Support for children with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive classrooms, in many countries, continues to be provided by teaching assistants (TAs). Whilst they frequently take responsibility for instruction, they are rarely adequately trained and prepared for this important role. As a result, their practice can have unintended negative consequences for the learner (Radford et al., 2011). Given the mounting evidence that interactions are at the heart of successful inclusion, what is now needed is further detail regarding the talk when students are directly supported by a TA. As TAs have ample opportunities for individualised and group interactions, our earlier work has shown that scaffolding is a helpful theory to inform their practice (Radford et al., 2014). Crucially, principles of the scaffolding role include how TAs could promote learner independence and fade their support in order to ensure that the learner is taking responsibility.

The current project drew on audio and video recordings from three TA projects of naturalistic interactions in the UK. Episodes of TA scaffolding were purposefully selected from both mathematics and literacy lessons. The analytical approach used the ethno-methodological procedures of conversation analysis. Three distinctive scaffolding roles emerged from the analysis. First, a support role was apparent that served a range of supportive functions. This included maintaining learner engagement, motivation, promoting good listening and on-task behaviour. Secondly, a repair role emerged that helps learners to find solutions for themselves when they are in difficulty. For example, this was accomplished through prompting students to self-repair their errors. Finally, a heuristic role materialised that encouraged students to use their own learning strategies to solve problems. The three roles are formalised into a theoretical model of scaffolding for TAs. The presentation will conclude with the implications of the model for trainers and managers and how teachers can support TAs in implementing each role.
