

THE ROLES OF TEACHING ASSISTANT IN THE DISCOURSE OF SUPPORT TO LEARNER

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The quality of inclusive education is measured applying the harmony indicators of personal success and learning activities of a school student in the context of learners' diverse needs and possibilities. Assistance to a learner in this educational environment is one of the most significant but sensitive dimensions because support provided to a learner has effect not only on educational but also on psychosocial aspect of his/her involvement into community. The receiver of support always assumes the status of the weaker in the interpersonal interaction. Assistance provided by unprepared teaching assistant (hereinafter - TA) or parents may stronger highlight the learner's disability, limit his or her self-dependence or distinguish such a child from the peers (Stockall, 2014). On the other hand, professional support provided by TA may significantly contribute to the growth of learner's self-dependence in all the dimensions of self-determination (Lane, Carter, Sisco, 2012). The anticipated effect of assistance is achieved, when it is targeted and professional, when conditions for learner's involvement in the process of education are established (Stoiber, Gettinger, 2011). Assistance to a special learning needs pupil is a complex process and involves the majority of members of school community: teachers, school principals, other learners, parents and, therefore, it requires skills of coordination and collaboration. The collaboration of TAs with the teacher of a learner acquires considerable significance. Working together teachers and TAs apply various forms of education organisation, including parallel and individual teaching (Scruggs, Mastropieri, McDuffie, 2007) but efficiency of joint work is achieved only when a teacher and TA targetedly allocate sufficient time for agreements, discussions of results and their evaluation (Roffey-Barentsen, 2014). A teacher and TA have to plan work together. It is important to agree upon carried out activities and to ascribe roles to all participants (M. Takala, 2007). Working as a team, planning and analysing success of education, both a teacher and TA have clearly distributed roles and responsibilities (Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, Blatchford, 2015). However, the research results reveal that collaboration between teachers and TA is insufficiently targeted and lack clear planning. Sometimes the conception of inclusive education perceived by teachers and their assistants is different. TA tends to support the conception of medical assistance to learners (Mackenzie, 2011). However, as inclusive education has been establishing itself in the system of education and as school communities have become open to the diversity of learners, the importance of TA has been gradually acknowledged and in high demand. The number of TAs in the countries that implement inclusive education has a tendency to intensively increase. M. Takala (2007) states that the numbers of TA in Finish schools grew from 3 technical assistants in 1967 to 6000 individuals in 2002. N. Edmond and M. Hayler (2013) indicate that in the USA only during 1990 the number of TAs went up by 48 % and from 2004-2009 it increased by 29 % in England. Various research studies reveal the versatility of TA activities. TAs help SEN school learners consolidate and support the acquired abilities, prepare learning environment and save precious time of teachers for direct work with pupils (Stockall, 2014). The role of TA is important encouraging learners to make independent decisions. All this is particularly characteristic of teaching assistants working in the programmes of general education (Lane,

Carter, Sisco, 2012). J. Radford, P. Bosanquet, R. Webster, P. Blatchford (2015) indicate three kinds of TA support to a child: 1) repair role: when the student is stuck in the activity, the TA helps to get out of the situation and to complete the assignment independently. This is possible when the teacher and assistant identify the reason why a learner is unable to perform the assignments (failure to find appropriate strategy or words, more time needed to understand adults' language); 2) role of support, which includes help to a child, who is embarrassed, tensed and needs safety; 3) heuristic problem solution, when, having considered the case with the teacher, the TA teaches the child to choose appropriate strategy for performance of assignment, encourages a child to verbalise the problem and to self-ask problem-based questions. The authors investigating the activities of TAs emphasise the necessity of targeted training of specialists taking into account the nature of provided support (Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, Blatchford, 2015, Stockall, 2014, Takala, 2007, Mackenzie, 2011, Frank, Keith, Steil, 1998). The TAs need knowledge of how to provide help to a stammering learner while studying as well as abilities to maintain good interrelations with learners they assist. The key elements, which create supportive environment, embrace the following abilities: to understand and spread humour; not to condemn; to demonstrate interest and enthusiasm; to remain calm; to talk to pupils not about them; to actively listen; to understand learner's social status and situation at home; to behave in a respectful way and to model respectful behaviour (Groom, 2006).

The overview of the research results reveals the role of TA as one of the relevant and multidimensional roles in the system of support to a learner. This research aims to deepen the cognition of the role of TA analysing the discourse of the TAs themselves.

The methodology of research.

The raised problem questions: what roles do teaching assistant emphasise in their professional activities? How do these roles address the learner's need for support?

The strategy of case study was applied. The data were collected using the questionnaire consisting of open questions. The TAs were asked to consider two questions: "In what school situations TA support is most needed? What support, in their opinion, is the most efficient in the process of learning? The data were analysed employing the method of content analysis. The research results were generalised abstracting them into sub-categories and categories.

The group of respondents. The research sample included 18 teaching assistants working in schools of general education, which implement inclusive education. Each TA provides assistance to 3-4 learners in the class ascribed to him or her. The average experience of teaching assistants in this position is 8.3 years and it ranges from 1 to 22 years.

The research environment. The school, where the research was carried out, has been implementing the activities of inclusive education for 20 years. The learners attend this school from the 1st to 12th forms. The school community consists of 560 learners and 19 % of them have special learning needs. Teaching assistants working in primary, basic and secondary education programmes participated in the survey.

The analysis of research results.

Pursuing to encourage TA to reflect own experience from the perspective of deeper personal relation with a learner, the respondents were asked to analyse the cases related to such learners, who, according to TAs, mostly need their assistance. The TAs distinguished the learners, who are ascribed special learning needs due to reduced mobility, learning disorders, autism syndrome, memory disorders and impaired vision (blindness).

The analysis of teaching assistant's activity areas. The duties of teaching assistant in Lithuania are regulated in two interrelated activities of learners: 1) teaching and learning. In such case assistance is provided to both a learner and a teacher; 2) learner's self-service and self-care. Such assistance is provided only to a learner. Analysing TA reflections of activities, it was established that teaching assistants emphasise more areas than provided for in the

description of their jobs. They mainly analyse their activities in four spheres. On the basis of the intensity of expression of supporting statements, the following priorities were identified in activities of TA: educational assistance (51), physical assistance (24), psychological support (15); social support (10). It is obvious that educational sphere is most intensively considered in professional activity reflections. This sphere of TA activities embraces assistance to learners in the process of learning and assistance to teachers in organisation of the process of education. Second most important kind of support provided by TA includes physical assistance to a learner while learning and using school infrastructure. The research results show that TAs provide psychological support to learners in various spheres of the educational process and social support helping a child to engage in life of school community. Deeper analysis of the research data is conducted abstracting data collected in the dimensions of TA activities determined on the basis of this result.

Dimension I. Teaching assistant as a participant in learner's teaching/learning. Two TA activity directions are highlighted in this dimension: support to a child while learning and assistance to a teacher in organisation of the process of education. Reflections of professional activities of TA reveal a direct relation of TA with a learner in the process of teaching/learning providing him or her with educational assistance. This is one of the directions of TA activities in this dimension (Table 1).

Table 1. *Participation of teaching assistant in learner's teaching/learning activity.*

Activity description	Sub-category of activities	Category of activities
<i>Reading of text to a learner</i>	Text reading	Assistance to a child while learning
<i>Assistance to a learner in text reading</i>		
<i>Note taking of text</i>	Writing down of text	
<i>Writing down of the text to accelerate learning activities</i>		
<i>Repeated explanation of the material</i>	Additional explanation of teaching material	Transformation of information
<i>Assistance in understanding teacher's explanation</i>		
<i>Explanation of how to perform an assignment</i>		
<i>Individual explanation</i>		
<i>Additional explanation after lessons</i>		
<i>Illustration of assignments</i>	Adaptation of ways of presenting assignment	
<i>Specification of information, abstraction of essence</i>		
<i>Adaptation of form of work to a learner</i>	Adaptation of work form and pace to a learner	
<i>Adaptation of pace of work</i>		
<i>Strengthening of knowledge and skills</i>	Activities directed towards enhancement of learner's abilities	Teaching
<i>Additional teaching after lessons</i>		
<i>Assistance while learning</i>		
<i>Teaching of learning techniques</i>	Development of targeted learning abilities	
<i>Orientation of a learner towards the goal of learning</i>		
<i>Development of reduced functions</i>	Increase in body working capacity	Maintenance of working capacity in the process of learning
<i>Observation of body position</i>	Compensation of consequences of reduced functions	
<i>Compensation of insufficient memory</i>		
<i>Maintenance of attention compensation</i>		
<i>Maintenance of learning motivation</i>	Maintenance of learning efficiency	
<i>Assistance in volitional concentration on activities</i>		
<i>Assistance to participate in activities</i>		

Category: assistance to a learner in the process of learning. This kind of assistance in the process of learning is limited to technical activities of TA. Most frequently it is writing

down the text into an exercise book of a learner, when the latter is not able to do it himself or herself: “...note-taking of lesson content into child’s exercise book”, when the pace of a learner is slow: “writing down the text to enable a child to catch up with other children”. In cases, when a child is unable to read the text on his or her own, the TA reads it to a child and, thus, performs a technical role of a note-taker or reader.

Category: transformation of information. In other cases, involvement of TA in the process of child’s learning is deeper. In such cases, when a learner due to insufficient cognitive powers is incapable of independent involvement in joint learning activities, the TA performs the role of a mediator between the learner and the teacher. During the lesson s/he “...explains teacher’s instructions”, “...retells tasks assigned by the teacher in a simple way”, in some situations “... it is necessary “to translate” everything to his/her (learner’s) language”. Thus, prerequisites for a learner to become a participant in joint learning activities are created. It is important to establish conditions for a self-dependent involvement of a school child in learning activities. The TAs stated that in cases, when learning materials are too complicated to a learner due specific learning disorders, they solve this problem increasing the accessibility of the content or assignments “...commenting: pictures, drawing, diagrams, other visual materials” when a child is unable to perceive visual information; “...to dictate the material presented by the teacher to enable a learner to write it down himself or herself” when a child faces difficulties in understanding of verbal information. Assistance of TAs is not unlimited and clearly determined by the boundaries of learner’s responsibility for own learning. The learners’ motivation to explore and discover is encouraged: “balance dosing assistance. To allow a child to achieve, try and learn himself or herself”. It is obvious that performing the role of support provider the TA aims to open up a learning space, rationally dosing assistance not to subdue learner’s self-dependence.

Category: though the main principle of assistance is to create conditions for a learner to better involve into joint learning activities, in some cases TA assistance oversteps the boundaries of the role of learning mediator and, under supervision of the teacher, directly intervenes into the process of learning pursuing to consolidate learners’ knowledge and abilities. TA works individually with a learner providing him or her with conditions for accumulation of powers for involvement in joint educational activities. The need for assistance is identified observing learner’s progress and focussing on strengthening of learner’s self-dependence “...support penetrating into the study subject, which causes biggest challenge” or “...reminding of spelling rules, when mistakes are repeatedly made”. The harmony between the way and place of education gains utmost importance in such activities. In certain cases seeking to provide more efficient support, the TA may work with a learner in separate premises “...teaching Lithuanian: reading aloud, phonic analysis of words, explanation of meanings of words, comprehension of the main idea of the text” or chooses the most accessible technique of learning “illustration of mathematical solutions”, “...use of abundance of examples”. Sometimes it is enough only “...to explain teacher’s instructions”. The research data also disclosed that TA activities are not restricted only to time allocated to lessons. When necessary, the work may be continued after the lessons are over and, thus, time of child’s learning with an educator is prolonged. The teaching assistants stated that after lessons “.....they explain < > using additional aids”, “complete unfinished assignments...”. A particularly important role of TA was revealed developing learners’ skills of targeted learning. Helping learners to reach higher level of achievements, the TAs aim to enable their learners to adopt learning strategies: “Most frequently learners have to be taught to learn: how to use content, schemes, tables of textbooks, computers” and strategies of self-management “to teach a child to analyse own efforts and to seek progress”, “to encourage motivation for learning during lessons”. TA support is not limited to enhancement of a specific learning episode but attempts are made to create conditions for long-term success of a learner.

Category: maintenance of working capacity in the process of learning. TA support is multi-sided. There are attempts to achieve higher quality of learner’s participation in learning activities enhancing pupil’s body powers. For example, this is done controlling the body posture “...*correction of the spine position sitting (failure to maintain balance)*”, strengthening and developing fine motor skills “*to develop coordination of fingers, to enable better use pen, pencil or ruler*”. Compensation of consequences of reduced functions is particularly important to TAs and this embraces attempts to maintain learner’s volitional attention in the process of learning “*to maintain child’s attention completing assignments*” or to help restore information and to help a child to orient in situation, when child’s memory is disturbed: “*to help a child remember what s/he has to do now, where to go, when a child faces problems of orientation in the space and time*”. TAs emphasise support, which contributes to maintenance of direction of child’s learning as well as motivation through continuous encouragement, praising and discussion of importance of learning.

Providing educational assistance, the roles performed by TAs trespass the boundaries of elementary help to complete the task. The reference point of the role performed by the TA includes maintenance of learners’ cognitive and physical functions and encouragement of their motivation for learning. Selecting forms of support to a learner, the TA ground it on the idea of creation of conditions for learner’s independent involvement in the process of education.

Another direction of the TA activities in this dimension is assistance in organising learning activities (Table 2). This role of the TA is linked with support to the teacher.

Table 2. *Engagement of teaching assistant in organisation of education.*

Activity description	Sub-category of activities	Category of activities
<i>Collaboration with teachers regarding issues of organisation of education</i>	Collaboration regarding issues of child’s education and care	Professional interaction
<i>Collaboration with parents regarding issues of health care</i>		
<i>Mediation of child, teacher, parents and peers</i>	Mediation	
<i>Development of teaching aids</i>	Provision with teaching aids	Attention to teaching resources
<i>Application of teaching aids</i>		
<i>Support to the learner using aids</i>	Increase in efficiency of use of teaching aids	
<i>Support to the teacher in the classroom</i>	Increase in efficiency of teacher’s activity	

Category: professional interaction. The TA emphasises the need of continuous collaboration with the teacher and learner’s parents, which embraces various areas of education. Appropriate didactic solutions are also important in TA’s activities. They are made collaborating and discussing with the teacher and specialists “...*regarding teaching techniques*”, “...*regarding the nature of needed support*”. Professional interaction of the TA is focused on the establishment of educational relation with the learner, what is achieved through continuous analysis of learner’s progress together with the teacher “*after each lesson to overview learner’s results and to monitor learner’s progress together*”. The considerations of TA reflect constant relation with child’s parents. Most frequently this communication is related to learner’s “*health condition...*” The TAs identify own role of a mediator between “...*child, teacher, parents and peers*”, which is revealed in various school situations.

Category: attention to teaching resources. In the activities of education organisation the roles of the TA are not limited to provision of support directly to the learner or the teacher. Under supervision of the teacher, they also perform the function of the provider of educational resources. They collaborate with the teachers regarding development “...*of teaching aids*” and

“...adaptation of teaching materials to possibilities of learner”, choice of appropriate learning place for a pupil; use of efficient teaching aids: “...to prepare for a lesson”, “...to arrange aids”, “...to open a book in the necessary place”. The research data show that the roles of TA increase efficiency of learner’s activities in the classroom because implementing specific instructions of teachers aim“to help the teacher to manage” to attain all the goals of education and include all the school learners into the process of education.

Dimension 2. Teaching assistant as a provider of psychological support to a child.

The research results also revealed that educational support of TAs frequently grow into psychological support to a child with special educational needs (Table 3).

Table 3. *Psychological support of teaching assistants*

Activity description	Sub-category of activities	Category of activities
<i>Development of courage</i>	Development of self-confidence	Maintenance of psychological balance of a learner
<i>Encouragement of coping with difficulties</i>		
<i>Support coping with emotions</i>		
<i>Teaching to communicate</i>	Development of successful communication	
<i>Development of self-awareness</i>		
<i>Immediate cognition of a learner</i>	Establishment of immediate relation with a learner	Creation of favourable psychological environment
<i>Emphatic communication</i>		
<i>Maintenance of emotional stability</i>	Assurance of emotional safety	
<i>Development of safe environment</i>		
<i>On-call duty seeking to provide support on time</i>		

Category: maintenance of psychological balance of a learner. Communicating with the learner, the TA allocates a lot of attention to development of child’s self-confidence. They emphasise such actions as “*continuous encouragement of a child*”, “...praises” and “...encouragement after failure” in particular. The efforts of TA “...to encourage” and “...to help a child to remain himself or herself” are obvious. TAs speak to learners not only to enable them to cope with unfavourable psychological situations but also to teach a learner to self-dependently manage them: “*conversations with them about how they feel, what they like, what is important to them (in this way children learn to express own emotions and to share with others)*”. Such conversations not only support him or her but also create psychological environment, which is favourable to a child.

Category: creation of favourable psychological environment. TA particularly appreciate and seek immediate relation with a learner “...to gain child’s trust and to maintain contact with a child”. To achieve this, simple but deep forms of communication are chosen “...to listen to a learner and to understand him/her” and “...to support a child...”. “*Good knowledge of learner: awareness of strengths and weaknesses, identification of anxiety fears*” is of significance to TAs. Having established an intermediate and human relation, “*compassion*” and “*child’s support*” are actualised. Analysing own activities, the TAs lay a specific emphasis on assurance of child’s emotional safety. They seek this providing multi-sided assistance in “...coping with various fears” and “...excitation”, endeavouring “*to reduce child’s internal tension using various techniques*”. The TAs point out that their psychological support is necessary “*in the situations, where children are exposed to insecurity: they are afraid of quizzes, lack self-confidence, are angry with somebody, feel humiliated or disappointed, lack physical safety*”.

The immediate relation created by the TA with a child not only provides psychological safety to a learner with special educational needs but also forms child’s ability to perceive and manage in various life situations.

Dimension 3. Teaching assistant as a provider of social assistance.

While analysing own activities, TAs highlight pro-active actions developing learner’s social skills and creating safe social environment (Table 4).

Table 4. *Social support provided by teaching assistants.*

Activity description	Sub-category of activities	Category of activities
<i>Support for eating</i>	Support for self-care	Development of social skills
<i>Support for toileting</i>		
<i>Teaching to eat</i>	Teaching of self-care skills	
<i>Teaching to dress up</i>		
<i>Encouragement of child’s self-dependence for self-care</i>		
<i>Encouragement of communication</i>	Development of communication skills	Development of interpersonal interaction
<i>Teaching to understand real life</i>		
<i>Teaching to cope with conflict situations</i>	Teaching to manage interpersonal relations	
<i>Teaching to manage interpersonal situations</i>		
<i>Teaching of self-control in interpersonal relations</i>		
<i>Support to children without special needs for understanding of SEN people</i>	Supervision	Creation of safe social environment
<i>Care</i>		
<i>Protection during free time</i>		
<i>Readiness to help when necessary</i>	Controlling of indefiniteness of situations	

Category: development of social skills. It is obvious that the TA performs the role of social worker helping a child in daily self-service and self-help situations: to eat, to dress up and to toilet. However, this assistance is not limited only to completion of specific action. The TAs are engaged in education and development of a child and seek to teach him/her to perform self-service and self-help actions independently. This is done in daily school life situations and TAs seek: “...to teach a child to use knife and fork in the canteen”, “...to differentiate the left shoe from the right one”, “...to grope buttons and to attempt to button clothes up”. Involvement into child’s daily life situations allows TAs to observe his or her abilities of participation in community life. Helping children in this area, the TA assumes an important role in the processes of encouragement of child’s social inclusion.

Category: development of interpersonal interaction. TAs are active helpers to a child establishing and learning to create interpersonal relations with other school learners. Complex processes emerge in this interaction; therefore, support in “daily matters, communicating with others” grows into ability to manage interaction education: “encouragement of child’s communication” and into teaching “to understand humour”. TAs state that “disabled children understand the world in their own way; that is why they have to learn to solve conflict situations with other learners, to defend oneself, to cope with bullying, to remain pleasant when others are not so kind”. The success of SEN learner’s interpersonal interaction depends not only on their ability to communicate but also on the attitude of other school learners, their disposition and ability to understand a disabled person. The research results show that the TA is a participant in education, who helps “...class mates to accept a child as s/he is” and if a learner needs support, to enable him/her “...to cope with stress situations communicating with peers and surrounding people”. Such actions of TA develop interaction skills of not only SEN learners but also those of school children without them.

Social safety becomes particularly important to a SEN learner. The TAs intensively discuss the role of social environment creator.

Category: creation of safe social environment. The learners obtain social security, when a TA is always near the child in care while observing their activity and providing support, when the need for it emerges due to learner’s incapability of performing a certain

action or due to indefiniteness of situations. Therefore, the TAs set themselves an objective “*to be always nearby to be able to serve if necessary*”. Unexpected support is frequently needed in learners’ interpersonal relations. The TAs state that they help a learner “*to cope with stress situations related to communication with the peers, in the canteen, with surrounding people and while self-servicing*”. Such school learners often encounter difficulties in adaptation to the form community. This is one of the reasons for social insecurity. In such situations the TAs see themselves in the role of provider of support “*for child’s adaptation in the classroom*”. They do it maintaining immediate relation with the learner “*simply speaking with a child to teach him or her to express own feelings, emotions, to calm down, to perceive what is allowed and what is not acceptable*”. Thus, safe psychosocial environment is maintained and a child is taught to create environment through experiential learning.

Dimension 4. Teaching assistant as a provider of physical support to a learner. The TAs intensively discuss physical support to a SEN learner. According to the intensity of supporting statements, this kind of assistance is relevant but the variety of activities in this area is not wide. The statements that reveal this role are abstracted into two categories and reflect technical support to the learner (Table 5).

Table 5. *Physical assistance of teaching assistant.*

Activity description	Sub-category of activities	Category of activities
<i>Support for self-service</i>	Satisfaction of self-help needs	Satisfaction of self-service needs
<i>Support for dressing up</i>		
<i>Support for eating</i>		
<i>Help in toilet</i>	Satisfaction of physiological needs	
<i>Preparation for a lesson</i>	Movement in learning environment	Satisfaction of movement needs
<i>Moving to classrooms</i>		
<i>Moving outside school for educational goals</i>		
<i>Carrying of objects</i>	Physical compensation	
<i>Compensation of disorder “I am their eyes”</i>		
<i>Creation of physical safety</i>		

Category: satisfaction of self-service needs. This kind of assistance is provided to learners with motor disability. TAs help learners to get on and off clothes, to put on shoes, to arrange things and to prepare learning aids for a lesson. Support targeted at satisfaction of learner’s physiological needs: to eat, when a child is not able to do it self-dependently and to use toilet is also relevant.

Category: satisfaction of movement needs. The TAs emphasise assistance of two kinds: movement in learning environment and compensation of disturbed movements or functions. TA’s support to learners with motor disability is particularly important preparing for a lesson. They help their learners: “*... to sit at the desk*”, “*to prepare learning aids for a lesson*”. The discussions of TAs emphasise the role of “an attendant”, which includes assistance in moving in the school premises “*taking a learner to subject classrooms*”, “*accompanying to circles (non-formal education classes – remark by author)*”, “*transportation of learners in a wheelchair from/to the bus*”. The TA helps a learner to reach certain school premises if s/he is not able to do it self-dependently. The function of attendant extends beyond the school boundaries, when educational activities leave school premises (“*assistance during trips and excursions*”). Accompanying learners from one classroom to another, the TA performs the function of carrying learners’ aids and other necessary things.

Providing physical support to learners, the TA also creates situations of physical safety to children in a direct or indirect way: “*I am their eyes*”, “*assurance of physical safety in the corridors*“. It is interesting that TAs’ reflections clearly express perception that it is

particularly important to provide school learners with freedom of actions and even in cases, when their self-dependence is limited. Such tendency is reflected in the statement “*to be together or nearby during trips*”. This confirms a close and immediate relation with the school students in care.

Discussion and conclusions.

The results of this research reveal that the role of TA providing support to a SEN learner is particularly multifaceted. It embraces all the spheres of learner’s involvement into the process of education from general assistance in self-help and participation to subtle processes of personality education. The results of this research prove the statements of K. L. Lane, E. W. Carter, L. Sisco (2012) that support of TA has impact on school students’ self-dependence in all the dimensions of self-determination: choosing, determination, problem-solution, setting of goals and its attainment, self-representation and leadership, self-regulation, self-cognition and self-awareness. The results of this research show that in a targeted way TAs seek not only to help a learner to take part in the process of education but also to enable him to become as self-dependent and active in the community. The reason for activity focus is not only implementation of planned and previously intended activities but also interaction that emerges in socio-pedagogical interplay, which leads to close personal relation with the learner in care.

Seeking to identify what roles are emphasised by teaching assistants in their professional activities, the taxonomy of development of support to school students, where the boundaries of general support are extended and the TA enters into personalised relation with the school learner in care, was revealed (Figure 1).

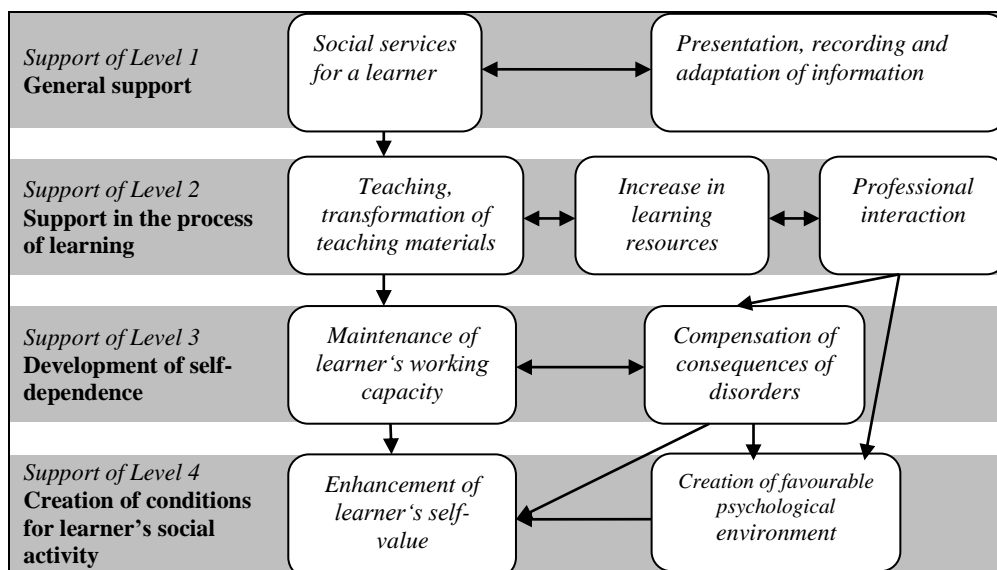


Figure 1. Taxonomy of development of teaching assistant’s support to a learner

Level 1. General support. Performing the role of general support provider to a learner, the TA helps him/her physically self-service, read or write down teaching material and adapt it to a learner when asked by the teacher. Simultaneously, the TA observes child’s efforts, learning powers and encountered difficulties. Thus, under influence of self-determination, internal and external motivation is conditioned, which promotes pursuit of psychological welfare (Deci, Ryan, 2008). External motivation, i.e., joint efforts of participants in education to achieve high educational outcomes, and internal one, i.e., empathy and sympathy, determine the efforts of the TAs not to limit themselves to instantaneous help but to look for solutions to ensure sustainability of the achieved results.

Level 2. Support in the learning process. The activities of TAs are incorporated into the general process of education. They become teacher's partners, who not only carry out instructions but also act as mediators, advisers and makers of certain decisions for a child. Helping learners to carry out tasks assigned by the teacher, transforming the teaching material into the form or level acceptable to a learner, developing teaching aids, constantly communicating with teachers and learner's parents, the teaching assistants penetrate into individuality of child's educational powers, evaluate efficiency of socio-educational means, reflect learning activities and forecast long-term result.

Level 3. Development of self-dependence. Child's cognition not only in the process of teaching but also in all the school life situations broadens the goals of the TA's activities and extends them far beyond the academic achievements only. School student's independence is particularly actualised in the context of support to a learner. His or her education becomes one of non-formal, voluntarily adopted goals of the TAs. L. Vygotsky's theory on dysontogenesis (1984) prioritises the social competence development of a SEN child employing all his/her psychical powers. The TAs confirm this presenting priorities of own practical activities. Maintaining learners' working capacity and compensating consequences of disorders employing a variety of means, they increase integration possibilities of these school students and their support moves to another level.

Level 4. Creation of conditions for learner's social activity. Constantly provided support by the TA to learners may lead to twofold outcomes. On the one hand, it creates conditions for learner's participation in the process of education together with other school students; on the other hand, such a learner may get accustomed to relying on support from outside and, thus, his/her may lead to reduction of the level of self-dependence. The TA considers those outcomes and aims to create the environment, which determines learner's social activity. Ensuring psychological, social and physical safety, enhancing learner's self-value and developing their self-confidence, they encourage their learners not to get accustomed to support but, on the contrary, stimulate their need to play an active role employing possessed powers.

Generalising it can be stated that in the system of inclusive education the activities performed by the teaching assistant not only include a versatile support to a learner but also plays a significant role in personality education.

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the roles of teaching assistants in the discourse of support to a learner. The analysis of teaching assistants' reflections of own activities revealed four areas of activities, where efforts of teaching assistants are concentrated to enable successful education of special needs learners: educational support, physical assistance, psychological support and social support. The conducted deeper analysis in the aforesaid areas disclosed the multi-dimensionality of teaching assistants' support and its influence not only on learning efficiency of learners but also on maturity of their personality.