

This work has been submitted to NECTAR, the
**Northampton Electronic Collection of Theses and
Research.**

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/1299/>

Creator(s): Yan Feng

Title: The enhanced role of teaching assistants in school remodelling in primary schools in England: some reflections on teacher education in China.

Date: 5-8 September 2007

Originally presented to: British Educational Research Association (BERA) New researchers/Student Conference

Official URL: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/168406.htm>

Example citation: Feng, Y. (2006) The enhanced role of teaching assistants in school remodelling in primary schools in England: some reflections on teacher education in China. *British Educational Research Association (BERA) New researchers/Student Conference, University of Warwick, Warwick, UK, 5-8 September 2007.*

Version of item: Accepted version - refereed

The enhanced role of teaching assistants in school remodelling in primary schools in England: some reflections on teacher education in China

1. Background

One of the key initiatives in the school workforce remodelling in England is to raise standards of education through internal reorganisation of schools. The reforms have aimed to change, improve and develop teachers and through them, teaching and learning. The National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workload (DfES, 2003) acknowledges that the issue of over-worked teachers and the goal of raising standards are inextricably linked. This is evidenced by Wilson's overview of the literature on teachers' stress (2002) that 'workload' consistently comes top as the most frequent cause for teachers' stress which has an economic impact on the education system in terms of teacher retention and additional costs of replacement teachers.

This issue of teacher shortage has become a policy challenge for England which forces the Government to look harder at how traditional 'teaching' roles can be spread to other kinds of employees (Kerry 2001). With the dramatic increase of the number of teaching assistants in the years 1997-2004 (DfES, 2004a), the effective deployment of them becomes a critical issue for schools and local educational authorities. The Agreement (DfES, 2003) as a fundamental part of the process of building capacity within school workforce recognises that teaching assistants are providing effective and valuable support in a wide range of classroom settings. It also envisages an enhanced role for teaching assistants to free teachers from non-teaching related tasks and allow them to focus on their core expertise. This inevitably has resulted in 'a general move towards professionalising those roles with a clear career structure,

focused training and a nationally recognised Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA) status for teaching assistants who will undertake a more advanced role in schools' (Foulkes 2005, 34).

The current educational system reform in terms of teacher education in China is also facing some similar and more difficult problems in raising standards of education. A very crucial issue at schools is the shortage of the workforce, which has led to some teachers failing to meet the expectations of schools or the society. In general, most schools in China suffer from the insufficient financial support from the society or the government. Teachers are playing the dominant role in teaching and learning with little or no support from staff such as TAs. By reasoning the initiatives of the call for the school remodelling in both countries and analysing their achievements attained so far and the problems remaining unsolved through re-evaluating the roles of TAs, the paper draws the insight of having TAs in schools in England to share some responsibilities currently shouldered by teachers exclusively to leave the latter time and space for focusing on their professionalism. This idea of having TAs in schools could be some food for thought to the educators and the government in China when they reflect on its educational reform.

2. Role of teaching assistants

The recognition of the role of teaching assistants is interpreted (Rose 2005) as an important step to develop classroom team which is conducive to the effective learning of all pupils. According to DfES (2004), teaching assistants provide support to teachers, pupils, school and curriculum. They work in the school alongside teachers and pupils by providing valuable support for teaching and learning activities. There is no such thing as a typical role since their job descriptions vary according to their qualifications and more importantly, to the needs and expectations of the schools they

attach. Some work right across the curriculum, some act as specialist assistants for a special subject or department and still some help to plan lessons and develop support materials. Most experienced teaching assistants would identify that their roles have changed compared with when they started (Clayton, 1993). This well explains the reason for the different and confusing titles for them all through the years: support staff, learning assistants, classroom assistants and learning support assistants, just to name a few.

3. Key findings from the literature

Much recent research was commissioned to look at the existing role of teaching assistants in eliminating excessive workload of teachers to raise standards of pupil achievement in schools. The research (e.g. EPPI-Center 2003, 2006, Stewart 2004, Foulkes 2005, Kessler et al. 2005) was conducted alongside the latest development on workforce remodelling and guidance, including full guidance on the Education (Specified Work and Registration) Regulations 2003 and the Education (Review of Staffing Structure) Regulations 2005. Foulkes' research (2005, 34) found that 'the Government's policies for school workforce reform will only produce the desired outcomes if schools embrace changes in their culture and working practices. Providing qualification and career progression route for support staff and redefining the role of teachers are both necessary, but are not in themselves sufficient to produce the desired outcomes'.

3.1 Motivation for professional development

'When a teacher is motivated, supported and encouraged in school, exposed to training opportunities that promote understanding and given sufficient autonomy to be creative, she/he is more likely to reach full potential' (Hayes 2006, 53). To provide essential support to teachers and enable all pupils to gain from a positive learning

experience, teaching assistants need further training, qualifications and higher status. HLTAs' professional standards were developed in the following three areas of professional value and practice, knowledge and understanding and teaching and learning activities for teaching assistants to meet.

However, the motivation to become HLTAs varies from teaching assistants' awareness of their professionalism within the limitations of their personal situations. Jones' research (2006) on the motivation of teaching assistants to aspire to achieve HLTA status in primary and secondary schools indicates that some teaching assistants are very committed to developing their understanding of the range of factors influencing pupil learning and how their role could contribute most effectively to that regardless of the status alone or an increase in salary. Stewart (2004), however, identifies that some schools may lack a promotion structure or enhanced pay commensurate with qualification. His research expresses the concerns by teaching assistants that having worked hard to gain HLTA status, increased payment rates would only apply to the time spent carrying out specific duties and the rest of the time would be paid at the lower rate. Such very occasional higher rate payments may not seem worth the effort required to gain the national professional status of a HLTA. Meanwhile, Stewart reports that demands for places on HLTA training courses have been lower than expected in some regions. Perhaps other potential HLTAs will be discouraged from applying for HLTA training until there is a clear national agreement on rates of pay. 'Issues of salary structures have yet to be finally resolved since the guidance from government continues to be that pay and conditions are best determined locally' (Foulkes 2005a, 19).

3.2 Teaching assistants teach in class

The increasing desire of teachers to be treated as professionals has encouraged a

tendency to look for ways in which teachers could solve their own professional problems at a local level rather than react to more remote initiatives. Hence the emphasis is on the school as the obvious location for curriculum renewal, the in-service education of teachers, the evaluation of teaching and learning, and even educational research (Lawton 1989). To alleviate the pressure on teachers would be to allow teaching assistants to play a more significant role in the teaching process. Despite the outcry from teaching unions (e.g. National Union of Teachers) and head teachers that this approach was a covert strategy for disguising teacher shortages by providing cheap labour, 'the idea is in the process of being implemented and has created rifts between different teaching unions over the extent and impact of the changes' (Hayes 2004, 38).

There are cases of effective use of teaching assistants in leading classes and stepping in for absent teachers. For example, School Workforce Development Board reports a case study of Dartington Primary School and Nursery of the transition from teachers to senior teaching assistants during PPA time as 'seamless' (2006). It signals the biggest shake-up in education for 40 years. However, it has proved controversial. The ongoing concern expresses nationally about the increasing use of teaching assistants for a pedagogic role in the classroom. The consequences of a widening of role certainly need to be monitored closely. "There has been little in the way of structured professional development with teachers receiving little advice or help on working with teaching assistants" (Farrell et al. 1999). Three models (room management, zoning and reflective team work) of team organization and planning for the work of teaching assistants were evaluated by Cremin and colleagues for the effects on children's engagement (Cremin et al. 2005, 427). It offers useful frameworks for helping teachers to manage the increasing numbers of assistants and helping to

maximize their contribution.

3.3 Recognition of role of teaching assistants

Although some large-scale studies (e.g. Gerbet et al. 2001, Blatchford et al. 2002, cited in Cremin et al. 2005, 415) have indicated insignificant effects of teaching assistants employment for attainment-related outcomes, recognition and better use of the skills and expertise of school support staff have been at the heart of workforce remodelling and have been carefully researched (e.g. Lee and Mawson 1998). The Office of Standards in Education (OfSTED 2002) reports that teaching assistants play an important role in literacy and numeracy catch-up and intervention programmes. Evidence from many other research studies (e.g. Rose 2000) confirms that teaching assistants are playing an essential role in school improvement: making schools more effective, enriching experiences for children and strengthening teaching and learning. Balshaw and Farrell (2002, 5) justify that ‘in mainstream schools the increasing number and expanding role of teaching assistants reflect the need for more inclusive educational provision. Teaching assistants therefore have the potential to play a key role in helping to make inclusive education effective for all pupils including those with statements’.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research focus

This paper tends to identify the opportunity to extend some aspects of the role of teaching assistants so that they can maximise their function in school remodelling process and make even more contribution to improve standards in schools.

4.2 Method

The research is a case study. Besides an analytic review of the literature, the paper reports in a qualitative approach a small-scaled case study using semi-structured

indepth interviews with school administrators, teachers, parents and teaching assistants about their perceptions on the enhanced role of teaching assistants. The findings generated from their perspectives are coupled with field observations by the researcher. This method helps to provide with the 'living voice'. The data are drawn from a limited profile group in a primary school in an East Midland area. It may not satisfy the purist researcher. However, it is intended to be an analysis of teaching assistants' role based on research that provides credibility and practical insight. In designing the interview questions, the researcher is much influenced by Kerry (2001), Jones (2006) and Foulkes (2005).

4.3 Research context

The research was conducted in a community primary school with about 300 pupils between the ages of 4-11 years in East Midlands. According to the recent OfSTED overall evaluation (2004), the school is effective in providing a good quality of education. 'Pupils achieve well' and 'leadership and management are satisfactory'. 'The school has a good number of competent teaching assistants who provide effective support for pupils with a range of learning and behavioural needs'. 'Carefully thought-out teaching groups and good use of support staff enable pupils of all abilities to learn effectively'.

There are 14 teaching assistants in this school with only one male teaching assistant. This almost matches Lee and Mawson's finding (1998) that 99 percent of teaching assistants are female ones. All of them are part-timers who work only in the mornings. Some work a few mornings in a week. Most of them work with children with learning difficulties. They report to the teachers the progress of children in written or oral form for teachers to set further targets for the children.

As a student teacher, the researcher started her research at the school by working two

days a week as a teaching assistant in three different year groups. Since the beginning of the school placement, the researcher has been observing the work of teaching assistants attached to the classes and a research diary by the researcher has been kept to record the observations as well.

4.4 Interview scheme

To avoid any potential ethical problems, prior to the interviews, a letter of consent was sent to the school head teacher together with the research proposal. Letters of consent were distributed by the school administrators to teachers, parents and teaching assistants. The school informed the researcher of the approved interviewees. All the interviews were on a one-to-one basis with each lasted about 30 minutes and were tape-recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Data obtained were coded and transcribed without any names attached for the confidentiality concerns. There are some generic questions for each interview for the purpose of seeking perspectives on teaching assistants' existing and/or enhanced role in the school workforce remodelling in relation to joint planning team work, role clarity and how the intervention was different to their previous practice.

Interview data were triangulated with reflective research diary and class observations (Robson 2002, 317). In this case, the researcher was immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people being studied to seek insight into the area.

4.5 The profile group

The group was selected on a voluntary basis. There are 7 in all, 3 school administrators/teachers with years of teaching and management experiences; 1 teacher with about a year's teaching experience but months of experience as a teaching assistant; 1 parent with her child having some problem in one subject and was trying to seek extra help from the school and 3 teaching assistants all having long years'

work experience in different year groups at the school. The teaching assistants work directly with pupils who experience learning difficulties as a major part of their role. They may work either with individual pupils or with a small group of pupils who are identified as a lower achievement set and all have Individual Learning Plans.

5. Key findings from the interview data

5.1 Perceptions of teachers' workload

BBC (April 16, 2002) reported that teachers work excessively long hours. Tired teachers are not effective teachers and a long-hour culture is not conducive to raising standards. When teachers were asked about their workload, they all agree that they have endless work.

I work all day obviously. I come at 7:45 and I am still here at 5:30. It is a long day. I have a lot of things to do. So I use time before school and after school.

I have mass and mass of paper work to do. Sometimes you feel like repeating yourself. You feel you are not using your time very well.

When I was trained to be a teacher, we had lots of different lectures and talks from people. One talk was from a career adviser, saying: In five years' time, most of you won't be teaching. That is the reality. That might be you. You have to think what job you would be doing next... So even when you are training to be a teacher, you are aware that most of us are going to leave because the workload is huge. You have to take work back home in the evening, every evening.

The study by the schools inspectorate OfSTED also found teaching assistants now spend more time helping children with literacy and numeracy leaving them less time for helping teachers with administrative chores. It does not match the government's initiatives (BBC news, September 1, 2003) that teachers in England and Wales can no longer be asked routinely to do any administrative or clerical tasks. But it agrees with

the interviewees' accounts.

I spend hours and hours photocopying. If I said I am not going to do the photocopying, I am not going to do the displays... that is just not going to happen. We don't have enough TAs. The school doesn't have enough money.

Many years ago, most classroom teachers had TAs. They assisted in general management in the classrooms. But these days, those learning support assistants only work with children with learning or behavioural difficulties...The teachers are doing routine work, for example, wall displays, teachers do that after school or at lunch time. It does mean a lot of work outside the classroom...We are still doing it. We don't have to do it. But 99% of teachers are still doing it.

5.2 Perceptions on teaching assistants covering PPA time

The time for allowing teachers to spend 10% of their working week to do the activities including planning, preparation and assessment of individual performance is achieved through teaching assistants undertaking specified work in many schools in England in 2005. National Union of Teachers (BBC 2005) fears that too much financial burden for some schools, without proper funding, the Agreement would be unsustainable. The consequence would be that schools would use non-qualified staff to take classes before they acquire appropriate status and expertise. The interview justifies that it is not the case in the primary school.

...the school didn't want that to happen. The school wanted to have qualified teachers to cover PPA time. But the governing board has said that we can't sustain the cost. We have to look at other ways of covering PPA time. What we are looking at is to ask two TAs to be trained as HLTAs. We are going to try. Even a teacher is willing to let TAs to cover teachers' PPA time, it has to be a qualified teacher.

It depends on the TAs and their capabilities...I prefer a supply teacher.

I prefer supply teacher. Quality concerns, HLTA, possibly. It depends on how much time, I guess. I won't feel confident or happy having TAs for a few days in class to do my numeracy lessons. If we just talk about here and there occasionally...

There have been no adverse comments from parents, who seem to be happy that cover will be provided by appropriate skilled people within the school who know the children rather than outside supply teachers. However,

It also depends on the subject. If it is PE, for example, then it will be Okay. Or music, that does not matter too much, either. But if they are helping with math, I am not going to judge, but if they are able to do that... TAs may not have the knowledge to help children how to learn. Math can be learnt in so many ways, TAs need to have the expertise to help. I have a degree. But I have not been taught how to teach. So I don't know how to help my child in Math. My child is not good at Math. So I am thinking of asking some teacher to give him some extra help.

However, the interview also shows that in some cases, it is acceptable that teaching assistants cover some PPA time for teachers.

It depends. First of all, not all the supply teachers are excellent... TAs have got a wide range of abilities. Some of them are very confident with a group of children. They have got some natural good quality to teach.

Are teaching assistants really able to cover for teachers? Teaching assistants themselves are confident.

I have been working as a teaching assistant for long years. I would be able to teach if I am asked to...

I have been help children with their IEPs these years. If the teacher gives me the plan, I think I can handle the whole group.

Some TAs can do much better job than teachers. Some can't. TAs have to follow the

ground rule to whether or not your teachers are happy. TAs definitely can make children work. But TAs have to consult teachers at the very beginning to make sure teachers are positive.

5.3 Relationship between teachers and TAs

Generating a high degree of collaborative teamwork between teachers and assistants ensures continuity of expectations and professional culture of schools. Once teaching assistants are valued and respected as important and influential members of the staff team, it ‘fosters greater confidence, self-esteem and the habit of ongoing reflective practice’ (Foulkes, 2005, 34).

In the school, on the whole, teachers are supportive of teaching assistants’ professional development. The relationship has been very successful in improving understanding and reducing suspicion. Teaching assistants are considered as best assets, too. They are confident and intelligent. They know the kids and know what they have been working on.

I have worked with 8-10-12 main different teachers. I have excellent relationship with some and strange with others. Good relationship, you get good atmosphere. It reflects on the work you do and working with children, because you are involved in the planning, which is great...

If the classroom has been used to TAs, if they haven’t got that person, they do notice the difference. I think the idea is changing now. TAs are beginning to feel more valued.

But as part-time teaching assistants, sometimes they feel excluded in the school.

Sometimes I go to the staff room, I feel very uncomfortable. The teachers are already in a conversation and you just sit or stand in a corner.

5.4 Perceptions on other relevant issues

5.4.1 Motivation and support for HLTA status

The motivation for professional development is affected by many factors in terms of commitment, age, previous education and/or qualification, pay scale and etc.

Yes. It is making me looking at policy, procedures and schools more as a whole picture rather than concentrating on what I am doing. You have to be very aware of the policies and issues...The role of TAs has been changing...10-15 years ago, the TAs just came in and did general things. Today, they have more specific roles. They work with children with IEPs...

...Even though some TAs now have qualifications, teachers might not always on the way to TAs. It depends really on the teachers. Teachers are really very very pleased to have HLTA in their classroom. But if they don't use them as efficiently...

For my age, I don't want to go to college to do a course. I am looking to finish in 2-3 years obviously. But for somebody who is younger, the new TA thing with HLTA is brilliant, provided they get paid for the job they do. Because they would be taking classes, that is great responsibility. They should be paid for the responsibility.

I am not going to do it at this age. I am happy with what I am doing. I have experience...

Teaching assistants might be considering applying for HLTA status which was introduced in 2003 to support workforce reform. The school has been striving to provide training opportunities for them. But because of financial stress, the support is not always satisfactory.

If we get funding, we will then let them have time out of school when they would be normally working. We can't fund everybody financially. If there is a need for that type of training, if it is linked to the school development plan...we will support them. There are free courses at the moment. We have done in-service courses. Teacher training comes top of the list. LSA does tend to come a little bit further down. If there are funds

available, they will be supported. But we have to look at the needs, relevance, how it is going to benefit the school. It links to the school development plan.

...for the moment, the responsibilities they have are enough for what they are paid to do. This school doesn't get extra money. If TAs have other responsibilities, they will have to have a pay rise.

...lots of classroom assistants are learning on the job. They are learning from the teachers.

5.4.2 Perceptions on staff meeting

Although all staff are welcome at some meetings at lunchtime or after school, sometimes teaching assistants would not come for they are on a part-time basis. It is hard for them to be totally immersed in school. But there is a call for a team leader among TAs.

They are trying to have liaison between themselves in their Key Stages so that they are tying up, also.

All the TAs should be able to have their own meetings, possibly once a half term. Just that we can sit together and talk about our concerns, other people can give their suggestions.

5.4.3 Perceptions on the evaluation of teaching assistants' work

As MacBeath et al. (1996,11) state, 'one of the strongest features of self-evaluation is that it allows the school to reflect critically on external criteria, to set these against its own internally derived criteria and to consider the relative merits and appropriateness of both'. Much of the school effectiveness research, according to Elliott (1996, 211), 'fails to describe practices from the practitioner's perspective, the perspective of one who is required to realize an educative personal relation with their pupils, the aims and content of curriculum activities, the pedagogical conditions which govern pupils

experience of them, and the community context in which they are developed’.

I don't think evaluations or reviews have been done in the past. Mrs. H has now taken that role. And I know they all have a review. Out of that review comes some training needs, which is why a couple of them going on to the HLTAs. Hopefully now training will be evaluated. I don't think they have been done in the past.

5.5 Field observation

As briefly described (See Table 1) by the researcher, the school does not provide teaching assistants for afternoon classes. Teachers have to prepare resources for class before afternoon registration. Some teachers mark worksheets over lunch in the classroom. Others wait in queues for photocopying materials. On one occasion, a teacher takes care of a sick pupil at lunchtime. The same teacher has to take a group of pupils for swimming class that starts at 1:00 once every week.

The school placement that lasted two terms offered the researcher great opportunity to have an in-depth understanding of the role of the teaching assistants in the school and the workload of teachers. A day in the school is quite ordinary to everyone there. But it reflects many issues that are still left unsolved. The observation well matches the culture in the school and the interview data that teaching assistants are finding their job more challenging with the enhanced role in the workforce remodelling while teachers, seeming released a bit with their PPA time, but arguably are having the same or even more work to do in the hope of their own professional development to raise standards of education for all.

The observations became the first-hand materials for the research diary, which in turn helped the researcher generate the interview questions for verification. Thus, data collected from this triangulated research process could be more valid and reliable.

6. Discussion

Teaching assistants are experiencing a major role shift in working practice. Lack of money could lead some schools to make greater use of them in helping children with literacy, numeracy or special needs instead of helping with routine tasks like photocopying and register-taking, aiding teachers with administrative chores, leaving qualified teachers to concentrate on the things they are qualified. Schools with falling rolls could be most vulnerable over the longer term.

Firstly, as some teaching assistants are not motivated to get a HLTA status, schools and LEAs as employers will inevitably be questioned of the cover for teachers' PPA time. However, it is not the intention of the Government to replace teachers with teaching assistants but to let them complement teachers. The Government believes that well-trained and experienced support staff can play a valuable role in undertaking cover for short-term teacher absence. However, the government emphasizes that it only expect well-trained support staff-normally having attained HLTA status will be leading classes, and then only under the direction and supervision of a teacher (www.teachernet.gov.uk, accessed on November 13, 2005).

Secondly, as teaching assistants are employed in a variety of functions in support of teachers and what they do varies between schools, their pay may not reflect their level of training, skills and responsibilities as the National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackle Workload expects. The Government considers that decision on pay and contractual arrangements for school support staff are best taken at local level. They can be more flexible and responsive to local needs and priorities. The Government expects local arrangements to have sufficient flexibility to enable schools to attract and retain support staff in both existing and new roles in a cost effective way and to develop existing staff into new roles where appropriate. Since the recruitment and

training of TAs is done at local level instead of directly by the DfES, it is a matter of local employers to decide what skills, experience and qualifications are necessary for any school support post bearing in mind the nature of the support required for the specific posts they wish to fill.

Lastly, all teaching assistants need to have access to high quality training and development that meets their needs and allows them to contribute fully to raising standards in schools and ensuring children's well-being. But the Teacher Training Agency (TTA, 2006) realized that in the past, the uptake of training and development in schools has been uneven. Many support staff have not the opportunity to develop their skills or have their experience recognized. It is necessary to make a difference to all staff by recognizing their diverse backgrounds and contributions, setting a clear strategic direction for support staff training and development that will lead to a strong confident and competent workforce focused on increasing pupils' achievement.

6.1 Implication of the research

- PPA agreement precludes the use of classroom assistants to cover those sessions. There needs to be a firm distinction drawn between cover supervision –covering from short periods when a teacher is out of the classroom–and covering a whole lesson which a teacher is timetabled to teach.
- The school should have a better policy of talking, listening and encouraging teaching assistants to try new roles to their best strengths and interests. Those who have achieved HLTA status can be expected to act as mentors or team leaders to new teaching assistants, offering them inducting, training, advice, support and managing or monitoring their performance within schools.
- LEAs should work closely with schools to help remove barriers to and improve the supply of training and development of teaching assistants. The quality of

training and development should be strengthened for people working in supporting roles in schools.

- Schools should carry out performance management with teaching assistants including reviews and structuring. This will give them a career structure so that they could clearly see what qualifications they are required to reach certain levels.
- DfES (2004, p8) urges schools to give appraisal of performance to inform decisions about priorities for further training, to involve teaching assistants in planning and include them in relevant school-based meetings and training. Schools need to have clear job descriptions for each type of teaching assistants and make them available to teachers so that teachers can give them appropriate tasks (Shaw, 2001).

6.2 Some reflections on teacher education in China

On the one hand, the Chinese government prioritises education (Chinese MoE, 2004) as a fundamental and guiding cause with an overall importance to social and economic development (Zhou and Reed, 2005, Pang and Richey, 2006). Because the Chinese are very concerned about being competitive in a world market, they are in the process of changing their teaching practices from that of rote learning to that of teaching thinking skills. There is an increasing awareness and recognition of teachers' role in raising standards of education. So policy makers and society at large have high expectations of teachers. However, China is still one of the developing countries with the lowest proportion of teachers with tertiary qualifications for teaching primary and middle education (UNESCO, 2001). The balance between what is required of teachers and what is offered to them has a significant impact on the composition of the teaching force and the quality of teaching. Though more information is needed about how teachers themselves perceive their profession and its demands and incentives,

particularly at the classroom level, there is evidence that the situation impairs school effectiveness and hence student achievement (Su, et al. 2001).

On the other hand, teacher education in China merely prepares teachers to work for students at different levels. At present, the idea of having TAs in classrooms is becoming aware of at schools. However, schools are not able to afford the reform owing to the insufficient funding and tight budget. Teachers are still the only adults working closely with all students regardless of their individual educational needs. The lack of support and assistance from people like TAs results in the inability of teachers in addressing the needs of students, especially those with physical disabilities, learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural problems. This has great impact on teacher professional motivation and development.

7. Conclusion

By reasoning the initial motive for the call for school remodelling in England and analysing the achievements attained so far and the problems remaining unsolved through re-evaluating the role of teaching assistants, the paper suggests with a small scaled research that teaching assistants in primary schools have already been sharing some responsibilities of teachers to leave the latter time and space for focusing on their professionalism. Teaching assistants are able to play a decisive part in creating further capacity within schools by providing a variety of improved services to free teachers from non-teaching related tasks and allowing teachers to focus on their core area of expertise if their role is enhanced and facilitated more professionally based on their skills, experiences and qualifications.

Having TAs in classrooms in economically developed countries like England has been researched to have positive influence for effective teaching. It also reduces the heavy workload of teachers so that teachers can better enjoy work-life balance. As the nature

of this school-based student teacher research determines that the research is not able to focus on a broad, representative sample for various reasons, the implication tends to be limited. Future research can be conducted on the cost-effectiveness of employing TAs to support learning of students. Thus, the insights drawn from the research could be of some food for thought to educators in classroom practice for developing countries like China in educational reform in terms of teacher education.

References

- Balshaw, M. and Farrell, P. (2002) *Teaching assistants: practical strategies for effective classroom support*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
- BBC (2002) Assistants fail to cut school workload. April 16, 2002. Available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_news/education/1932075.stm[Accessed May 29, 2006].
- BBC (2003) Teachers freed from humdrum tasks. September 1, 2003. Available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/3192909.stm[Accessed May 29, 2006].
- BBC (2005) Teacher time put to the test. October 7, 2005. Available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/4307968.stm[Accessed May 29, 2006].
- Clayton, T. (1993) From domestic helper to assistant teacher: the changing role of the British classroom assistant. *Europe Journal of Special Needs Education*. **8**(1), 32-44.
- Cremin, H. et al. (2005) Working with teaching assistants: three model evaluated. *Research Papers in Education*. December **20**(4), 413-432.
- DfES (2003) *Raising standards and tackling workload: a national agreement*. London: DfES.
- DfES, (2004a) *Statistics of Education, schools in England*. London: DfES.
- DfES (2004) *Role and context modules: induction training for teaching assistants in primary schools*. Ref: DfES/0575/2004
- Elliott, J. (1996) School effectiveness research and its critics: alternative visions of schooling. *Cambridge Journal of Education*. **26**(2), 199-224.
- Evidence for Policy and Practice information and Co-ordinating Center (EPPI-Center), (2003) *The impact of paid adult support on the participation and learning of pupils in mainstream schools*. Institute of Education: London.
- Farrell, P. et al. (1999) *The management, role and training of learning support assistants*. London: DfEE Publications.

Foulkes, P. (2005) Teaching assistants and the school workforce of tomorrow. *Education Today*. **55**(3), 34-35.

Foulkes, P. (2005) Higher Level Teaching Assistants: their perceptions of the HLTA standards and of assessment for HLTA status. *Education Today*. **55**(2),15-21.

Hayes, D. (2004) Recruitment and retention: insights into the motivation of primary trainee teachers in England. *Research in Education*. May No. **71**. Great Britain: Bell and Bain Ltd. 37-49.

Hayes, D. (2006) Effective teaching: an elusive concept. *Teacher Development*. **10** (1), March, 43-54.

Jones, J. (2006) To consider the motivation of teaching assistants to aspire to achieve Higher Level Teaching Assistant status in primary and secondary schools. unpublished.

Kessler et al. (2005) *Survey of teaching assistants and teachers in two London boroughs*. Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC): Swindon.

Kerry, T. (2001) *Working with support staff: their roles and effective management in schools*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Lee, B. and Mawson, C. (1998) *Survey of classroom assistants*. Slough: NFER/Unison.

MacBeath, J. et al. (1996) *Schools speak for themselves: towards a framework for self-evaluation*. London: College Hill Press.

Ministry of Education (2004) MoE: Survey of the educational reform and development in China. Available from: <http://www.edu.cn/20041125/3122184.shtml>. [Accessed 29/05/2006].

OfSTED, (2002) *Teaching assistants in primary schools: an evaluation of the quality and impact of their work*. TSO: London.

- Pang, Y. and Richey, D. (2006) The development of special education in China. *International Journal of Special Education*. **21** (1), 77-86.
- Robson, C. (2002) *Real world research*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Rose, R. (2000) Using classroom support in the primary school. *British Journal of Special Education*. **27**(4), 191-196.
- Rose, R. (2005) *Becoming a primary higher level teaching assistants*. Exeter: Learning Matters.
- School Workforce Development Board (2006) *Developing people to support learning: a skills strategy for the wider school workforce 2006-2009*. [s.l.] [s.n.]
- Shaw, L. (2001) *Learning supporters and inclusion*. Bristol: CSIE.
- Stewart, W. (2004) Another blow to staff. *Times Educational Supplement*. 3, 2004.
- Su, Z. X., Hawkins, J. et al. (2001) Choices and commitment: a comparison of teacher candidates' profiles and perspectives in China and the United States. *International Review of Education*. **47** (6), 611-635.
- TDA (2006) *Building the school team: our plan for support staff training and development 2005-2006*. London: Training and Development Agency for Schools.
- Wilson, V. (2002) Feeling the stress: an overview of the literature on teachers' stress. *The Scottish Council for Research in Education*. No. 109.
- Zhou, J. and Reed, L. (2005) Chinese government documents on teacher education since the 1980s. *Journal of Education for Teaching*. **31**(3), 201-213.