations for TAs was noted many times in the comments of the respondents. Specialized TAs would be a step

towards solving many of the current issues raised by TAs, such as being used in areas they are not trained in, such as instruction, behaviour management, or personal care. Supporting students in areas in which they are not trained has potentially negative outcomes. Student progress many be slow or nonexistent if they are working solely with a TA who is not trained to support them in that area.

Similar to previous research in the United Kingdom (UK), TAs in BC complete a wide array of non-pedagogical tasks (Webster, Russell, & Blatchford, 2015). Contrary to suggestions of previous researchers, many TAs and teachers in the present study indicated that they felt that many of these non-pedagogical tasks should not be part of the TA's role. Administrative tasks in particular, like marking, photocopying, running teacher errands, or being used for supervision, were identified as tasks that diminish the purpose of their role in the classroom. One respondent explained, "Sometimes it feels like we are placed in classrooms to act as babysitters, very seldom having the opportunity to use the skills and talents we possess".

As identified in research in the UK by Webster, Russell, and Blatchford (2015), it appears that TAs in BC are also often assuming responsibility for the education of students with special educational needs, rather than teachers. In the current study, TAs and teachers alike overwhelmingly reported that TAs spend the majority of their time working one-to-one with students with special educational needs. Previous research has found that when TAs are consistently working one-to-one with students with special educational needs, these students are often getting less direct educational input from teachers (Giangreco, 2005). This, coupled with the "training trap", may mean that students with special educational needs in BC might be getting *alternative* support from TAs, as suggested by Giangreco (2003), rather than *additional* support.

Twenty-six percent of the TA respondents in the present study indicated that they prepare and differentiate lesson plans and learning support materials for the students with special educational needs that they work with. These results align with the findings from the MAST and SENSE studies, which also highlighted that TAs often differentiate work for students (Webster and Blatchford, 2017). Eight percent of TAs in the current study indicated that teachers are often not prepared in terms of differentiating lessons and adapting materials and work for special educational needs students and leave it to TAs to do this task. One TA remarked, "Often it is the E.A. (TA) who is creating the academic program for the student. Teachers need to be more aware of their responsibilities for all of their students". Given that some TAs in BC are left to their own devices to differentiate, adapt, and modify materials and assignments for students, 10% of TAs asserted that more preparation time should be given for this, as differentiation, adapting, and modifying is often done on the fly.

In their research, Webster, Blatchford, and Russell (2013), also observed the challenge that TAs face in having to make these types of decisions in the moment. They argue that since students with special educational needs are receiving the majority of their instruction and support from the individuals who are the least qualified to provide this support, these students are being given a disservice and their access to education is not equitable. Further to this, in BC, the role and responsibilities of teachers and TAs are defined by the Ministry of Education Special Education Services Manual of Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines that states:

> The teacher responsible for a student with special needs is responsible for designing, supervising, and assessing the educational program for that student…Teachers' assistants play a key role in many programs for students with special needs, performing functions, which range from personal care to assisting the teacher with instructional programs. Under

> the direction of a teacher they may play a key role in implementing the program (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016; p. 9-10).

As per this manual, which guides how students in BC should be supported in BC classrooms, TAs that take on the responsibility of differentiating, adapting, and modifying materials and work for students with special educational needs are working beyond their role and responsibilities and are completing tasks that the student's teacher should be doing.

Giangreco (2013) has suggested that negative consequences, such as over reliance of TAs to do work that they are not qualified to do, can result from the lack of clarity in the role of the TA and in turn, impacts the outcomes of the students that TAs support. In the current study, TAs and teachers were asked if their school has a written and up-to-date policy or guidance on the roles and duties of TAs and approximately 50% reported that they did. If this finding were generalized to all schools in BC, this would suggest that half of the schools in BC do not have such a policy or guidance or TAs and teachers do not access it. This may partially explain the consistent lack of clarity of the role of TAs in BC classrooms.

Research Question Two: Preparedness

In previous research, training has widely been the focus of the quality of TA support (Abbott, McConkey, & Dobbins, 2011; Giangreco, 2013; Martin & Alborz, 2014; Webster, Russell, & Blatchford, 2015; Webster and Blatchford, 2017). TA preparedness in the literature focuses on the overall training and skills and daily preparedness to work in a particular classroom for a particular lesson.

Overall Training and Skills. Overall, TAs in BC were generally trained, with 97% of the TA respondents reporting that they had at least an education assistant certificate or diploma or equivalent (e.g., early childhood development), with almost 20% of the participants indicating

that they had two or more credentials. However, it is important to note that it is unclear if the training that TAs have is suited to the work that they do in classroom. Given that they generally do not have teacher training, they likely do not have instructional and subject matter knowledge to take responsibility for differentiating, adapting, and modifying materials and assignments for students and do not provide the quality of instruction given by a trained teacher (Giangreco, 2003).

When it comes to professional development, the majority of on-the-job training that TA respondents reported having was related to the non-pedagogical role of the TA. Very few TAs (8%) reported receiving additional professional development in areas of teaching, learning, interventions in reading, writing, or math, or in content area classes such as science or social studies. However, the vast majority of TAs (86% and 70%, respectively) had additional training in Nonviolent Crisis Prevention and/or Intervention and First aid/Emergency First Responder. This suggests that there may be a gap professional development opportunities for TAs, specifically in supporting the development of their pedagogical role and to more effectively engage in teaching when required.

Day-to-Day Preparedness. On a daily basis, concerns noted in previous research were similar to ongoing problems identified in the current study. TAs and teachers alike agreed that communication between the teacher and TA is brief or nonexistent. As a result, less than half of the TA respondents indicated that they felt fully prepared on a daily basis. Elements of the lesson that require advance planning and communication (i.e., knowing the topic, expected outcomes, and what feedback the teacher requires) were the areas that TAs and teachers reported TAs are least prepared for. In order to maximize the impact of their support for students in the classroom, it is vital that TAs have access to and understanding of the topic of the class and the expected

learning outcomes, so that they can provide targeted support and have a clear understanding of where they may be needed in the lesson. In addition, knowing what feedback the teacher requires, especially for the most vulnerable learners, is important to ensure that the teacher has a better understanding of the progress students are making, especially those the TA works with frequently, so that they can prepare an appropriate follow-up lesson and ensure that more students are meeting expected outcomes. Instead, just as Webster, Blatchford, and Russell (2013) found, TAs in BC are appear to be going into classrooms "blind" on a daily basis, given their lack of or limited communication with the teacher before class.

Another challenge faced by TAs, which may stem from this lack of communication, is that the most common way that TAs reported gaining subject matter knowledge is by listening to the teacher teach. This finding was consistent with the research conducted by Webster, Blatchford, and Russell (2013). In addition, in the current study it was found that many *teachers* are not prepared in advance and often do not plan for students with special educational needs (e.g., adapting materials and work). As highlighted by one TA respondent, "teachers need to learn how to differentiate for our neediest learners instead of passing them off to an SEA (TA) to make up all their curriculum". Consequently, TAs are supporting students on a moment-to-moment basis directly after receiving the information they need to support students, for the first time and with minimal or no input or guidance from the teacher. Limited communication and advance preparation creates an inequitable learning environment for the most vulnerable learners as they are not being supported to the extent that they could be and are likely not progressing as they potentially could as a result.

Previous research has suggested that TAs feeling unprepared can lead to lowered self-efficacy and confidence (Abbott, McConkey, & Dobbins, 2011; Symes & Humphrey, 2012).

However, the majority of TAs and teachers in the current study reported perceiving TAs as fairly to fully confident in their role. This may be explained by the fact that the majority of TA respondents indicated that they were trained and most had 11 or more years of experience in their role.

Research Question Three: Impact

Impact can be measured in subjective and objective ways. Studies in the UK have measured impact from the perspective of teachers and students (subjective) and by looking at student academic progress (objective). In the current study impact was only measured in a subjective way: through the gathering of TA and teacher perspectives of impact. Overall, TAs and teachers reported that TAs make a positive impact on student learning, motivation, confidence, and distraction. This is consistent with the perspectives from the UK studies (Blatchford, et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2010). However, in the current study it was also found that many of the teacher respondents (almost half) perceived the TA's impact on student independence was very limited or even negative. Previous research, suggests that students who have consistent TA support over time may become used to "outsourcing" their learning to the TA (Bosanquet, Radford, & Webster, 2016). That is, relying on the TA to guide them to the answer rather than engaging in learning and completing the task for themselves (Bosanquet, Radford, & Webster, 2016). These previous findings may explain why teachers may see TAs as contributing to student dependence, despite the TA's best intentions.

Overall, the results of the current study suggest that TAs in BC classrooms are indeed making a positive impact on student learning and development, despite some challenges. Similar results were found in the UK studies and when objective measures of impact were obtained (e.g., observations and tracked progress over time), TA support was seen differently. That is, even

though TA support was appreciated and necessary, some ways in which TAs were utilized negatively impacted student academic progress and social inclusion. Although the current study's results indicate that BC TAs and teachers believe, for the most part, that TAs make a positive impact in BC classrooms, objective measurements of impact, if obtained, could show something different as it did in the UK. For example, an experimental research design could be used to compare the progress of groups of students with special educational needs with and without TA support, as well as typical achieving peers over an extended period. In addition, observations of interactions of typical students and students with special educational needs with their peers and teachers would allow researchers to observe and compare their levels of social inclusion.

Other Considerations

Job Title. School staff that are used to support the inclusion and progress of students with special educational needs have been found to go by many titles such as teacher assistants (TAs), education assistants (EAs), learning support assistants (LSAs), special education assistants (SEA) or paraprofessionals. Given that the literature on this group of professionals is referred to primarily as teacher assistants (TAs), for the current study, this title was selected to describe this group of individuals. TAs in the present study were asked to comment on their exact job title, to determine what title is most commonly used in BC. Just as their job is diverse and can change from school to school and district-to-district, results indicate that their title does as well. The majority of TA respondents indicated that their title included "education assistant" and were differentiated with the terms "certified" or "special". There seems to have been a shift in BC towards these professionals being in classrooms primarily to serve the students and not the teachers. As a teacher respondent explained, "It needs to be clearer that it is not a teacher's

assistant, but rather the assistant of the students and their needs". As such, the term "Teacher Assistant" is one that seems to offend some professionals in this role as suggested by this remark made by a TA respondent: "I didn't go to university to be called a TA it is an EA. TA stands for Tits and Ass".

This perspective, however, appears to be contrary to the role that TAs should have in the classroom, according to the Ministry of Education and the ideology of inclusive education. The title, "Education Assistant" implies that these professionals contribute to teaching – assisting students learning. The Ministry of Education is clear that planning and implementing the educational program for students is the sole responsibility of the teacher. TAs have a role in assisting the *teacher* with this responsibility, but it should be under the teacher's supervision. In addition, inclusive education means that all students have equal opportunity for social and academic success. When TAs are assigned to particular students with special educational needs and are consistently physically present with that student, they may be contributing to that student's stigmatization and unintentionally adding to that student's social exclusion. Best practice for inclusive classrooms suggests that TAs should be assign to a teacher or classroom and work as part of a team to support *all* students and the classroom teacher. This considered, "Teacher Assistant" may be a more appropriate title for professionals working in supporting roles in inclusive classrooms.

Teacher Training Regarding TAs. There is currently a paucity of research investigating the level of training pre-service teachers receive on the role of and how to work with teacher assistants. In a small, preliminary study, pre-service teachers reported that they had little or no coursework addressing TAs or how to work with them (Dmyterko, 2018). The current study's findings were similar; teachers reported that they had little to no training, including professional

development, on how to work with TAs or their role in the classroom. Both TAs and teachers suggested that teachers should receive more training in the role of and working with TAs. As discussed in previous research, TAs can contribute to the limited progress of students. The current study and prior research indicate that TAs sometimes complete work beyond their role and the work intended for teachers. This may be explained by the findings that some teachers lack an understanding of the scope of the TA role and also, its limitations. This suggests that teachers may require more knowledge and skills in order to fully utilize TAs to their maximum potential and ensure that their role and the role of the TA is fully understood.

Team Approach and Collaboration. TAs and teachers in the current study recognized a need to move towards a team approach when working in inclusive classrooms. Currently, in many classrooms in BC, it seems that TAs and teachers are working side-by-side or parallel rather than together. Limited opportunities to collaborate and communicate mean that there is minimal planning and coordination of the team. In addition, TAs and teachers in the present study acknowledged that TAs sometimes work unsupervised and in isolation with students with special educational needs. The reports that some teachers do not plan for the students with special educational needs imply that they expect the TAs to do this. Many of these challenges and those reported in the literature could be solved with a team approach. For example, through collaboration, a TA and teacher could work together to plan when and how students would be supported. This would enable the teacher, the person most qualified in the room, to support students with special educational needs as required while the TA supervised and worked with other students in the classroom who do not necessarily need the same level of support.

In addition, if a team or collaborative approach were used, many of the changes suggested by TAs in the present study would be easier to achieve. For example, some TAs

expressed that they would like to be included in meetings relevant to their role (e.g., Individual Education Plan meetings, School-Based Team), have guidance from teachers about what they would like them to do, and be included in decisions or discussions about students they work with and asked for feedback/input about students more often. The implementation of these changes would mean that TAs would be more involved, engaged, and knowledgeable about particular students they support, but also that they are included as a valuable contributor to the team.

Several TAs and teachers reported that the TA working with the whole class rather working with one particular student would build independence for the students with special needs, and provide support to other students who might not normally receive extra help. It would also allow TAs to build relationships with more students in the class and become a more valued adult in the classroom. This relates to a need for respect, appreciation, and recognition raised frequently by TAs. Across the present study, participants reported that in many classrooms, TAs feel undervalued, unappreciated, and unrecognized by teachers, administrators, and students. When a team approach is used in classrooms, the teacher is automatically giving the TA respect and treating them as an equal professional. Students see this and consequently, also show respect to the TA. Although the job that TAs do is different than teachers, it is a job that can both compliment and supplement the teacher's role.

Implications for School Professionals

All members of the school team have a role to play in bolstering the effectiveness of inclusive education and in particular, shifting perceptions and practice around the role of teacher assistants. Previous research and the results of the current study suggest a gross inequity for students with special educational needs, that is, these students are the most vulnerable and require additional, specialized support, but are receiving much of their instruction from the least

qualified person in the classroom. Inclusive education requires school professionals to have a common goal: equitable learning and participation in all aspects of school life for all students. Every school staff member including (but not limited to) administrators, classroom teachers, resource teachers, teacher assistants, and school psychologists should consider themselves members of the same team, with each member of the team bringing different knowledge and skills to the table. Shifting the role of teacher assistants requires strong leadership at the district and school levels to ensure that job titles, job descriptions, and role and responsibilities are clear and consistent with emphasis on what responsibilities are teachers', TAs', and shared. Further, the scheduling of TAs would also need to change, with TAs being assigned to particular classrooms or teachers rather than certain students. Stakeholders (i.e., teachers and TAs) would need to fully understand and accept the reasoning behind these changes and be prepared to make the changes in their practices. Resource teachers have an important role too: to support classroom teachers with adaptations and differentiation and provide strategies and resources to make their classrooms more inclusive.

School psychologists have a unique role in schools to advocate for students, share knowledge, and support professional development for teachers and school staff. In addition, they have the ability to impact systems-level change. School psychologists have the opportunity to be instrumental in shifting current practices in inclusive classrooms. For example, through the use of professional development opportunities for TAs and teachers and school-based teams, school psychologists could support TAs and teachers to work together more collaboratively and use a team approach. Furthermore, their in-depth knowledge of special educational needs and strategies to support learning, behaviour, and social-emotional needs could be a focus of professional development or ongoing consultation with school staff. School psychologists could

work with administrators and district level staff to develop understandings of the current literature on TA work, which could be a catalyst to influence changes at a systems-level.

Limitations of the Present Study

There are a number of limitations that must be considered in the current study. Sampling a diverse group of professionals was a challenge. First and foremost, this study used convenience sampling, which allowed the researcher to obtain participants for the study with ease but obtained a sample that is likely not representative of the general population. As such, the sample had over- and under-represented groups including (1) more participants from large urban centres with less representation from rural or small urban centres and (2) more elementary staff rather than middle or high school staff. There may be notable differences in urban schools versus rural and/or remote schools as well as elementary to middle to high schools. As such, follow-up studies could focus on collecting more perspectives from rural or remote regions and from middle and high school TAs and teachers. In addition, there is a high probability of sampling error, that is, that the results found in this sample may not be representative of the general population and limits generalizability of the findings.

The survey was anonymous and completed online. As such, there is no way to confirm that the respondents are who they say they are (e.g., teachers or TAs) or to determine if any respondents completed the survey more than once. The respondents were self-selected and therefore, could have participated because they were more passionate about the issues versus someone who perceives that there are no issues in this area. Previous studies in the UK used observations and monitored student progress over time to have more direct measures from a more objective third party, which was not available in the present study where the self-report was more subjective and could not be verified.

Strengths of the Present Study

The current study had a number of strengths. The study fulfilled its purpose and answered the research questions more thoroughly than expected. This research added to the existing literature in the area but also built on the literature in a Canadian context plus added few novel findings. Multiple sources of data were used (i.e., TAs and teachers) that allowed for a more in-depth interpretation of the results. Having both professionals' perspectives allowed for comparisons to be made on most questions, and clarified areas where TA and teacher perspectives differ. For example, TAs and teachers both frequently indicated that TAs spend most of their time working one-to-one with special educational needs students, but teachers did not have a clear understanding of the level of training TAs have. In addition, the open-ended questions allowed participants to share their own thoughts, be better understood, and have their voices heard than the closed choice questions. Further, the nature of the online survey allowed for participants from all parts of BC. The study generated interest and engagement from the community. For example, TAs, teachers, and representatives from post-secondary institutions that educate TAs contacted the researcher to provide additional feedback or comments and offers of support for the research. Problems not identified by the research/survey questions, such as the mental health of TAs and the physical abuse that some TAs encounter in their role, were relayed to the researcher via email after respondents completed the survey.

Directions for Future Research

Given the paucity of research on this topic in Canada, there are many avenues for future research. As all of the provinces are independently responsible for their own education system, research in one province is not adequate. Studies in all parts of Canada are necessary to fully understanding challenges and solutions inclusive classrooms face. Therefore, continued

investigation at a national level would be beneficial as well as studies in other provinces. To limit sampling error and ensure generalizability of the results, a strategic sampling strategy would need to be employed (e.g., random or stratified sampling). Involvement from the teacher and TA unions and post-secondary institutions that train teachers and TAs would allow for research to be practically and more immediately applied. In addition, their involvement could be a catalyst for change at system-levels.

Future research could also explore how issues raised in the previous literature and the current study could be addressed in practice. For example, how can communication, collaboration, and clearer roles be addressed in schools? Studies focusing on the role of the school psychologist in professional development and consultation around TA-teacher collaboration could be conducted.

Finally, to show the full impact of the deployment and preparedness of TAs, objective measurements of impact such as observations and student progress made over time (e.g., grades or learning outcomes) could be used to compliment survey self-report measures. To ensure that cause and effect statements can be made from such as study, an experiential design would need to be used. Students could be matched for type and severity of special educational needs in two groups, (1) with TA support and (2) without TA support, as well as a (3) typical peers group, would achieve this.

Conclusions

The present study investigated TA deployment, preparedness, and impact in BC classrooms through an online survey completed by TAs and teachers. Findings suggest that TAs generally spend most of their time working one-to-one with students with special educational needs, but that their role is also ever changing and diverse. Although TAs are trained and have

much experience, they lack professional development opportunities in areas that they are regularly engaging in such as instruction and decision-making about student work. Many challenges and ongoing problems were raised throughout the study including lack of teacher training to work with TAs, TAs taking on too much responsibility for learning of students with special educational needs, the lack of team work, and communication, respect, appreciation, and recognition for TAs. This research contributes to the literature in Canada on this topic and has provided insights into changes that can be made to how TAs are deployed and prepared in order to maximize their impact on student outcomes.

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Appendix A

Teacher Assistants in Canadian Inclusive Classrooms: An Investigation into their Deployment, Preparedness, and Impact

Email Template to Request TA and Teacher Participation

Dear XXX Teacher or Special Educational Assistant (SEA),

We are writing to invite you to be part of an exciting research study about SEAs called **Teacher Assistants in Canadian Inclusive Classrooms: An Investigation into their Deployment, Preparedness, and Impact**. Your participation is very important to help us better understand experiences that SEAs in BC have had. We would like to tell you about our project in hopes you might like to take part.

The study is a part of the thesis requirements for the Master of Arts in School Psychology for the Co-Investigator, Ms. Juliane Dmyterko. Juliane is currently completing her internship in XXX as a School Psychologist Intern. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the work SEAs are doing, their preparedness to complete this work, and how they collaborate with teachers to make an impact in inclusive classrooms.

In addition to allowing teachers and SEAs in BC to have their voices heard, which may help to initiate change in our education system, if interested, you will be entered in a draw for a $50 gift card at the end of the study and we will share our study's results with you! The survey will be open until August 30, 2018. After that date, the online survey will no longer be open for completion.

To participate, please click on the link below to complete our 15-20 minute long anonymous survey:

Click here to complete the survey!

For further information on this study, please contact Juliane at the email provided.

Sincerely,

Laurie Ford, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
Department of Educational &
Counselling Psychology & Special Education
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: XXXX@ubc.ca

Juliane Dmyterko, B.A.
Student Co-Investigator
Department of Educational &
Counselling Psychology & Special Education
Email: XXX@alumni.ubc.ca

Appendix B

Teacher Assistants in Canadian Inclusive Classrooms: An Investigation into their Deployment, Preparedness, and Impact

Poster/Flyer for Recruitment

UBC researchers seek Canadian teachers and education assistants (EAs) to tell us about their experiences working in Canadian inclusive classrooms. This is an exciting research study about Special Educational Assistant (SEAs) called **Teacher Assistants in Canadian Inclusive Classrooms: An Investigation into their Deployment, Preparedness, and Impact**.

In addition to allowing teachers and SEAs in BC to have their voices heard, which may help to initiate change in our education system, if interested, you will be entered in a draw for a $50 gift card at the end of the study and we will share our study's results with you! The survey will be open until August 30, 2018. After that date, the online survey will no longer be open for completion.

The study is a part of the thesis requirements for the Master of Arts in School Psychology for the Co-Investigator, Ms. Juliane Dmyterko. Juliane is currently completing her internship in XXX as a School Psychologist Intern. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the work SEAs are doing, their preparedness to complete this work, and how they collaborate with teachers to make an impact in inclusive classrooms.

Go to this link or email to Juliane to find out more and participate!

https://ubc.ca1.qualtrics.com/XXX/XXX

Laurie Ford, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
Department of Educational &
Counselling Psychology & Special Education
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
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Appendix C

Teacher Assistants in Canadian Inclusive Classrooms: An Investigation into their Deployment, Preparedness, and Impact

Facebook Advertisements

Advertisement One:

UBC researchers seek Canadian teachers and education assistants (EAs) to tell us about their experiences working in Canadian inclusive classrooms. Enter to win a $50 gift certificate and to learn more about this exciting research!

Click here to find out more:

https://ubc.ca1.qualtrics.com/XXX/XXX

Advertisement Two:

Are you a teacher or education assistant (EA) working in Canada? Tell us about your experiences working in inclusive classrooms and contribute to valuable research at the University of British Columbia. You will have a chance to win a $50 gift certificate!

Click here to find out more:

https://ubc.ca1.qualtrics.com/XXX/XXX

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Appendix D

Teacher Assistants in Canadian Inclusive Classrooms: An Investigation into their Deployment, Preparedness, and Impact

Informed Consent

Informed Consent
The survey for a study we are doing on Teaching Assistants [TAs; otherwise known as education assistants (EAs), Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), etc] in schools in Canada follows. We hope you will take part in our study.

Study Title:
Teacher Assistants in Canadian Inclusive Classrooms: An Investigation into their Deployment, Preparedness, and Impact

Principal Investigator:
Laurie Ford, Ph.D. Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special Education, Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: XXXX@ubc.ca

Student Co-Investigator:
Juliane Dmyterko, B.A. Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special Education, Email: XXXX@ubc.ca

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the work TAs are doing, their preparedness to complete this work, and how they collaborate with teachers to make an impact in inclusive classrooms. In 2002, the British Columbia Teacher Federation (BCTF) published, "B.C. teachers views of Special Education issues", which highlighted a need to address how teachers and TAs are working together. Furthermore, in 2009, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, British Columbia (CUPE BC) published, "Education assistants in BC: an educational profile and agenda", which highlighted the need for empirical information regarding the skill profile and educational needs of EAs and best or promising practice for EAs. It is our hope that our research is a step towards achieving those goals. The study is a part of the thesis requirements for the Master of Arts in School Psychology for the Co-Investigator, Ms. Dmyterko.

Why were you selected as a participant?
You have been selected because you are working in a role as a teacher, teacher assistant or a similar role in Canada. We are sending this request to as many Canadian teachers and teacher assistants as possible because we want to gather as many diverse perceptions as possible.

What should I know about taking part in this study?
- You will be asked to complete an online survey that includes questions about your background, education, practice, and experiences.
- The survey will take about 15-20 minutes to complete.
- This online survey is hosted by UBC, in Canada and is compliant with B.C.'s privacy act (FIPPA). The data collected is anonymous. Access to the information gathered throughout the study will be

limited to the Principal Investigator and the Co-investigator listed above, and those directly involved in the research process.

- Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences or impact to your role as an educator. However, please note that once you have submitted the survey you will no longer be able to withdraw as each survey is anonymous and there will be no way to identify your survey to exclude it.
- If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at XXX-XXX-XXXX or if long distance e-mail XXX@XXX.ubc.ca or call toll free XXX-XXX-XXXX
- We do not expect any physical or psychological risks in completing this survey. If any questions make you feel uncomfortable or seem too sensitive or personal, you do not have to answer them.
- This study will allow teachers and TAs in BC to have their voices heard, which may help to initiate change in our education system.
- If you are interested you receiving a copy of the results please email your request to the email address provided at the end of the survey.
- If you are interested you will also be entered in a draw for a $50 gift card. To be entered, please email your request to the email address provided at the end of the survey.
- The survey will be open for completion until August 31st, 2018.
- If you have additional questions about the study, please contact Ms. Dmyterko at the email provided above.

Consent to Participate:
It is assumed that by completing and submitting this survey, you are consenting to participate in this study. Once you have submitted the survey you will no longer be able to withdraw your consent as each survey is anonymous and there will be no way to identify your survey to exclude it. To participate in the study, please click the 'Next' button.

Appendix E

Teacher Assistants in Canadian Inclusive Classrooms: An Investigation into their Deployment, Preparedness, and Impact

Demographic Questions

What is your exact job title?
e.g., Learning Support Assistant (LSA), Special Education Assistant (SEA), Teacher Assistant (TA), etc.

[ ]

What percentage of your position in schools is considered Full Time Equivalent?
e.g., FTE = Full Time Equivalent, 0.8FTE = .8 of the Full Time Equivalent position, 0.5FTE = .5 of the Full Time Equivalent position, etc

[ ]

Gender
Please select one.

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ If these categories do not accurately reflect how you identify yourself, please use this text box space to write in your response _____
- ○ Prefer not to answer

Age

[ ]

How many years and months experience do you have as an educator?
(Include time in your current role and any time in a similar role)

[ ]

Level of Schooling?
Check the highest level of schooling you have completed and specify area of study in space provided. If you have more than one degree and/or certificate, please check all that you have obtained.

- ☐ Some high school
- ☐ High school diploma or the equivalent
- ☐ Some college credit, no credential awarded
- ☐ Certificate or Diploma (please specify name of program) _____
- ☐ Associate Degree (please specify area of study) _____
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree (B.Ed., B.A., B.Sc., etc., please specify area of study) _____
- ☐ Master's Degree (M.Ed., M.A., M.Sc., etc., please specify area of study) _____
- ☐ Doctorate degree (Ph.D, M.D., etc) _____
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Where is your school located?
i.e. town or city name

What grade levels are in your school?
e.g. k-7, k-6, 7-9, k-12, etc

Appendix F

Teacher Assistants in Canadian Inclusive Classrooms: An Investigation into their Deployment, Preparedness, and Impact

Survey Questions

Deployment Questions

Thinking about what you/the TA typically does in a lesson, put the list of six activities into rank order from 1 to 6. Where 1 equals the activity you/they spend the MOST time doing, and 6 equals the activity you/they spent the LEAST time doing.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Working one-to-one with a student	○	○	○	○	○	○
Working with a pair or group of students	○	○	○	○	○	○
Walking around the classroom (monitoring)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Listening to the teacher teach	○	○	○	○	○	○
Leading or teaching the class	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other (admin, marking)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Are there any other tasks that you complete that were not on the list?
Please list any additional tasks you/they complete.

What percentage of your/their day is spent doing the following?
Please add up to 100%

Working one-to-one with a student	
Working with a group or pair of students	
Walking around the classroom (monitoring)	
Listening to the teacher teach	
Leading or teaching the class	
Other (admin, marking)	

Once again, thinking about a typical lesson, put the list of 5 groups of students into rank order from 1 to 5. Where 1 equals the students you/they spend the MOST time and 5 equals the students you/they spend the LEAST time supporting.

	1	2	3	4	5
Higher attaining students	○	○	○	○	○
Average attaining students	○	○	○	○	○
Lower attaining students	○	○	○	○	○
Special educational needs students	○	○	○	○	○
Mixed (students with different levels of attainment)	○	○	○	○	○

What percentage of your/their time in a day is spent with the following students?
Please add up to 100%

Higher attaining students	
Average attaining students	
Lower attaining students	
Special educational needs students	

Preparedness Questions (Overall preparedness)

Level of Schooling?
Check the highest level of schooling you have completed and specify area of study in space provided. If you have more than one degree and/or certificate, please check all that you have obtained.

- ☐ Some high school
- ☐ High school diploma or the equivalent
- ☐ Some college credit, no credential awarded
- ☐ Certificate or Diploma (please specify name of program) _____
- ☐ Associate Degree (please specify area of study) _____
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree (B.Ed., B.A., B.Sc., etc., please specify area of study) _____
- ☐ Master's Degree (M.Ed., M.A., M.Sc., etc., please specify area of study) _____
- ☐ Doctorate degree (Ph.D, M.D., etc) _____
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Please list any additional training that you have that is relevant to your role as an educator (e.g., Non-violent crisis prevention, First Aid, etc)

How many years and months experience do you have as an educator?
(Include time in your current role and any time in a similar role)

Preparedness Question (Daily preparedness)

There are a number of things TAs need to know in order to be effective in lessons.
For each of the areas listed below, please indicate, on average, how prepared you/they are when you/they go into lessons.

	Fully prepared	Fairly well prepared	Partially prepared	Now well prepared	Unprepared
Knowing which student(s) I will support.	○	○	○	○	○
Knowing the educational needs of the student(s) I will support.	○	○	○	○	○
Knowing which topic will be covered in the lesson.	○	○	○	○	○
Knowing what subject knowledge I need to provide support effectively.	○	○	○	○	○
Knowing what instructional knowledge I need to provide support effectively.	○	○	○	○	○
Knowing the expected outcomes for the student(s) I will support	○	○	○	○	○
Knowing what feedback the teacher requires from me.	○	○	○	○	○

Impact Questions

In general, when you/TAs are in the classroom, how would you describe your/their impact on learning?

- ○ Significant positive impact
- ○ Mostly positive impact
- ○ Small positive impact
- ○ Negligible impact
- ○ Negative impact

In general, when you/TAs are in the classroom, how would you describe your/their impact on the following aspects of learning and development?

	Significant positive impact	Mostly positive impact	Small positive impact	Negligible impact	Negative impact
Confidence: extent to which students are confident about doing the tasks they are set.	○	○	○	○	○
Motivation: extent to which students are motivated to learn and participate.	○	○	○	○	○
Distraction: extent to which students are able to avoid getting distracted or distracting others.	○	○	○	○	○
Independence: extent to which students are able to work independently.	○	○	○	○	○

Additional Questions

Tick the statement that best describes your opportunity for communication with TAs/teachers.

- ○ My communication with teachers/TAs before and/or after lessons is brief (e.g. a couple of minutes).
- ○ I/TAs come into school early and/or stay behind after school in order to meet with teachers.
- ○ The teachers/TA(s) and I have scheduled time to meet each week.
- ○ There is no opportunity or time to communicate with teachers/TAs.

Within a typical week, how much time do you spend communicating with teachers?
Please answer in number of minutes.

In general, how confident are you/TAs about carrying out your/their role effectively?

- ○ Fully confident
- ○ Fairly confident
- ○ Partially confident
- ○ Not very confident
- ○ Unconfident

Does your school have a written and up-to-date policy or guidance, on the roles and duties of TAs?
This might be incorporated into another policy (e.g. your teaching and learning policy).

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Not sure

What suggestions would you make to improve the way you/TAs are used in classrooms?

How many courses during your teacher-training program addressed the role of the TA and how to work with them?

How many hours during your teacher-training program were devoted to and addressed the role of the TA and how to work with them?

There are various ways in which TAs acquire the SUBJECT knowledge (e.g. topic in math) they need in order to be effective in lessons.
Please indicate how often - on average – you acquire subject knowledge by each of these methods.

	Always or almost always	More often than not	Occasionally	Very rarely or never
Your own research and reading.	○	○	○	○
Listening to the teacher teach.	○	○	○	○
Lesson plans and schemes of work.	○	○	○	○
Talking to other TAs.	○	○	○	○
Talking to teachers.	○	○	○	○
Training and in-house professional development.	○	○	○	○