

Reception Class Practitioners' Understandings on the Role of Teaching Assistants, in Particular Supporting Children in Mathematics

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Abstract : The purpose of this study is to investigate the roles of teaching assistants (TAs) working in reception classes through practitioners' perspectives. The study has two major purposes; firstly to explore the general roles of TAs, and secondly to identify their roles in supporting children for mathematics. A small-scale case study approach was adopted for this study. The research was carried out in two reception classes within a primary school in London. The qualitative data were gathered through observations and semi-structured interviews with four reception class practitioners, comprising two teachers and two TAs. The results show that TAs consider their role to be more like a teacher, whereas classroom teachers do not corroborate this and they generally believe that the role of TAs depends on their personal characteristics and skills. In regard to the general role of TAs, the study suggests that reception class TAs are deployed both at the classroom level to provide academic support for children's learning and development, and at the school level they are deployed as support staff such as Midday Meal Supervisor or assistants. In terms of the pedagogical roles of TAs, it was found that TAs have a strong teaching role in literacy development, with notable autonomy if conducting their own phonics sessions without teacher direction, but a negligible influence in numeracy/ math's. In addition, the results show that the TA role is perceived to be quite limited in planning and assessment processes. Linked to their limited roles in such processes, all participants agree that all the responsibility regarding the children's learning and development, planning and assessment lies with the teacher. Therefore, data suggest that TAs' roles in these areas depend on TAs' their own initiatives.

Keywords : early years education, reception classes, roles, teaching assistants

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