

APPRECIATING THE CONTRIBUTION OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS (TAs)

**A STUDY OF TAs' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR SUPPORT FOR PUPILS
IDENTIFIED AS HAVING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES
(SEND), USING AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY (AI) APPROACH**

by

JULIE ANN COZENS

**A thesis submitted to The University of Birmingham in part fulfilment of the
Degree of PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
(Ed Psych D)**

**School of Education
The University of Birmingham
March 2014**

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ABSTRACT

TAs comprise a substantial proportion of the staff in both primary and secondary schools and occupy a key role in the support of pupils identified as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), (Webster *et al* 2011). Much previous research about their role has assumed that TAs can and do make a positive contribution and has focused on the identification of best practice. However, recent findings have questioned these assumptions, suggesting that TAs have a negative impact on pupil progress, and offering possible explanations for this (notably Blatchford *et al* 2009b). The present study examines descriptions offered by TAs about their work obtained during focus group interviews. An Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach is adopted as a framework for the research (Reed 2007) with a focus on what they do well and on what would help to move their work forward. Interview data are subjected to a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). Findings offer a view that TAs provide a vital role in enabling pupils to cope in mainstream schools; that they provide a uniquely personal and holistic view of the pupil's needs in school and that relationships and communication are central to the success and development of their work.

DEDICATION

To my daughter Lia and husband Graeme, for their patience, understanding and support while I was working on my doctorate and for Graeme's help with formatting. Also to my Mum, for her love and encouragement and in memory of my Dad, who I think would be proud.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Jane Yeomans, my tutor at Birmingham University for her support and advice. Thanks also to Liz Hawkins, for her support and for arranging a venue for the research. And thanks to the dedicated TAs who gave up their time to take part in the study.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis has been written in accordance with the requirements of the part time Professional Doctorate for practising educational psychologists, (Ed. Psych. D) at Birmingham University. The Structure of the doctorate has involved two initial years requiring the completion of 4 taught modules, each including attendance at a series of seminars and the completion of a related assignment. Areas of study as part of the doctorate have included mental health, inclusive education, community psychology and raising attainment, all with particular reference to the implications of the issues for the professional practice of educational psychologists (EPs). Two research modules and assignments were also completed, one a highly theoretical and abstract exploration of researcher identity and epistemology and the other a more practical focus on research design in education. From the third year, there has been a narrowed focus on a particular area for research, which forms the basis of the thesis. During the first 4 years of the doctorate including the period of data gathering for the thesis I was working as a local authority EP. I then left the local authority and was working on an independent basis during the final writing up of the thesis. The research was self-funded and was not directly influenced by local authority policies or requirements.

I trained as an educational psychologist at Nottingham University, completing a one year Masters course in 1998/99. At the time that I embarked on the professional doctorate I had been working as an educational psychologist for 9 years, having been employed in two local authorities, one in the midlands and one in the south west of England. I developed a strong interest and focus on Dyslexia during this time

having been involved in policy and practice developments in both of the services where I worked, but was keen to focus on something different for an area of doctoral research. I had worked extensively with TAs, both as individuals in discussions about the needs of particular pupils, and as groups in training sessions focusing on range of areas from literacy interventions to behaviour management. From this work I had become interested in the role and contribution of TAs, particularly in relation to their support for pupils identified as having SEND.

My experience had led me to develop a view of the EP as consultant rather than expert and to view my contribution as one of facilitating helpful processes and of working collaboratively with school staff and others involved in the care and development of children. I lean towards what may be described as a social constructionist perspective, valuing the unique insights individuals bring to situations, rather than an approach that seeks to label, to establish generalisable truths and 'right ways' of solving problems, in a social and educational context.

The focus and rationale for the research

This study is focused on exploring with Teaching Assistants (TAs) how they effectively support pupils identified as having SEND; ways of conceptualizing this type of support and how their practice could be further developed.

The research involves talking with TAs to gain their perspectives on how they support individual pupils effectively. In order to encourage a focus on specific activities and interactions the focus is on those TAs whose role it is to support a particular pupil identified as having SEND, and on how they do this with classroom activities and around school. It aims to consider, through collaboration with the

teaching assistants themselves, what sorts of tasks, interactions and relationships this work involves and how these may contribute to the pupil's progress and inclusion. It aims to explore how this area of teaching assistants' work could be helpfully conceptualised and how it might be taken forward and further developed in the future.

My reasons for selecting this area for research reflect my own professional work and very positive experiences of working with TAs, and current critical trends in the research which seemed to be at odds with my own perceptions of this particular group of staff. I was intrigued and disturbed by findings that seemed so negative in their evaluation of a group with which I had experienced such rewarding interactions both in consultations about particular pupils and during training. I chose to write one of my doctorate assignments about Teaching Assistants' support for pupils, from the perspective of mediated learning theories, and this furthered my interest in the area.

Teaching Assistants (TAs) provide a key role in the support of pupils identified as having special educational needs. In my work as an educational psychologist I have found that TAs are often passionate about their work, keen to effect positive change and that they often develop close relationships with and detailed working knowledge of the pupils they support.

In spite of this, the status of teaching assistants in school is often low and this has been reflected in their pay and career structures. Recent research, most notably that of Blatchford *et al.* (2009b) has questioned the efficacy of TAs and in much of the literature they are treated as passive subjects rather than active participants. I was thus motivated to carry out research that aims to give a voice to TAs and to utilize their expert knowledge of the pupils they support and of their own learning context.

In the counties in which I worked as an educational psychologist, the additional resourcing provided when a statement of special need is issued usually focuses on the specification of a set number of weekly hours of teaching assistant support for the pupil. Yet the conclusions from recent literature call into question the routine allocation of such support for the neediest pupils, or at least the assumption that this *in itself* is sufficient.

In my own local authority there is an expectation that the educational psychologist will meet with school staff following the allocation of 'exceptional arrangements' (where additional funding is given to the school to meet a pupil's needs) to discuss how the detail in the pupil's statement can be translated into effective practical support in school. My research aims to inform this discussion by questioning and clarifying what constitutes effective TA support from the perspective of TAs.

The present study relates to recent political questions about the role of TAs in schools more generally and in particular, debates about their appropriate deployment and the extent to which they make a positive contribution. Rather than seeking explanations for why they are not promoting pupil progress, my research aims to ask different questions, taking a positive, collaborative approach that aims to illuminate the activity of TAs when they support pupils in school, to explore from the perspective of TAs what is working well, and how to develop this work further.

Research aims:

The aims of my research may be summarised as follows.

Substantive Aims:

To identify what TAs describe as key factors regarding:

- effective aspects of their support for pupils identified as having SEND and
- ways in which their work might be improved and developed.

Theoretical Aims:

- To add the voice of TAs to current literature regarding the impact of their support for pupils identified as having SEND

Methodological Aims:

- To utilise an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach that seeks to explore with TAs what is important in their work, what is working well, and how this may be developed.
- To use focus group interviews as a way of facilitating a collaborative and discursive situation for data collection.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study have emerged from issues of both content and process arising in the literature as will be discussed in Chapter 3. Much of the research on effectiveness raises concerns about the extent to which additional support for pupils identified as having SEND may be limiting the pupil's thinking processes, preventing contact with teachers and peers, and fostering over-

dependency on adult support. Whilst there are implicit assumptions about what constitutes poor practice in much of this research, there is lacking detail about what might constitute effective practice here. Much of the research focuses on whether, or to what extent TAs are effective, rather than examining, from a more appreciative perspective, what they do well, and has tended to be from the perspective of outside researchers, rather than from active collaboration with the TAs themselves.

The following research questions provide a focus for the present study:

- What do TAs describe as the most effective and positive aspects of their support for pupils identified as having SEND?
- How do they conceptualise their contribution to pupils' progress?
- In what terms do they describe ideal practice in their work?
- What do they suggest would increase their contribution to pupil progress?

Definition and use of terms and acronyms used in the study

Teaching Assistant (TA)

This is the term used to refer to the participants in the study. It is acknowledged that a number of terms have been applied to the professional group in question over time, in different parts of the country and to refer to subtly different foci in their work. Classroom Assistants, Ancillary Staff and Learning Support Assistants are examples. The term Teaching Assistants, and the acronym TA is used throughout this study, referring to those adults employed in school to work with pupils identified as requiring

individualised support. One reason that the term TA is used is because it seems to be the preferred term in recent research literature and in recent debates relating to this theme (see for example Blatchford et al 2009; Balshaw 2011; Fletcher Campbell 2011). More importantly, it is the name by which the participants involved in the study refer to themselves, being the commonly used term in the learning community of schools where the research took place.

Thematic Analysis

The term thematic analysis, the approach used for data analysis, is used in full throughout the study, avoiding the commonly used acronym TA that may be confused with the acronym for Teaching Assistant.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

This term is now in common parlance since it was used in the government's green paper support and aspiration; a new approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability (2011) and in related documentation relating to the forthcoming Children and Families Bill. It is acknowledged that the term is not un-controversial and that there are particular problems with the unquestioning presentation of the idea that pupils 'have' SEND or not. Debates about whether SEND may focus on a within –person view and the extent to which the term is socially constructed are peripheral to this study, but I have nevertheless attempted to be careful in my use of language. I have used the term SEND in the title of the study to highlight that it refers to TAs who were employed at least for part of their time in school to support a particular pupil and that

the TAs were asked for the purpose of the study to have in mind a particular pupil that they support. In discussion I have taken care to refer to 'pupils *identified as* having SEND'. Elsewhere, the pupils are referred to simply as 'the pupil or pupils that the TA(s) supports'.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE TA ROLE

Chapter Overview

This chapter considers the historical and political context in which the role of the TA has developed and expanded and from which TAs have become a subject for critical attention. The agenda for inclusive education will be placed as central here. Recent initiatives to raise standards, including the development of paraprofessionals of the workforce in schools (and other public services) and attempts to reduce teacher workload are also presented as important drivers of the development and expansion of the TA role.

The agenda for Inclusive Education

The work of TAs has been described as central to the agenda for inclusion (e.g. Lacey 2001). However, inclusion is not easily defined. Florian (1998) identifies no fewer than eleven subtly different definitions. Some descriptions focus on change within the school system, 'a move towards extending the scope of 'ordinary schools so they can include a greater diversity of children' (Clarke *et al* 1995); others emphasise attitude, 'an inclusive schools is one that is accepting of all pupils' (Thomas 1997) and some make specific reference to the curriculum, either as one that should be all-encompassing 'doing the same lessons as the other pupils and it mattering if you are not there' (Hall 1995); or as one that 'responds to pupils as individuals' (Sebba 1996). Lindsay (2003) summarises that the term inclusion is problematic because 'it is not a simple unambiguous concept'. A key distinction evident in the literature is one that considers the difference between the terms 'integration' and 'inclusion'. For Thomas (1997) the term integration focuses on the movement of pupils from one place to another, whereas inclusion is concerned with

the changes in mainstream schools to accommodate diversity. Topping and Maloney (2005) highlight what they call 'expanding concepts of inclusion' that extend over four levels from 'the presence of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in mainstream schools', through to the idea of 'all children, parents and the community equally achieving and participating in lifelong learning in many forms in and out of school and college'. If the role of TAs is central to these ambiguous and debated ideas, it is unlikely to be so in a clear and straightforward way.

Thomas Walker and Webb (1998) trace the origins of thinking about inclusive education back to the turn of the twentieth century. They note that the ideas became lost to the science of psychometrics and even eugenics, strands of thinking that became dominant in the first half of the 1900s and which focused on the identification of 'misfits'. This led to an education system based on 'categorisation of the child'. Within this climate, the 1944 Education Act identified ten categories of handicap for which segregated schools would offer specialist provision.

The following shift in thinking away from this segregated approach to education may be viewed against the backdrop of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 70s that questioned the social exclusion of certain groups. From the perspective of educational psychology, this also represented a time of 'reconstruction' within the profession. A group of educational psychologists (EPs), considered to be radical at the time, were questioning the whole system of special schooling and were highly critical of the traditional role of Educational Psychology, and its focus on measuring and classifying children, (e.g. Loxley 1978), a role which had been vital to the old system of segregation.

The Warnock report of 1978 and the resulting 1981 Education Act argued for the general principle of integration for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs, getting rid of the old categories of handicap and marking the beginnings of a growing shift, in theory and in legislation at least, towards a broad aim of mainstream education for all. As this aim gained momentum, the role of the TA emerged as central to the notion of the additional support required for its implementation.

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994) underlined an ethical dimension to this shift, adding moral weight by emphasising the rights of all children to education and proclaiming that 'those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting those needs'. This gave rise to the emergence of another key distinction within the literature, between arguments for inclusion based on *rights* (e.g. Thomas 1997) and those for inclusion based on *efficacy* (e.g. Ainscow 1997). Topping and Maloney (2005) summarise the situation regarding the research on efficacy as follows:

'the evidence suggests that any differences in outcomes for children with special needs between special and mainstream schools are small, but tend to favour mainstream school, in terms of both educational attainments and social integration' (p.7).

Arguably, the growing emphasis on rights also had the effect of silencing much of any argument against inclusion, although there is evidence of what has been termed a more 'cautious' or 'responsible' approach to inclusion (Evans and Lunt 2002), focusing on the rights of individuals to an appropriate education and arguing that there is a small minority for whom mainstream schooling would not be appropriate.

These views gained support when a pamphlet published in 2005 by Baroness Mary Warnock, the author of the 1978 Report expressed regret that the move towards inclusion had resulted in a system where children can become 'casualties' of a system that ignores their individual needs.

TAs may thus find themselves at the heart of tensions around not just the definition of inclusion but about the perceived benefits and value of inclusive education.

In 1997 the New Labour Government published its Green Paper *Excellence for all Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs* (DfEE, 1997), setting out its plans for the following 5 years. Here a commitment to inclusion was underlined 'we want to see more pupils with SEN included within mainstream primary and secondary schools' (page 43) and a continuing role for TAs 'the contribution of LSAs is central to successful SEN practice' (page 60).

As Lyndsay (2003) notes, the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (1996; revised 2001) subscribed to the view that pupils should be educated in mainstream schools 'unless this would be incompatible with the wishes of the parent; or the provision of effective education for other children'.

Yet it is an oversimplification to suggest that legislation and the social climate was moving uni-directionally towards the support and promotion of inclusion. It may be argued that other parallel developments focusing on targets, competition, academic standards and league tables may have worked against the move towards more inclusive education (Dyson, Howes and Roberts, 2002). I think it is also possible that legislation explicitly promoting the ideals of inclusion on the one hand, may have inadvertently hindered its cause. Indeed the Code of Practice has arguably re-

created a concern in schools with practices of identification and categorisation, and a focus on within –child deficits. While ostensibly aimed at securing appropriate support and effective inclusion, this may actually work against the principles of inclusion in practice. O’ Gorman and Drudy (2010) note that these practices bring with them an associated perception of a need for specialist knowledge, causing teachers to view some pupil’s needs as being outside the boundaries of their expertise.

This may recreate a culture in which the focus remains on identifying misfits and continues to promote what Lewis and Norwich (2005) call the ‘fallacy’ that there are particular, specialist methods of supporting and teaching some pupils that are different from those that work with the majority. As Gerschel (2003) comments, ‘it may be that the term ‘special educational needs’ is no longer helpful, reflecting a within-child or medical model to planning’. Within this, the support of TAs may be seen to tread a thin line between facilitating the inclusion of pupils and singling them out as different.

There has been a growing medically-orientated terminology to describe pupils’ difficulties. For example, in relation to social emotional and communication difficulties the terms Asperger’s syndrome, Conduct Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder are all commonly used in school staffrooms (Slee 1995). Linked to this idea, of children who present behaviour difficulties, Swinson, Woof and Melling (2003) observe that many teachers believe: ‘that they lack the skills to deal with such children; and consequently, that there must be some special school or unit that has the necessary skills and abilities to provide a solution to these problems’.

Whilst teachers have been found to ‘welcome the support and flexibility that the presence of an additional adult gave them, to bring about inclusive practices’ (Cajkler and Tennant 2007), they may see the expertise of TAs for dealing with pupils who have complex needs as limited. TAs have thus found themselves at the centre of concerns that the most complex pupils are being supported by the least qualified (Blatchford *et al* 2009b).

Inclusive Education may be seen as an area where philosophical thought outpaces practice, highlighting what Sikes, Lawson and Parker (2007) call a ‘tension between an educational ideal and the day to day living of inclusion’. TAs are situated at the centre of this tension. Elliot (2007) notes the frequency with which ‘teachers complain that many education professionals who are most forceful in their advocacy of inclusion are those who do not carry the day-to-day burden of teaching’. This ‘burden’ for teachers may also represent difficulties for TAs who may be positive about inclusion in principle, but less certain about how it works in practice (Mackenzie 2011).

Arnold and Yeomans (2005) note the irony inherent in the assumption that teaching assistants are employed to assist in the inclusion of children asking ‘How many assistants themselves are included in the decision-making around their roles in schools? How many assistants are included in continuing professional development in an area of learning?’ (Arnold and Yeomans, 2005, page 28).

Raising standards in the classroom

Whilst TAs have been closely associated with the agenda for inclusive education, the TA role may also be seen to have emerged within a broader context of initiatives to

raise standards in education more generally. Arnold and Yeomans (2005) trace the origins of an assistant to the teacher back to the first prefects or *praeposters*, originally appointed to reduce brutality between children in the early nineteenth century, a role often taken by older pupils. They note that in 1900 68% of the teaching force lacked a formal teacher qualification (Evans 1985).

The first formal references to consistent additional classroom support staff appear in the Plowden Report (1967). As Aylen (2007) suggests, this report was visionary in its desire to see more adults in the class to help children. The term ‘teacher aides’ was used to describe what had previously been called ancillary staff and was presented as important in providing increased adult- pupil ratios in the classroom, within a child-centred approach to education. The report was also far-sighted in its recommendations for TAs ‘not just to wash paintbrushes, but to guide children through their talk, and therefore thinking, into work’, Aylen (2007) page 109. Later, TAs were closely associated with raising standards and supporting pupils within the literacy and numeracy hours that became statutory for schools as part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (DfEE 1998).

In 2003 Estelle Morris, the then Secretary of State for Education set out a vision whereby the workforce in schools would be ‘remodelled’ in order to raise standards, calling for ‘more adults in the classroom and more time for teachers to plan and assess children’s work’ (DFES 2003c 40). This has also been described in terms of a greater trend at that time for developing paraprofessional roles within public services more generally, for example the police force, in order to raise standards, whilst maintaining a policy of fiscal prudence (Bach, Kessler and Heron 2004).

Reducing Teacher Workload

A related factor in the development and expansion of TAs was the increasingly pressing issue for the government, of teachers' dissatisfaction with excessive workload. In 2003, following pressure from teaching unions there was a national agreement to ensure a reduction in the demands put on teachers, by reducing the administrative duties that teachers were expected to perform (Workload Agreement (DfES, 2003)). Increasing the in-class support available to teachers from TAs was one important element in this reform. However, the TA's part in this was not universally welcomed by teachers, representing another area of tension in which the TA role was uncomfortably situated. The NUT in particular expressed serious concerns about the threat to teaching from the employment of unqualified adults in the classroom. In 2004 the position of higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) was created. This was the equivalent of a National Vocational Qualification level 4 and enabled TAs to take on additional responsibilities. TAs increasingly did work that would previously have been the exclusive domain of teachers, such as teaching, planning and assessment and in the case of higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs), the covering of whole classes (Burgess and Shelton Mayes, 2007). This shifting of boundaries has continued to be controversial, prompting questions about what is and importantly what *should* be the role of the TA (Howes *et al.*, 2003; Cajkler *et al.*, 2007a; Blatchford *et al.*, 2009).

Their changing title over the years highlights shifts in perceptions over time about the purpose of the role, and suggests movement between the political contexts discussed, from 'ancillary support', 'teacher aide' (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967), 'non-teaching assistant' (NTA) and 'classroom assistant' (CA)

(Moyles & Suschitzky, 1997), to 'teaching assistant' (TA) and 'higher level teaching assistant' (HLTA) (Department for Education and Skills, 2003).

Whatever their title, there has been a dramatic rise in their number working in mainstream schools. Recent estimates note that the number of TAs has trebled since 1997 and that they now make up about a quarter of the entire school workforce – around 181,100 people (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF] 2009).

It remains to be seen whether the present coalition government will reconsider the role of TAs in their cost-cutting associated with austerity measures, in the ongoing agenda of raising standards in education, and in particular as part of their forthcoming reform of Special Educational Needs planned for September 2014.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have presented the emergence, development and expansion of the TA role as a response to certain key historical / political agendas: The inclusion of pupils identified as having SEND in mainstream schools; efforts to raise standards within the classroom, including a policy in the 1990s and early 2000s of developing paraprofessional roles within public services; and finally, as part of an attempt to address the problem of increasing teacher workload. Against the backdrop of these complex and often controversial contexts, recent research about TAs will now be examined.

CHAPTER 3: CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Overview

In order to position my research with Teaching Assistants (TAs) I have identified three broad themes within the research in this area. Taking each in turn I will provide an overview of what I see to be the current state of knowledge, and a critical summary of selected key texts related to each theme.

1. Clarifying the work of TAs

Here the developing roles of the TA will be explored, and research that has attempted to describe, clarify and categorise the role will be examined, both in general terms and within the particular context and focus of the present study, their support for pupils identified as having SEND.

2. The effectiveness and impact of TA support

This section will begin by examining research that is broadly positive about the contribution of TAs and then focus on the rise of an increasingly critical focus within the research that has questioned the efficacy of the support provided by TAs.

3. Views of TAs as a vulnerable group

Finally, the literature presenting TAs as a particularly vulnerable professional group with low status will be explored, including research that reflects a growing need to gain the views of TAs and to give TAs a voice.

Rationale for selection of texts

Searches utilizing the Birmingham University e-library resource and Google Scholar allowed a search of data bases within social sciences and education, using the terms *teaching assistants; learning support assistants; mainstream schools'* specifying articles published since 2000. This time-frame was chosen to reflect the political and contemporary nature of the issues and debates pertinent to the current role of TAs since their targeted expansion over the last decade or so. This search returned around 60 articles, the abstracts of which were considered. Articles were selected for closer examination if they related to one or more of the three strands particularly relevant to my planned research namely the role of TAs in relation to their support for pupils identified as having SEND; the effectiveness of TAs in this context and TA voice/ participation in research. The cited references of the papers were examined to identify further related texts to ensure that an overview of relevant research was being captured some of which dated back to the 1990s.

Clarifying the work of TAs

In 2001 the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) set up a Teaching Assistants Working Group (TAWG) to bring some clarity to a group loosely termed support staff in schools. This working party began to categorize support staff into three broad job roles:

- supporting pupils and teachers (such as special needs teaching assistants)
- supporting the curriculum (such as science and ICT technical staff)
- supporting the school (secretaries, bursars).

However, the boundaries between these categories were described as 'rather porous' (TAWG, 2001). The present study uses the term TAs and focuses primarily

on the first of these roles, whilst acknowledging a degree of overlap with the other two broad roles identified.

Even within this more specific group (those supporting pupils and teachers) there has been a lack of clarity around the TA role and this has been presented as a problem by many authors. For example, Moyles & Suschitzky (1997) talk of ‘an unresolved dilemma faced by all schools regarding the “old ancillary role” of classroom assistants in supporting teachers’ work, versus the new “teaching role” in supporting children’s learning’ (p. 5, para. 1.8), and this view continues to resonate. Kerry (2006) suggests that ‘neither the employment, nor the training, of TAs can be effective until the job itself is delineated in ways that help the employee and the employer to understand what precisely the term TA covers—and what it does not’ (page 382).

Kerry (2006) carried out a review of literature in an attempt to conceptualise TA work, and from this identified 11 key roles, presented in Figure 1.

<i>Role</i>	<i>Description</i>
Dogsbody (or pig ignorant peasant)	A role substantially limited to menial tasks, ‘the archetypal washer of paint pots’
Routine administrator, teacher’s PA	The role is to deal with the classroom paperwork, routine functions such as registers, low-level learning-related activities such as putting up displays, and running errands
Factotum	A versatile role carrying out the range of tasks assigned to the teacher’s PA, but with a routine requirement to go beyond those roles e.g. by supporting individual pupils, or class visits, minding the class while the teacher goes out of the room, marking work with answer book
Carer/Mentor	A support role that may or may not be in a special school environment, whose main concern is with welfare—physical or psychological

<i>Role</i>	<i>Description</i>
Behaviour Manager	A role involved with behaviour support with an individual or with groups, including monitoring and control, and dealing with parents in issues of pupil behaviour
Curriculum Supporter	The role is to identify, assemble and prepare curriculum materials and, in some cases, to revise curriculum documents and create new curriculum activities and planning
Ring Fenced Operative	A role requiring specialist training, such as a National Nursery Examination Board qualification, and confined to a specific phase or function in relation to that training
Delineated paraprofessional	A role operating in an environment where duties of teacher and support member are tightly codified, and where support and teaching tasks are hermetically sealed into separate functions
Teacher support and partial substitute	A role requiring a range of duties on behalf and under the guidance of the teacher: such as supporting the learning of individual pupils, marking, invigilation, substitution for absence, teaching small groups for short periods; without pretensions to 'teaching' 'whole classes' or reliance on trained skills
Mobile paraprofessional	Typified by the HLTA, the role requires a trained person who carries out a range of tasks traditionally associated with teaching, including teaching classes under supervision, against a background of professional training to a level below QTS

Figure1: The 11 key roles of TAs identified by Kerry (2006)

Kerry's (2006) study represents one interesting way of coding of the work of TAs that may be helpful in demonstrating the wide range of work that the TA role may encompass. However the extent to which these titles are valid as distinct roles and how far they are helpful as a way of understanding the work of TAs is questionable. For example, that the role of supporting individual pupils is subsumed into the rather vague 'factotum' role seems to overlook one of the key purposes for which the TA role has been developed. Kerry's (2006) categorization may also be seen as

somewhat disrespectful in its tone referring as it does to ‘dogsboddy’ and ‘pig ignorant peasant’ (even if some TAs have chosen to describe their roles in this way) and to the notion of having ‘pretensions’ to teaching. This highlights issues of status, considered later in this chapter.

The *Deployment and impact of support staff in schools* (DISS study) (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, Martin, Russell, Webster and Rubie-Davies, 2009) represents the largest and most comprehensive study of TAs to date. It comprised two parts, the first of which was to describe the work of TAs and the second to evaluate the impact of TAs. (The study will be examined and reviewed in more detail in the following section, in relation to its findings about the second of these aims).

As an investigation into what TAs do, this large scale, longitudinal research provides an informative and comprehensive picture of TA work under everyday conditions. It found that TAs spend over half their working day in a direct instructional (pedagogical) role with pupils, as evidenced in time-logs (workload diaries).

Structured observations suggested that TA-to-pupil interactions tend to be with individual pupils (82%) or small groups of up to five pupils (85%). Observations showed that primary TAs tended to support groups, whilst TAs in secondary schools worked mainly with individuals. It was found that pupils were nine times more likely to engage in what the authors term ‘sustained interactions’ with TAs than with teachers (44% vs. 5%) (Webster *et al* 2011 page 11). Here ‘sustained’ means that the pupil was the focus of the TA’s attention for longer than the length of the observation interval (ten seconds). Pupils were six times more likely to be actively involved in their interactions with TAs (63%) than with teachers (11%), ‘active’ involvement referring to the pupil beginning to respond to, or sustaining an interaction with an adult, during the period of the observation interval. In contrast, for

the vast majority of their interactions with teachers, pupils were one of a crowd (87%). (Webster *et al* 2011, page 11). The findings also showed that TAs tended to interact with pupils identified as having special education needs, more than teachers did and that interactions increased the greater the level of identified need of the pupil, as shown in table 2:3.

	Teacher	TA
Non-SEN	55%	27%
School Action	24%	32%
School Action Plus or SEN statement	21%	41%

Figure 2: Observed interaction by pupil level of SEN (from Webster *et al* 2011)

Providing direct support for pupils who are identified as having SEND is a key role for TAs that has become embedded at both national and local policy levels. Within local authorities the allocation of a teaching assistant has become routine as part of the process of issuing of a statement of Special Educational Needs, to support a pupil's inclusion, and this is true in the local authority in which I work.

Lacey (2001) carried out a key piece of research with a view to the role of TAs, referred to in her study as Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), in their support for individual pupils. This study looked at their particular role in the inclusive learning of pupils with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD).

Lacey sets her interests within the context of the pledge of the government of the time, to promote inclusive education and their commitment to the pivotal role of TAs within this agenda. The research was motivated by what Lacey identified as a lack of research relating to the inclusion of pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties and by ongoing questions relating to what represents best practice here

for TAs. Her research contributed to the report on this topic entitled 'On a Wing and a prayer' (Mencap 1999). Theories of inclusion underpin the work (Lacey makes a clear distinction in her work between inclusion and integration) and she focuses on the multi-layered influences and systems impacting on pupils and on the work of TAs.

Lacey states that the aim of her research is to establish the role of TAs. She takes what may be described as a realistic approach, focusing on observed practice and on the gathering of the views of TAs, teachers, pupils and parents.

A multiple case studies approach was adopted with interviews and lesson observations carried out in 24 participating schools. The data generated were mainly qualitative, and were subjected to inductive analysis.

Lacey identifies that the roles of TAs in supporting pupils with SLD may be categorised as follows:

- Promoting inclusion (encouraging independence and interaction)
- Promoting learning (providing access, prompting and encouraging)
- Teaching (working on IEPs, explaining, adapting work)
- Pastoral and personal care (toileting, behaviour, ensuring safety)

As well as describing TA practice, the study is not without an evaluative element. What constituted good TA practice was extrapolated from the data gathered, in the light of the literature and from the expressed views of the respondents.

From this Lacey suggests that the 'best' TAs were those who:

- were good at judging how much support to offer pupils and when to step back
- worked with several pupils as well as the identified child

- were given time to plan with teachers
- were clear about their role in the classroom
- felt supported and that their role was valued

With regard to reliability and validity, and / or credibility and trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn, the study benefits from having drawn together information from a number of sources including the views of TAs pupils, teachers and parents as well as the data from naturalistic observations. TAs from four of the schools were asked to verify the impressions and interpretations of the researchers regarding their conclusions about what constitutes good practice. The author's stated commitment to the inclusion of pupils with PMLD may represent a degree of researcher bias but her open acknowledgement of these issues acts as a balance.

The conclusions drawn are consistent with other research at the time about good practice for TAs working with pupils with SEN more generally, such as guidance from the then DFEE based largely on work by Farrell, Balshaw and Polat (1999) and with more recent findings (Alborz, Pearson, Farrell and Howes, 2009). Lacey's conclusion that TAs are essential to the inclusion of pupils with SEN seems to refer to the finding that schools were, in the main, only willing to take pupils with SLD if they were provided with a TA, rather than to the role they fulfilled while there.

The present study aims to take this work forward, looking in more detail at the views of TAs particularly about their work and with a focus on pupils with less severe, high incidence needs in mainstream schools.

Lacey's work highlights a subtle and interesting distinction in the literature, between identifying the role of TAs and considering their aims and purpose. This often

remains only implicit but may represent an important difference between identifying and categorising the work that TAs undertake, and, importantly, clarifying to what end their various tasks are targeted. The headings of 'promoting inclusion', 'promoting learning' and 'teaching' presented above by Lacey (2001) illustrate how the boundaries between role and purpose can be blurred.

In a review of the literature on the role of teaching assistants Alborz *et al* (2009) conclude that TAs viewed their functions as 'creating an accessible learning environment, increasing pupils' opportunities for engagement ...and developing their ability to become independent learners', although the authors note that there is little detail about how they actually did this in practice.

In considering the purpose of TAs' work with pupils identified as having SEND, views about the learning potential of the pupils are likely to be important. A pessimistic view of the pupils' potential may result in the support being viewed as a vehicle, by which the child can achieve the educational products or outcomes that they are viewed as lacking the capacity to achieve independently. Goals may thus focus on enabling access to the curriculum by compensating for limited intellectual capacity and on providing support to achieve small steps.

However, Feuerstein's (1980) view of mediated learning presents more ambitious goals for individual support based not on training the individual to master a set of specific skills that will enable him or her to function in a limited way but rather to: 'change the cognitive structure of the retarded performer and to transform him into an autonomous, independent thinker, capable of initiating and elaborating ideas' (Feuerstein 1980 page 70).

Importantly, Feuerstein identifies a type of 'direct' learning distinguishable from mediated learning in that it occurs without a mediator to stand between the learner and the stimulus. He explains that the more a child has been afforded a mediated learning experience and the more optimal the mediational process, the greater the capacity of the child to benefit and become modified by direct exposure to stimuli. It follows that the purpose of the effective TA becomes one of 'preparing' or 'equipping' the learner with the pre-requisites for future independent learning, with the task in hand merely a vehicle for this, rather than an end in itself.

Overall the research on the role of the TA suggests a wide range of tasks, and a theme of concern about a lack of clarity around the role. There is clearly a focus on support for less able pupils, and increasingly so, the more severe the needs of the pupil. These findings are perhaps unsurprising given the contexts in which the role has evolved.

The research on what TAs do in the main imposes external categorisation from the researchers, rather than from the TAs themselves and the distinction between role and purpose is often blurred. Research about the TA role is also difficult to separate out from research on the impact and effectiveness of TAs, much of it entangling what appear to be descriptions of TA work with researcher evaluations and judgements about what not just what they do but what they *should* be doing. Research with a more explicitly evaluative purpose, looking at the impact and effectiveness of TA support will now be considered.

The effectiveness and impact of TA support

During the period of TA expansion over the last 15 years or so government policy appears to have proceeded on the premise that TAs can and do make a positive

difference. The research about the impact of TAs during this time has varied from broadly positive, to expressing caution, to most recently a deeply critical approach. Examples of research taking such different tones will now be examined.

A broadly positive approach may be seen in the work of Balshaw and Farrell (2002) in their guidance on working effectively with Teaching Assistants. This work may be seen as primarily politically driven, as it built on a study from Manchester University commissioned by the then DFEE, carried out in 1998/99 which looked at the management role and training of Learning Support Assistants and where one outcome was the Good Practice Guide on working with teaching assistants (DfEE 2000a).

The motivation for this work was to assess the value for schools of a set of indicators for effective TA practice that had been developed from the DfEE study previously. The study is large-scale, looking at schools and support services across three local education authorities. There is clearly an intention to make findings generalisable, since the aims relate to drawing broad conclusions about the work of TAs, but there is also awareness from the authors of the impact of geographical, demographic and organisational factors that will mean each situation is different. The action research methodology employed suggests an interpretive approach where meaning and knowledge are generated through collaboration between researchers and those being researched.

The work aimed to test the value (validity) of theories generated from their previous research ie the general factors that characterize effective practice in the work of TAs a model with three components representing key aims of TA work: participation, independence and raising standards. The project was implemented in schools and

support services in Cheshire, Harrow and Salford. There were various phases planned over two years, which included workshops for participants, the drawing up of development plans by the schools and services, ongoing development work in the schools, and visits to the schools and services that had been involved in the gathering data to inform the writing of the Good Practice Guide for working with Teaching Assistants.

The study concluded:

That the following principles are useful in the analysis of good practice:

- clear roles and responsibilities
- effective communication
- consistency of approach
- team work
- development of skills and strengths that TAs bring
- continuing professional development and training

The action research and collaborative approach is inspiring, as is the generally positive and respectful and open-minded attitude towards TAs implied and that effective practice is not predetermined, static and measurable but an evolving process.

A focus on the issue of how the contribution of TA support may be maximised frames research by Cremin, Thomas and Vincett (2005). This research represents an evaluation of three models of deploying teaching assistants in classrooms, coming at the issue from a practical viewpoint and one which views the issue as one of

teachers' 'effective management of additional adults' in the classroom. Theories of team-work and planning underpin the models evaluated in the study. The researchers are explicit in their description of the research as idiographic rather than nomothetic, stressing the specificity of their work and highlighting their reluctance to generalise their findings. Their approach may be described as a realistic evaluation, studying what works for whom in particular circumstances.

The research took place in six case-study schools. It evaluates three models of team organization and planning described by previous authors, as applied to the work of TAs: 'room management', 'zoning' and 'reflective teamwork'.

The room management model involved the taking of specific roles by the adults in the classroom. The first of these roles was individual helper, which focused on supporting an individual pupil or group for 5-15 minutes. The second, that of activity manager, focused on keeping the rest of the class occupied. The zoning model involved clarifying where in the classroom and with which pupils and groups each of the adults would focus their attention. Finally the reflective teamwork model involved the teacher and TA meeting to review and plan for sessions together, focusing on elements such as questioning, problem solving and active listening.

A repeated-measures design is employed in the study and quantitative data gathered on the effect of each model on pupil engagement. Interviews are also carried out, generating qualitative feedback from teachers and TAs regarding the perceived benefits of each model in relation to their practice and including their thoughts on possible adaptations to the models.

Key conclusions drawn were that:

- All three models of TA support effected statistically significant improvements on pupil engagement, with the implementation of 'room management' model showing the greatest gains
- The room management and zoning models appeared to offer a tool for inclusion by preventing certain children habitually avoiding attention and certain children becoming saturated and over-dependent on support
- The reflective teamwork model showed the lowest effects on pupil engagement, although this model was the most favourably evaluated by teachers and TAs regarding benefits for pupils overall
- The most positively evaluated elements of each model could be conflated and offered as a model for the training of teachers and TAs

The involvement of participants across 6 schools adds credibility to the findings of the study as does the degree of triangulation of results, bringing together data from specific measures of pupil engagement with the views of TAs and teachers about the efficacy of the models employed. The effectiveness of TAs is couched here in terms of effective communication with the teacher.

Devecchi and Rouse (2010) continued this theme when they explored the impact of TAs from the perspective of effective collaboration between TAs and teachers. The research took an ethnographic approach and focused on practice in two secondary schools. There was a focus on how TAs and teachers included each other in the task of supporting pupils identified as having SEND. Theories of inclusion underpin the research which views the successful inclusion of students as dependent on how

schools as organisations are also able to support the inclusion of adults. Data were gathered from observations of TAs and teachers' across the schools and from interviews and questionnaires with TAs and teachers and examination of school policy documents. Analysis of the data looked for patterns of supportive and collaborative practice.

According to the participants the success of their collaboration was based on the following:

- sharing knowledge, skills, resources and ideas useful to support individual children and the whole class;
- knowing each other's teaching strategies and classroom behaviour management;
- having clear but also flexible roles and responsibilities;
- being professional and competent;
- being knowledgeable of the subject;
- being approachable;
- being respectful of each other; and
- being, and enabling others to be autonomous, independent and self-determined.

Conclusions from the research included:

- That collaboration between TAs and teachers is effective for the adults involved and the pupils they support
- Personal and affective knowledge is as important as technical knowledge
- That collaboration enabled those involved to 'consider other people's viewpoints, to think about their practice, solve problems together and to find ways in which they could make a difference and re-imagine what they could do to be inclusive' (Devecchi and Rouse 2010 page 98)

Alongside the broadly positive research discussed, framed mainly in terms of promoting and maximising effective practice, there has been a growing literature expressing concern about the potentially negative impact of some aspects of TA support, raising questions about a range of possible problems, including the risk of creating pupil dependency, where TAs are given responsibility for a named pupil (Rose 2000), and issues relating to TAs' lack of subject content knowledge (Houssart, 2011).

Recently this cautious tone has been replaced by more directly critical conclusions and the research in this area has become dominated by findings that suggest TA support may have a negative impact on pupil progress, particularly for those pupils identified as having SEND. Such controversial conclusions have come largely from research conducted as part of the *DISS study: The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff in Schools* (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, Martin, Russell, Webster and Rubie-Davies, 2009b). This is important research that has been considered earlier in this chapter for its findings in relation to the role of TAs. It will now be examined and reviewed from the perspective of its findings in relation to the efficacy of TAs.

The study was commissioned by the then Department for Children Schools and Families (DCFS). The research can thus be seen to be situated within an overtly political context, representing a large-scale study with the purpose of informing and evaluating the central role of TAs within contemporary education agendas of the promotion of inclusive education and the remodelling of the workforce in schools. This study represents the second of two waves of research and looks specifically at the impact of support staff in school, building on earlier research focusing on

features of TA deployment more generally, as discussed in the first section of this chapter. A wide range of data was collected and a rich picture presented of the world of TA support providing breadth, depth and a valuable across-time element.

The scale of the study is incomparable. A longitudinal multi-method approach was conducted over the six years 2002-08. A wide range of qualitative and quantitative data was gathered on the deployment and characteristics of support staff and on the impact of support staff on pupil outcomes and teacher workloads. Wave 2 of the study is of particular relevance to the consideration here of the literature on the impact of TA support. The study may be seen to have adopted a broadly realistic epistemology, acknowledging the complexity of the work and social systems within which TAs work exists, whilst maintaining a focus on finding definitive, quantitative answers to the question of the impact of TA support on pupil progress. The study set out to assess the impact of TAs on the academic attainments of pupils and also to assess the impact on areas such as confidence, concentration and independence about which they stated: 'There is only relatively anecdotal evidence on these dimensions, and so we also wanted to collect systematic evidence in order to provide a more comprehensive and reliable account of the effect of TAs' (Blatchford *et al* 2009b page 2).

Data were gathered from a large survey across 76 schools, from systematic observations and from case studies involving a smaller number of schools. The survey gathered pupil data including information on gender, English as an additional language and pupils who had been identified as having special educational needs (at any level of the code of practice from school action, through to having a statement of special educational need). The amount of TA support provided for the pupils was

gauged from teachers and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators' (SENCo's) estimates, given as a percentage (0%, 1-10%, 11-25%, 26-50%, 51%+) and from systematic observations of pupil's indirect and direct contact with TAs. Data relating to the impact of TA support on pupils' approaches to learning were gathered via teacher completed rating scales. These included pupil's attitudes to learning looking at 8 dimensions: distractibility, task confidence, motivation, disruptiveness, independence, relationships with other pupils, completion of assigned work, and following instructions from adults. Teachers were asked to describe change over the year on each of the dimensions in terms of a scale: 1. improved over the year; 2. stayed the same; and 3. deteriorated over the year. The effect of TA support on pupils' attainment was assessed in relation to progress over the school year as measured mainly by National Curriculum Levels from testing or from teacher assessment. Foundation stage profiles and predicted GCSE results were also used for the youngest and oldest pupils respectively. These measures were all assigned a numerical value to allow for statistical analysis. Multi level regression statistical methods were applied to examine the extent to which the amount of support was related to the end of year attainment. An important aspect of the analysis is described: 'It is quite likely that the provision of extra support for pupils will be based on their prior attainment and their SEN status and so we controlled for these in the analysis.... controlling for prior attainment means that we were effectively looking at relationships with the relative progress in attainment made by pupils, a more useful measure than attainment only' (Blatchford *et al* 2009 page 11).

Key conclusions from the study regarding the impact on pupils are provided as follows (Blatchford *et al* 2009 page 34):

- The main ways in which teachers felt that support staff had affected the learning and behaviour of pupils were through taking on specific pupils; bringing specialist help to teacher & classroom; allowing individualization / differentiation; improving pupils' attitudes and motivation to work; and having general positive effects on learning and behaviour
- There was little evidence that the amount of extra support received by pupils over a school year improved their 'Positive Approaches to Learning' (PAL) (e.g., distractibility, motivation, disruptive behaviour) at Wave 1 or at primary for Wave 2, but there was a strong relationship between additional support and the PAL outcomes at Year 9 (secondary), even after controlling for pupil characteristics like prior attainment and SEN status
- At Wave 1 and 2 there was a consistent negative relationship between staff ratings of the amount of support a pupil received and the progress they made in English and mathematics, and at Wave 2 in science. The more support pupils received, the less progress they made, even after controlling for other factors that might be expected to explain the relationship such as pupils' prior attainment, SEN status and income deprivation. A similar though less marked trend was found with measures of the amount of support taken from the systematic observation data
- Further analyses showed that the negative effect of support was not attributable to pupils who were making less attainment progress being allocated more support over the year, and results were not attributable to any bias resulting from missing data

- There was evidence that unsupported pupils in year 9 made less progress in those classes that had a higher proportion of pupils receiving support

Whilst controversial, the conclusions relating to a negative impact are not completely at odds with previous findings. Ofsted (2004) suggested that TA individual attention can help pupil engagement, but that it may adversely affect independent work. Wider research on the impact of individual TA support on pupil progress is limited, as noted by Lee (2002), although the troubling findings from Blatchford *et al* do reflect concerns raised from other sources about the possible detrimental effects on pupil independence and social inclusion (e.g. Giangreco 2009).

A systematic review by Alborz, Pearson, Farrell and Howes (2009), suggests that studies examining the effect of support staff when they are trained and prepared for specific curriculum interventions (most of this research has focused on literacy) do tend to show positive effects on pupil progress. However the Blatchford *et al* study looked at the effect of TA support as it occurred under everyday conditions, supporting pupils with their learning in the classroom and it was here, the authors conclude, that the impact on pupil progress seemed to be particularly negative.

That conclusions regarding a negative impact are based mainly on measures of pupil progress using National Curriculum Levels may be criticised in the sense that these may present a rather narrow view of progress. On the other hand it is perhaps also possible to question the validity of the conclusions relating to attainment, on the basis that National Curriculum Levels are broad and general in nature, as opposed to more precise measures of progress, for example standardised scores on tests of reading or maths.

Nevertheless these negative findings have been taken on readily and widely publicised. For example The Sutton Trust report, a document that provides guidance for teachers and schools on how to use their resources to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils summarises approaches and resources in terms of their average impact on attainment, the strength of the evidence supporting them and their cost. Teaching Assistants are presented here as ‘low impact high cost, based on limited evidence’. (Sutton Trust –EFF Report 2014).

Given these findings, the importance of more helpfully conceptualising and developing TA support as it occurs under everyday conditions would seem to be important and timely, given that so many of the lowest attaining and needy pupils identified as having SEND are routinely provided with such support.

Follow –up work by Blatchford *et al* (e.g.2009b; 2010) has focused on seeking and developing explanations for the negative impact of TAs assumed from the DISS study.

One such example is that of Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou and Bassett (2010). This research follows on from and analyses data gathered as part of the large-scale DISS study discussed previously. Here the focus continues to question the efficacy of TA’s pupil support, this time studying and evaluating the quality of TA’s verbal exchanges with pupils and comparing these with those of teachers using recordings of TA-pupil and teacher-pupil interactions.

The study is based on theories of classroom talk and of what constitutes effective teacher –pupil dialogue. Reference is made to Bakhtin’s (1981) notions of ‘limiting monologic exchanges’ as opposed to more effective dialogic exchanges that

stimulate, expand and facilitate pupil engagement and thinking. Theories of effective teaching more generally are drawn upon in relation to such aspects as providing effective feedback to pupils (e.g. Berliner 2004) and managing behaviour (e.g. Topping & Ferguson, 2005). Berliner's (1987) model of effective teaching is drawn on directly in the development of categories used for coding of the recorded adult-pupil interactions. The study may be seen to represent a largely realistic approach, seeking to test theories/ seek explanations for previously generated conclusions about the poor quality of TA support. There is little attempt to seek or to refer to the underlying intentions and choices of the TAs in the research. The researchers' approach may be seen as what Habermas (1971) described as 'technical' (seeking to predict and control) as opposed to the alternative practical (seeking mutual understanding) or emancipatory approaches. The notion that TAs represent a meaningful homogenous group for study is taken for granted, with little reference or interest in differences within the group, only to those between TAs and teachers. A static view of the situation is taken which focuses on 'what is' rather than on what could be and a problem focused approach is adopted. How can TAs poor practice be understood and explained?, rather than looking for what is working well and considering how practice might be further developed.

Using a sub-sample of 15 schools, transcriptions of audio recordings of adult-pupil interactions gathered during the DISS study were analysed for this research. 16 lesson-length transcriptions of TA-pupil talk were compared with 16 lesson-length teacher-pupil interactions (during Maths and English lessons). Data were gathered showing the frequencies of the types of talk for TAs and teachers and comparisons made using paired t-tests. Conclusions drawn are:

1. That there are some similarities in the types of interactions that both TAs and teachers have with pupils in the classroom.
2. Teachers' interactions are more focused on learning and understanding
3. TAs interactions are more focused on task completion
4. Teachers show more evidence of 'effective teaching'
5. TAs appear to be stifling pupil independence

This study is open to criticisms of researcher bias, set up as it seems to have been to test (confirm?) the conclusions from their previous large scale study for which they gained much publicity from the conclusion that TAs are ineffective. It is possible that in looking for evidence of poor practice they were more likely to see it, with the views and assumptions of the researchers giving a potentially negative slant to selection, observation and reporting of the results. This seems to be very much an extension of these authors' previous research, providing further evidence of, along with some partial explanations for the negative impact of TA support.

What is lacking in this research is that it does not consider things from the TA perspective – why they were doing / saying what they did– their beliefs and the purposes of what they were doing – nor does it give them a chance to reflect on them.

Whilst the sheer scale of the DISS study and the follow up work that has stemmed from it gives the findings weight, the conclusions have not gone unchallenged, (notably Balshaw, 2010; Fletcher –Campbell, 2010).

Criticisms of the policy of allocating TAs to pupils with SEND are often framed as a problem of the most needy being supported by the least qualified. However, one

criticism of these negative findings and a threat to their validity is the way in which TAs are referred to as if they are a homogenous group (Balshaw 2010), when the group may include a wide range of experience and qualification. (This is supported in my own experience, with the TAs initially expressing an interest in becoming involved in my own research including a qualified and experienced teacher and a clinical psychologist).

Balshaw (2010) is critical of what she describes as the narrow focus of this research, suggesting that it is 'couched in out-dated perceptions of both special needs – the focus on perceived weaknesses in individual pupils, and the 'supportive' interventions supposedly needed' (page 338). Balshaw (2010) calls for research that focuses less on the notion of paraprofessional support per se and more on the factors that are involved in creating an effective learning environment characterised by teamwork.

In a highly critical response to the DISS study's conclusions and those of follow up work, Fletcher-Campbell (2010) makes challenges on epistemological grounds, questioning many of the assumptions made. The summary of the research is described here as 'disappointing, even depressing, in the way that it conceives of special educational needs and, throughout, in the assumptions it makes. 'Learning needs' and 'behavioural needs' are taken as 'givens' and unproblematic – the pupil 'has' them and there is no challenge of the curriculum or pedagogy to which the pupil is exposed, and no hint of the possibility of the social construction of special educational needs' (Fletcher-Campbell 2010 page 339).

There is further criticism of the lack of discussion about what is (or could be) valued knowledge in different contexts and how this affects a perspective on the efficacy of

teaching assistants. The assumption that those with the highest qualifications are necessarily the most effective supporters of learning is also questioned. Indeed findings by Myhill and Warren (2005), who analysed the interactions of teachers with pupils concluded that 'many teaching strategies or teacher–pupil interactions act as a heavy prompt or even as a straitjacket upon pupil learning' (page 55), suggesting that teachers may be subject to similar criticisms. Of the conclusions from the DISS study Fletcher Campbell offers perhaps the most fundamental challenge to the research asking 'Do we identify our 'problems' by the questions that we ask in particular contexts and by the design of our methodologies?' (page 340).

The work of Blatchford *et al* (2009b) provides interesting, provocative conclusions and I believe a useful prompt for the adoption of an alternative approach for my own research that is based on the following challenging views:

- TAs are a diverse group where individual differences experiences and understandings are important
- There are multiple alternative perspectives on what constitutes effective teaching
- There are multiple alternative perspectives on what constitutes progress
- That the expertise, judgments, beliefs and narratives of those involved in the day-to -day work are just as – more? - valuable than those of 'experts'
- That an appreciative inquiry orientation may be a more helpful way of moving practice forward
- That practice may develop through experience, common sense and reflection as much as through the 'explicit training and scripted lessons' recommended in this study

More recent research from the team of authors involved in the DISS study (e.g. Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin and Russell 2010) has framed the negative impact as one that may be more about the wider deployment of TAs rather than their inherent characteristics (the criticism has thus been made less personal) and a framework for understanding this has been proposed as shown in Figure 3.

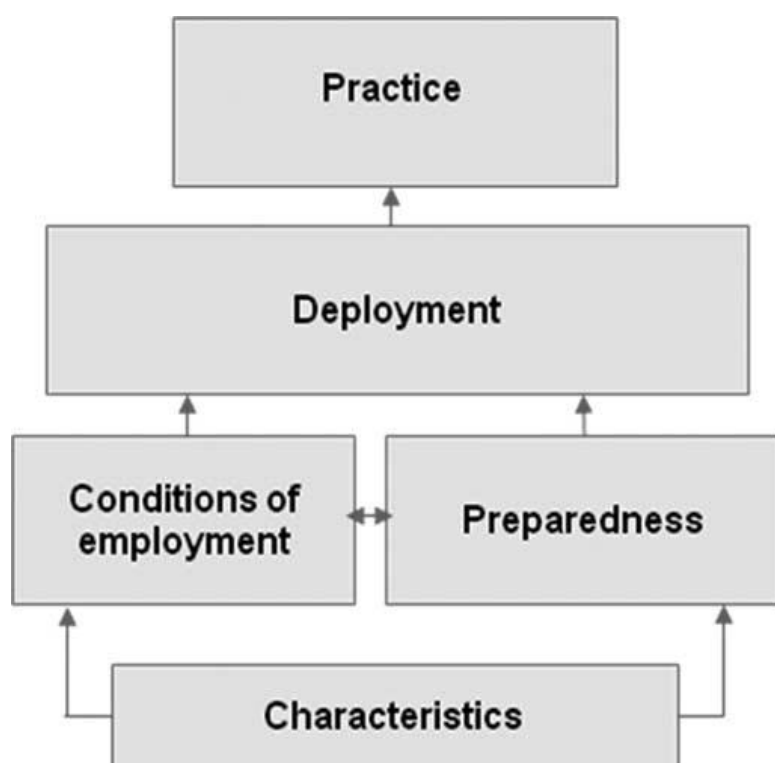


Figure 3: Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR) from Webster *et al* 2011

Webster *et al* (2011) suggest that the *characteristics* (of TAs) element in this model are likely to account for the negative effects of TA support in only a minimal way. *Conditions of employment* relates to issues such as whether TAs are paid, or provided with allocated time to meet with teachers. The authors focus largely on the remaining three factors of *preparedness*, *deployment* and *practice* as those that have most bearing on TA effectiveness and these will now be considered.

Preparedness describes two aspects of TAs' work:

- (1) the training and professional development of TAs and teachers (e.g., how teachers manage and organise the work of TAs); and
- (2) day-to-day preparation (e.g., time for joint planning and feedback between teachers and TAs)' (Webster *et al* 2011 page 9)

Practice refers to the nature and quality of TA –Pupil interactions. What this means is more difficult to pin down. In their analysis of it the authors refer to issues such as formality; talk to keep pupils on task; the extent to which interactions are related to task completion as opposed to 'learning' and the extent to which they are 'reactive', i.e. responding to pupil's 'in the moment'. The authors suggest that the interactions of TAs with pupils are of poorer quality than those that pupils have with teachers, concluding that 'TAs' interactions fail to foster active pupil participation, which has longer term implications for creating passive learners', (Webster *et al* 2011, page 14)

Deployment relates to the particular situation in which the TA is placed. The authors pay particular attention to the ability-level of the pupils they support ; the size of group they work with, including whether the TA is deployed in a 1:1 situation; and how long interactions with pupils last. In relation to deployment, the authors are critical of the pedagogical role given to TAs suggesting that a negative consequence of this is that pupils supported by TAs can become separated from the teacher.

The model contains some interesting and important elements for consideration when exploring the role of the TA and reflects many of the key issues raised previously in relation to TA practice. For example 'preparedness' and 'deployment' may be seen to link respectively to the notions of 'effective communication' and 'clear roles'

identified by Farrell and Balshaw, (2002). However, whilst the model is claimed by the authors as one that is not critical of TAs themselves: 'to hold TAs responsible for the impact of the support they provide is too simplistic' the model's purpose seems to be born out of an attempt to explain the assumption that TAs have a negative impact. As such it represents a problem-focused examination of the issues and there is a danger that it may be demoralizing for TAs in their work. Much needed literature that considers the status of TAs as a vulnerable group, and their need for a voice will now be reviewed - a body of research to which it is hoped the present study will contribute.

Views of TAs as a vulnerable group

A key theme in the literature on TAs relevant to my research is that of their often low status in schools (e.g. Hammett and Burton, 2005). Such concerns have been discussed in relation to their low pay and lacking career structure, an issue that has been partly addressed with the development of the Higher Level Teaching Assistant qualification.

O'Brien and Garner (2001) express concerns about a marginalizing of TAs within schools, and are critical of what they call a 'language of domination manipulation and exclusion' in much published literature on TAs where they are frequently passive subjects rather than active participants. They talk of a 'voice vacuum' for TAs and a need for conversations *with* them rather than *about* them (Garner and O' Brien (2001). Over the ten years since their writing there seems to have been little to rectify this situation and recent negative conclusions about the efficacy of the work of TAs particularly in supporting pupils with SEN (Blatchford *et al* 2009) makes them currently a particularly vulnerable group.

O'Brien and Garner (2001) provide a key piece of research that aims to give TAs a voice. The authors describe how their motivation for the work came from their attendance at a conference in Dublin where the work of teaching assistants (referred to in their work as learning support assistants), a hot political issue at the time, became a focus for discussion. Feeling uncomfortable that their conversations were *about* teaching assistants rather than *with* them the authors resolved to 'explore the possibility of providing a forum for LSAs to tell their own tales', (page 6) with an aim that the voice of TAs should be heard at the heart of policy.

No particular theories are made explicit in this work. There is a sense in which they deliberately avoided imposing theories on the data gathered from the TAs, going as far as to express concern that the 'stain of academia will corrupt the potency of the message being carried by these stories' (page 6). A socio-cultural and life-history perspective underpins the authors' view of important aspects of the stories they sought.

The authors present their work as being representative of what they refer to as a growing tradition of 'emancipatory research'. They state their belief that the empowerment of the researched is the most potent and ethical position to adopt. The authors assume a relativist epistemological position in which scientific accounts are not accorded a privileged position but are seen as equivalent to other accounts, including lay ones. Further, the authors may be seen to adopt what has been referred to as a 'constructivist' methodology. Robson (2002) describes the task of the constructivist researcher as 'to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge', where participants are invited to construct reality with the researchers.

In this work, it is the stories of individual TAs that are the focus of the research, giving credence to individual narratives and a belief that reality is represented through the eyes of participants. This study seeks subjective, individual, experiential descriptions of practice, rather than constant, generalisable truths.

More than 80 TAs from across the British Isles were invited to give personal accounts of their work. Data were gathered in an opportunistic fashion, over a 12 month period, via focus group discussions; semi structured interviews or written accounts that were, according to the TAs' choosing, either structured within a loose writing frame, or unstructured. Stories included in the publication were selected following consideration by the authors about whether a story seemed to offer the reader a new or alternative perspective into the work of TAs and / or whether it would inform the reader with regard to the development of future practice.

The approach taken allows the stories to stand alone and any attempt to draw general conclusions is avoided. Instead, points for reflection and action are appended to each story. However, commentary provided on the data collected from focus group discussions implies the following conclusions:

1. Three key rationales for career choice (pragmatic; trigger and serendipity)
2. A wide range and variety of duties evident in the work
3. Teamwork and relationships seem to be the 'defining motif' of the TAs work
4. Notions of success are located around 'small steps'
5. The paradox of being pivotal to the process of educational inclusion but having low status
6. A need for professional development

The extent to which it is appropriate to evaluate notions of reliability in this study is open to question, since hard conclusions are avoided by the authors and the study does not seek to establish results that are necessarily repeatable. Rather, the stories stand alone as individual narratives. Robson (2002) suggests that 'credibility' or 'trustworthiness' are useful terms of reference when evaluating studies of qualitative and flexible designs and suggests that threats to these include reactivity (the possible effects of the researchers' on participants' responses). Also respondent bias (various positions taken by respondents to 'mask their true view, for example being obstructive if they perceive the researcher as a threat; or giving responses that they believe will cast them in a positive light). And finally researcher bias, where assumptions or beliefs of the researchers affect selection of participants and reporting of results. This study seems to be fairly free of such threats, mainly because the authors have made a conscious decision to tamper with the responses from the TAs as little as possible presenting quite pure and potentially honest accounts and allowing the TAs free reign to focus on what they perceive to be important and to tell their own stories following either a very loosely structured format or completely unstructured by the researchers.

This work was one of the first to highlight a need to give TAs a voice. Themes arising from the TAs stories are consistent with much of the research and writing about TAs over the past decade. These include narratives about poor pay and conditions and low status, along with a lack of clarity about their role and shifting professional boundaries between teachers and TAs. The diversity within the TA population is highlighted, a point that calls into question the validity of conclusions about TAs in general as if they were a homogenous group.

I like the emancipatory approach taken here with TAs and hope to emulate this in my own research. The use of focus groups and semi-structured interview seems to be an effective way of encouraging active participation. The acknowledgement of the expertise of those doing a job day to day is acknowledged here and is something I want to build on. This work is now over ten years old and predates developments to the career structure for TAs including the establishment of Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) status. It also predates the rather negative conclusions from research questioning the efficacy of TAs as a professional group. It is interesting to consider how these developments might impact on contemporary stories of TA practice.

Mackenzie (2011) carried out recent research that was motivated by a wish to gain TA perspectives on their role, having highlighted a lack of research that focuses on the TA voice and having been inspired by the work of O'Brien and Garner (2001). The study takes a life-history approach and focuses on how their backgrounds impact upon their role in the classroom. This research may be described as interpretivist; taking a social constructionist approach where the focus is on 'personal interpretations, understandings and day to day implementations of inclusion'. The importance of viewing the meaning of experience in all its complexity is stressed. The sample in this study consisted of 13 TAs working in schools in East London, who were also following degree courses at the university where the author worked. Qualitative data were gathered from focus group discussions and from semi-structured life-history interviews. A case study approach was applied to gain information on TAs' perspectives on a range of issues relating to their role including motivations to carry out the role; understandings of inclusion; relationships with other

school staff and tensions between policy and practice as they experience it day to day.

Key conclusions drawn were that:

1. Relationships between TAs and teachers are full of tensions, misunderstandings and antagonism
2. Experiences of ambiguity and conflict around inclusion are common, with only one TA from the study dedicated to remaining in mainstream education
3. TAs have a medicalised and individual category approach to SEN
4. Training for TAs needs to be revisited and a collaborative approach emphasised

The selection of TAs who were also following a degree course means that this focuses on a possibly narrow group of TAs who are pursuing higher education and may not be representative of TAs more generally (although the notion that TAs represent a homogenous group in any sense has been discussed). It is possible that there is likely to be greater tension between teachers and those TAs who are educated to a similar level. However the author's commitment to a social constructionist and case study approach limits the extent to which the conclusions are presented as being generalisable and acts as a balance to this potential criticism.

This research suggests less positive collaboration between TAs and teachers than found by Devecchi and Rouse (2010). The somewhat negative findings do contribute further to a weight of evidence that there may be complexities and difficulties of introducing additional adult support in schools and that it is not in itself sufficient to promote positive outcomes.

This research highlights potential tensions in the TA role and possible barriers to positive professional development. Whilst emancipatory in spirit it tends towards a rather problem focused approach, again highlighting a need for the more solution orientated and appreciative approach that I aim to adopt in my own work.

Conclusions from the literature review

The literature presented shows that over the last ten years there has been an increase in the number of TA's supporting pupils in schools, and that the expectations and scope of their role has expanded during this time. TAs are a key group with which to engage in research, occupying as they do a central role in the support of pupils identified as having the greatest need. Two contrasting key trends in the research have been on the one hand an identification of the low status of TAs and of lacking TA voice, and on the other an increasingly negative evaluation of their effectiveness. The gaps I have identified in the research relate to both content and also to methodological and ethical features. The need for more detailed examples of the pedagogical role, that is about exactly what TAs do when they support pupils, and how they view this aspect of their practice has been highlighted. I hope that my research will help to illuminate this. Importantly I hope to do this from the perspective of the TAs themselves in order to engage with this issue from the perspective of those actually doing the work providing an 'inside view' of this work. Also, from a more emancipatory perspective, I intend to add to the literature that has aimed to address the highlighted lack of a TA voice in research. The present study also aims to come at the issues from an 'appreciative' perspective where positive practice is highlighted and explored and where the opportunity to consider the development of this is integral to the research process.

In summary, in response to the current picture presented in the literature and as stated in Chapter 1 the aims of the present study are as follows:

Substantive Aims:

To identify what TAs describe as key factors regarding:

- effective aspects of their support for pupils identified as having SEND and
- ways in which their work might be improved and developed.

Theoretical Aims:

- To add the voice of TAs to current literature regarding the impact of their support for pupils identified as having SEND

Methodological Aims:

- To adopt an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach that seeks to explore with TAs what is important in their work, what is working well, and how this may be developed.
- To use focus group interviews as a way of facilitating a collaborative and discursive situation for data collection.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

My role and context

During the course of my doctoral study and in the process of considering and planning a topic for research, I have come to question many of the beliefs I previously held about what constitutes 'good research'. My work as an educational psychologist during the years prior to embarking on the doctorate had already led me to question the place and meaning of science in my everyday practice when supporting schools and families. I had a sense that, as Burden (2008) writes of Educational Psychology 'it is a social rather than a natural science and owes as much to the arts as it does to scientific methodology'. Further, I had developed a view of the purpose of EP work as one that should be focused on dealing effectively with situations, rather than the more traditional aim of seeking to accurately represent them. Within this view, for an EP, as Burnham (2013) describes, the 'truest' ideas are, 'those that help an individual adapt to and thrive in a particular context'.

That my view of research did not initially match those I held about EP practice generally reflected that I saw the research process as something quite distinct and necessarily more rigid. This reflected what Reed (2007) describes as a tradition of viewing 'research and intervention as separate processes, yielding wholly separate sorts of information', one that is deeply rooted in professional and academic cultures. During the period of my doctoral study and of my reading about new forms of qualitative research there was for me a blurring of these boundaries and a sense of a loosening of the rules, in a way that made research come to feel very much more like the daily practice in which I was engaged as an EP. The change in my thinking

about research is reflected in Willig's (2008) comment on her own shift 'from seeing research methods as following a recipe, to viewing the research process as an adventure' (page 218). I found myself opening up to new ways of looking at what research can be; possibilities for the role and status of the researcher and of the individuals and groups who are researched; and what impact research can have, not just in the later dissemination of results but for those involved in the research as it happens. As a result of these insights, my own research with TAs, whilst conforming to the structure and criteria required of a professional doctoral thesis, feels in practice very much a part of my wider, supportive work with staff as a school EP, as discussed in Chapter 1.

This chapter follows the development of my thinking about and planning of my research, describing the general and theoretical underpinnings, through to more specific, practical and ethical considerations.

A note on terminology used in this chapter

I have found the terminology in research texts is defined slightly differently by different authors, causing a little confusion. For example, De Vaus (2001) describes design as 'the structure' of an enquiry stressing that it is 'unrelated to any particular method of data collection or type of data'. On the other hand, Willig (2008) talks about principles of research design as relating directly to 'the type of data we aim to collect and the role of participants in the research process' (page 16).

Acknowledging such differences, and a considerable degree of overlap between the terms, I have used the headings epistemology, design, method, procedures and data analysis. These map my thinking in what feels to be a logical and broadly

chronological progression from very general and theoretical considerations, moving towards increasingly specific and practical matters in the planning of my research project.

Epistemology

Willig (2008) stresses the importance of being clear about the goals of our research and within that, to have a clear sense of what kind of knowledge we believe it is possible to generate. Key to this process, she asserts, is the adoption of an epistemological position. Willig poses three key epistemological questions to analyse the epistemological roots of research methodologies:

1. What kind of knowledge does the methodology aim to produce?
2. What kinds of assumptions does the methodology make about the world?
3. How does the methodology conceptualise the role of the researcher in the research process? (Willig 2008)

These questions will be applied in turn to the current study, in order to set out the epistemological position adopted in my research.

What kind of knowledge do I aim to produce?

Underpinning my thinking here is an increasing personal research orientation towards what is sometimes called a 'social constructionist' standpoint. My own thoughts here are summed up well in Robson's (2002) description of constructivist researchers, who:

‘have grave difficulties with the notion of an objective reality that can be known. They consider that the task of the researcher is to understand the multiple constructions of meaning and knowledge’ (page 27).

This contrasts sharply with what is often described as a positivist approach to research, one that seeks to uncover objective knowledge (facts) and to develop universal, causal laws (Robson 2002).

Willig (2008) points out that a social constructionist standpoint does not claim that it is impossible to know anything, but importantly that ‘there are knowledges, rather than knowledge’.

Within this constructionist tradition Burden (2008) describes a process of ‘illuminative evaluation’ in educational psychology, the aims of which are ‘not to provide evidence of who is right or wrong, but to bring into the public domain the fact that these different perspectives occur’.

My research aims to gain the views of TAs and by doing so, give them a voice. The social constructionist position taken means that there is no assumption that the knowledge gained is representative of TAs views generally, rather that it presents a perspective, or collection of perspectives, in a particular context. Further, my epistemological position views the gathering of data as less one of ‘tapping’ pre-existing, static views, and more as a dynamic process whereby knowledge is co-constructed as part of the research process.

What kinds of assumptions does my research make about the world?

This relates to what is often called Ontology. Moore (2005) describes how ontological questions might be characterized by two extreme views of the world: 'the first is 'an orderly, law-abiding, enduring, fixed and objectively knowable and constant place. The other is 'indeterminate, disorderly and constantly in flux and thereby ultimately "unknowable" in any objective sense' (Moore, 2005 page106). My own view of the social world may be seen to sit somewhere between these extremes, but perhaps rather more closely to the second. As such, my research takes what Robson (2002) calls a broadly 'relativist' position. Within this view the research acknowledges the complexities within any given phenomenon and the 'multi-layered nature of reality' specific to the subject of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Some aspects of these realities will be shared between individuals (a process that is actively encouraged in the focus group interviews I used) although it is acknowledged that experiences and interpretations will be constructed differently by different people.

How is the role of the researcher conceptualised in my research?

Habermas (1971) associates the approach of researchers to scientific knowledge with three types of cognitive interest: in prediction and control, (technical); in mutual understanding, (practical); and in bringing about change with regard to existing power relationships, (emancipatory).

My approach is focused mainly on the practical, in the hope that my work will encourage a deeper understanding of the work that the TAs do and their views in relation to it, that is, for the TAs in this particular study. Related to this, Moore (2005) calls for EPs to question 'the extent we as experts appreciate the ability of others,

clients included, to contribute to and to guide their own process of change and development' and this is a question that sits at the heart of my research.

There is also an emancipatory spirit in the orientation of my research with a view to giving TAs a voice, and within an appreciative framework that focuses on, or at least starts with, what TAs feel they do well.

The notion that the research process in itself can facilitate change has become appealing to me and I have been increasingly drawn in my reading to the broad ideas of action research, as described by Kemmis and McTaggart (1998):

'A form of collective enquiry, undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practice as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out' (page 5).

As a constructionist researcher my active role within the research is acknowledged (and capitalised upon). The final interpretation presented is understood as ultimately my own, and one that has itself been constructed during the research process. As such, I am very much the author, rather than the witness of the research findings.

Given these epistemological underpinnings, and the identified need in the literature for research that gains the perspectives of TAs and involves them in the research process, this research aims broadly:

- To provide a voice for TAs, gaining their descriptions, narratives, interpretations, reflecting their situational perspective on their work and involving them collaboratively in the research process
- To provide a transformative element in my research, bridging the gap between research and change, acknowledging that the very process of asking questions and of facilitating reflection and discussion on practice, changes are generated.
- To engage in research that is positively framed, building on what is seen to be working rather than focusing on the identification and explanation of problems.

Design: Appreciative Inquiry

The purpose of my research is to gain descriptive information relating to how TA s view and experience their work. The particular research questions that I hope to answer are:

- What do TAs describe as the most effective and positive aspects of their support for pupils?
- How do they conceptualise their contribution to pupils' progress?
- In what terms do they describe ideal practice in their work?
- What do they suggest would increase their contribution to pupil progress?

The type of data that the research aims to collect is naturalistic descriptions. Given that an aim of the research is to bring about change and that there is a progressive element to the questions, from what currently happens, to what would ideally happen, to what could be, there is a built in temporal element to the design, gaining

data over the course of a few weeks allowing for reflection (and possibly action) between the points of data generation.

Having been inspired by a book that presented AI as a methodology for research for change (Reed 2007), I felt that this would offer an effective foundation for my research. AI offered a fitting framework for the broad research questions I had in mind, particularly from the perspective of my core beliefs about what is possible and what is desirable within the research process.

AI is described as 'a theory, a mindset, and an approach to analysis that leads to organizational learning and creativity'. (Watkins and Cooperrider, 2000). AI began as an approach to organisational development in the mid 1980s and is generally attributed to David Cooperrider, who developed it as a method of interviewing hospital doctors for his PhD study (Reed 2007).

Reed (2007) identifies that the general starting point for a researcher wanting to adopt an appreciative inquiry approach might be 'what's going on here that can be appreciated?' This seems to encapsulate precisely what I want to do, to offer an alternative, complementary view to the somewhat negative conclusions emerging from some of the recent literature about TA practice.

Hammond (1998) proposes that AI is based on a number of assumptions:

1. In every society, organisation or group, something works.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality.
3. Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
4. The art of asking questions of an organisation or group influences the group in some way.

5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
7. It is important to value differences.
8. The language we use creates our reality.

These assumptions clearly fit with the epistemological views underlining my research that I have described, particularly that reality is created in the moment, that there are multiple realities, that what we focus on becomes our reality and that the language we use creates our reality. Thus AI takes the view that ‘through our assumptions and choice of method we largely create the world we later discover.’ (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987 p.129). This implies an integrated view of research, theory and practice in which it is neither possible, nor desirable to separate these elements. It also relates to the criticisms of recent research about the efficacy of TAs that I have levelled at research within and arising from the DISS study, for example Webster *et al* (2011) where the focus and language has become increasingly negative and the search for what is wrong with TA practice may have become self-fulfilling. AI offers an alternative and complementary approach to the work of TAs that offers ‘the possibility of working and thinking *with* people, rather than just about them, (Carter 2006).

Reed (2007) asserts that AI may inform research in the following ways, to which I have added in brackets links to my own research.

Supporting people: AI research needs to take an engaged stance rather than a disengaged one, as AI development is facilitated by the active input of those

exploring change. (Active collaboration with TAs is absent from much of the research and I intend to make this a key element in my work).

People getting together: AI research is communal, in that it involves collective interaction to share and explore experiences (I hope to foster a sense of group identity in getting TAs from different schools together)

Telling stories: An interest in the ‘telling process’ the language that people use to express ideas is evoked in AI (this links to the notion of providing TAs with a voice)

Positive development: AI focuses on change and innovation and the generation of plans for the future. The process of development in AI starts with uncovering experiences of achievement in the past and present and involving people in planning for the future. This temporal dimension fits with notions of story and narrative (Several TA meetings will take place allowing a development over time of their stories)

Changes in the workplace: AI emphasises the importance of focusing on the workplace setting and understanding its context (this is clearly key to my exploring the work of TAs).

Reed (2007) sets out connections between models of research and the relative position of Appreciative Inquiry, with reference to a world view; the context for the research; and the view of change, as shown in Figure 4. I have added links to my own research in relation to each of the three elements.

Reed (2007) warns that AI should not be reduced simply to a set of procedures and that the ‘positive core’ of focusing on the strengths goals and achievements of an

organisation should remain central. Ways of operationalising AI have nevertheless been presented and the 4-D cycle consisting of four phases has been identified as the most common way of doing so, (Coghlan, Preskill and Catsambas 2003).

Model	Links to AI	Concerns (ie relates to)	Links to the present study
World view: Social constructionism	Concern with meaning and interpretation, rather than measurable facts	Ensuring that the meanings the world has for participants are understood	Constructing with TAs how they view their work, what they see as their contribution to pupil progress
Critical theory	Interest in developing challenges to ways of thinking	Searching for data that question assumptions	Finding alternatives to the negative discourse emerging about the ineffectiveness of TAs
Context: Ethnography	Interest in complexity of the social world and understanding it in its entirety	Collecting diverse forms of naturally occurring data that encompass the social world	Gaining the views of TAs about what they do, why they do it, what this means to them, how they see their contribution to pupil progress
Case study	Focus on specific settings or situations	Determining the boundary of the case	A focus on the context of a group of TAs working with an EP in a particular learning community
View of change: Narrative methodology	Interest in hearing stories of events and processes	Ensuring that stories are told and heard and that ideas of chronology are explored	Replicating earlier research where the stories of the work of TAs were recorded
Action research	Interest in facilitating change	Following the processes of change	Discovering what TAs do, what works and reflecting on what should be and what could be, over a period of weeks, allowing for reflection and action between sessions

Figure 4: The position of AI within models of research (Adapted from Reed 2007)

with links to the present study

The 4-D cycle represented an overarching structure for the design of my study. The four phases identified are presented in Figure 5.

AI phase	Description	Application to the present study
Discover	Participants Explore what works well, what 'gives life' in their work	TAs discuss what they do that is effective, what works well and share high points in their work. TAs consider how they might conceptualise (categorise) their effective support for pupils
Dream	Participants envisage 'what could be'	TAs discuss what would represent ideal practice in their work
Design	Participants consider ways to develop, to move forward	TAs discuss small and realistic changes that would move their practice forward
Deliver	Participants engage in detailed action planning	Not covered directly in the process of my research, although may be an opportunity for this in the future

Figure 5: The 4-D cycle of AI (adapted from Reed 2007)

A number of criticisms and questions about AI have been raised. Some of the key issues summarised by Reed (2007) are shown in Figure 6, along with responses to these and a justification for the use of AI in my own area of research.

Proposed limitations or potential problems of AI	Responses	Justification for appropriateness of AI in my research
Strength-based orientation is naive / idealistic and paints an unduly 'sanitised picture'. Research should aim to produce a comprehensive picture 'warts and all'.	Focus is on providing a perspective - 'a truth' rather than ' <i>the</i> truth' Taking a relativist view this is the case with any research. Interviews are negotiated not imposed and if participants want to talk about problems they can.	Provides a missing perspective in recent research about the effectiveness of TAs that has focused on problems and deficits. Acknowledges that research studies do not stand in isolation, as such AI may be seen to be redressing the balance and contributing one part to a greater whole.
Negative experiences are ignored	AI does not preclude discussion of problems, on the contrary, within this supportive framework people may be more willing to be open and honest	Interviews are loosely structured allowing TAs to take discussion off in a number of directions, including the discussion of problems
Could draw uncomfortable implicit comparisons between ideal performance and performance of those present	Potentially less uncomfortable and more motivating than a focus on problems and criticism of current practice.	What is ideal is constructed by the TAs rather than imposed by an outside expert, providing an alternative view to that in much of the recent research
Fails to acknowledge the constraints of power within organisations	These issues can be acknowledged within discussions about ideal practice.	The context of the research is my wish to gain and give voice to TA views, not one arising from a perceived and imposed agenda for change.

Figure 6: Proposed limitations or potential problems of AI (from Reed 2007) with responses and my justification for appropriateness of AI in my research

Method: Focus Group Interviews

Reed (2007) points out that AI research does not dictate a particular method and that AI studies may use a range of different tools and methods for data collection, including for example conversations, looking at written accounts and engaging in activities such as taking photographs.

Conversations were selected as the most useful approach to my proposed research questions. In practical terms this meant that TAs were invited to attend meetings where loosely constructed AI questions formed the basis of conversations relating to my research questions.

Focus group interviews were chosen as the method by which conversations could be generated and from which data was collected.

Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) describe focus groups simply as 'group discussions exploring a specific set of issues'. Crucially, focus groups are distinguished from the broader category of group interviews by the explicit use of group interaction to generate data' (page 4). They suggest that 'focus groups are ideal for exploring people's experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns' and that 'the method is particularly useful for allowing participants to generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms in their own vocabulary'. (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999, page 5).

Focus groups offer the following advantages and appropriateness to my own purposes:

- They allow the collection of a range of views more quickly than individual interviews
- Meaning is actively and collaboratively constructed
- Can generate rich, naturalistic data, where statements are discussed, challenged, extended, developed in a way that cannot happen in individual interviews
- Increased ecological validity, allowing observation of relatively spontaneous interaction between participants not entirely under the control of the researcher
- Validity is further heightened by the fact responses are not forced and participants can choose not to respond to a particular issue

Chui (2003) suggests that focus group practice can be 'developed as a distinct group process that has the potential to promote change', although she stresses that this will ultimately depend on the extent to which the researcher is reflexive and reflective in their practice. Focus groups therefore also provided the possibility for an action or transformational element to research that I hoped to bring to the study.

As with any method there are limitations and potential difficulties. Figure 7 shows potential disadvantages of focus groups: as highlighted by Morgan (1998). I have noted my own responses to minimise the possible effect of each.

Potential disadvantage of focus groups	My response in relation to my own research
<p>They are an essentially artificial setting, controlled by the researcher and may therefore lack the validity of more naturalistic environments, (such as observations)</p> <p>Difficulties in getting people to come – particularly for more than one session, need to consider ways of gaining the commitment of participants</p>	<p>As a medium for gaining views, it remains arguably more organic as a process than individual interviews or questionnaires</p> <p>As the participants are TAs working in schools where I am the EP there is a sense of familiarity and loyalty that may be lacking with complete strangers.</p>
<p>Groups of friends or colleagues who know each other well may rely on taken for granted assumptions that may not be apparent to the researcher</p>	<p>Participants were invited from different schools so that contributions were more likely to be explained fully with fewer assumptions</p>
<p>Generates a large amount of complex data to be transcribed and analysed which can be time consuming</p>	<p>Yes, although also rich and relatively naturalistic data that is co-constructed with the researcher and other participants</p>

Figure 7: Potential disadvantages of focus groups (from Morgan 1998) and my responses to them

Data were generated over three sessions corresponding broadly to the 4-D cycle involved in AI and linking to the key research questions as follows:

- Session 1: Introduction to research, group warm up, and conversations facilitated relating to the *Discover* phase exploring the question of what do TAs view as the most effective and positive aspects of their support?
- Session 2: A continuation of the *Discover* phase exploring the question How can this type of support be conceptualised? And moving into the *Dream* phase and the question What would ideal practice look like here?
- Session 3 : Conversations related to the Design phase and the question How can this type of support be further developed?

Ethical Considerations

An overview of the key considerations is given here. Ethical approval was granted for this research project in line with the requirements of the University of Birmingham, as applicable in 2012.

There were no major issues anticipated with the study. However the project did involve working with a professional group for whom low status and lacking power in schools have been identified as discussed in Chapter 3. There were possible concerns arising from setting up expectations about the potential for change in their professional situation that may not be possible to realise. General issues around confidentiality could have arisen, particularly given the group situation of the interviews that required consideration and discussion with the group.

Gaining informed consent

Participants were contacted in writing, via email giving full details of the research project, including methods of ensuring confidentiality and security and accessibility of the data collected. Further information was given at the first focus group meeting allowing questions to be asked and details of the research to be clarified, before proceeding with the research. (see Appendix 2 for information provided to participants).

Right to withdraw

This was written in the information that potential participants received via email, and was reiterated at the initial focus group meeting. Participants were informed that whilst it was hoped that they would continue to be involved in the study, they could withdraw at any time during and after the focus group meetings up to the beginning of February. It was explained that audio recordings of the group interview sessions should allow for the identification of any individual who withdraws and does not wish for their contributions to be included as part of the study. However in practice the audio recordings did not allow such precise identification of who was talking. This would have needed to be discussed with anyone choosing to opt out, however no participants chose to withdraw from the study.

Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of participants

Unlike individual interviews it is difficult to give focus group participants a guarantee that confidences shared in the group will be respected. There was a possibility of 'gossip' especially where participants are part of the same professional /social network as was the case here. This issue was raised and participants reminded at

the outset, before the research began to be sensitive to this possibility. Data were anonymised when written up, with steps taken to avoid identifying individuals. No names of TAs were included in the transcripts and where (rarely) a pupil name was used, this was replaced in the transcription with 'student'.

Possible detrimental effects of the research

One issue highlighted in relation to focus groups is that of the possibility of over-disclosure where participants disclose issues and experiences that may be inappropriate in a group setting. I planned to deal with this by reminding participants at the outset about considering carefully what they share. During the interviews I planned to intervene by heading off any inappropriate discussion (for example discussing a teacher in a derogatory fashion) where possible, responding briefly, moving the discussion on and if appropriate picking up the issue with the participant afterwards. In fact this was not necessary during any of the sessions.

During the 'dream and 'design' phases of AI where ideal practice is envisaged and next steps discussed, I was mindful that this may raise unrealistic expectations for how their future work will be supported and developed. This was dealt with by explaining that the research was about gaining their views, and that their best hopes for their work may remain a long term goal and may not be able to be realised as part of the research project.

Ensuring the safe and appropriate storage and handling of data

Care was taken to keep recorded data safe and secure. Audio data files have been transferred to password-protected computer file and will be kept for a period of 10 years as required by university regulations.

Revealing of illegal or unethical behaviour

The appreciative inquiry focus limits this possibility by asking for examples of positive and effective practice. In the event of my becoming aware of such behaviour it would have been discussed with the individual/s concerned and an agreed course of action negotiated. This was not necessary as no such examples arose during the discussions.

Subterfuge

The research was designed to be as transparent as possible involving no subterfuge and disclosing the research aims at the outset during the first focus group meeting.

Disseminating research findings to participants

The process of the research meant that findings partly emerged collaboratively and in a fairly transparent way, as the research proceeded and some conclusions were discussed informally during the focus group sessions.

It is intended that I will hold a follow-up feedback meeting at the host secondary school meeting to present and discuss the findings of the research with those who took part. A written summary of the key findings will be given out to participants when it has been written up. I intend to invite Head Teachers / SENCOs of the schools at which the TAs involved work so as to make them aware of emerging themes and enabling them to become involved in taking forward the work back in school.

Procedures

Recruitment of Participants

Initial voluntary expressions of interest in becoming involved in the research were invited informally at schools in which I work as an educational psychologist.

Following this, in September 2013 I attended a TA meeting at the secondary school where I talked briefly, summarising the general area of my proposed research and asking for informal expressions of interest. I also took the opportunity to describe an outline of my research during some training that I delivered with TAs from the learning community and asked for the contact details of any interested TAs there who would be willing to be contacted again in the future with a view to being involved. A letter was given to those expressing an interest (see appendix 1). Those who had expressed an interest from any of these opportunities were then followed up with an email and given further details of the research and asking them if they would still like to be involved in the research (see appendix 2).

TAs were informed that participation would involve their attendance at 3 focus group meetings at which group discussions would be facilitated and recorded. It was explained that an Appreciative Inquiry framework would be used and that this focuses the discussion particularly on positive aspects of their work and on considering ways of developing their work further.

Twelve TAs agreed to take part in the research. They all worked in schools in the learning community that I supported in my role as an EP, in a rural area of South West England. Ten of the participating TAs were from the secondary school where the meetings took place and two were from local primary schools both of which were

feeder schools for the secondary. There were 11 female and 1 male participants. One of the TAs was absent for the second session and three different participants (including the male TA) were absent for the third session. So there were 12 participating TAs at the first session, 11 at the second and 9 at the third and final session.

An overview of the 12 participating TAs is given in Figure 8.

Coded Initials and Male or Female (M OR F)	Primary or secondary school	Years of experience working as a TA	Primary difficulty of the pupil they support
JA (F)	Primary	6	ADHD and Aspergers
ST (F)	Primary	7	Autism
GI (F)	Secondary	21	Literacy
MA (F)	Secondary	6	Aspergers
RO (F)	Secondary	1	General Learning and Literacy
GE (F)	Secondary	9	Autism
LA (M)	Secondary	7	Behaviour and Emotional
HA (F)	Secondary	7	Literacy
CH (F)	Secondary	1	Speech and Language
PE (F)	Secondary	5	Literacy
CA (F)	Secondary	2	Physical
CH (F)	Secondary	2	Autism

Figure 8: Overview of Participating TAs

At the first session several additional TAs turned up unexpectedly asking to be involved. This was problematic, not least because they had not been given the initial information about the research and so were not in a position to give fully informed consent (see appendix 3) in addition, this would have taken the number present to around 18, a number far greater than the 8-12 (or even fewer for some groups) that has been found to be optimum (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999). I therefore made the decision to politely ask the additional TAs if they would either leave, or sit in on the discussion without actively participating in it. As a result 6 additional TAs remained and were present just as observers, during the first session only.

The TAs who participated in the research were all White British, with English as a first language. Specific ages were not requested but there was an estimated range from twenties to fifties.

Timetable

A time-table drawn up in advance of my research outlines the form that the research project took as it evolved and some of the practical considerations.

Task	Time scale	Potential problems	Planning
Draft appreciative inquiry questions / format of meetings	September 2012	Over -prescription leading to researcher control	Discuss with colleagues about suitability of questions. Be aware of need to keep questions loose
Arrange dates for focus group meetings – contact secondary school SENCo who has agreed to host	September/ October 2012	Dates to coincide with TA meetings at secondary school hosting them will this be a convenient time for the primary TAs?	Consider holding a second focus group series if time allows, or proceed with reduced numbers

Task	Time scale	Potential problems	Planning
Write to participants informing of research details ethical issues and dates of meetings	October / November 2012	Ethical approval needs to be finalised	Tighten up on information provided to ensure 'informed consent'
Carry out focus group interviews	Second half of Autumn term 2012	Need to gain commitment of participants to attend all sessions	Monday afternoon sessions at secondary school 2.30-3.30
Transcribe, and analyse data using Thematic Analysis Approach	January– May 2013		
Write up thesis	May – September 2013		
Disseminate results	When thesis complete		Arrange follow-up feedback meeting at secondary school with participants to summarise findings and invite comment and feedback

Figure 9: Timetable of planned research

The format of the focus group interviews

The three focus group sessions took place at a secondary school in the South West of England in the learning community where the participating TAs worked. The sessions took place over a period of 5 weeks during the latter part of the autumn term 2012. Meetings were fortnightly, on Monday afternoons with each lasting approximately 1 hour.

A room was made available at the secondary school that hosted the meetings and hot drinks and biscuits / sweets were provided to create a welcoming and informal atmosphere. The groups were conducted with all those involved sitting on chairs arranged in a circle. A microphone was situated in the centre of the circle in order to facilitate audio recordings of the discussions. I took minimal additional written notes during the sessions.

At the first session I welcomed participants and introduced them to the research process, reminding them of the information about the research that they had been given previously (including the key ethical considerations outlined in the following section) and the nature of focus groups, reiterating the hope that they would feel free to discuss the issues in as natural a way as possible, given the situation. Participants took turns to introduce themselves and their work context. I then presented the questions / conversation starters.

At the second and third meetings I began the session by providing a brief recap on what we had covered at the previous meeting before introducing the questions and focus for that session. Other than the posing of the next question, additional comments from myself occurred in a natural conversational and responsive manner and were limited in the main to asking for clarification, (e.g. can you give an example of what you mean?) or affirming the TAs' contributions (e.g. that's interesting, thank you).

A summary of the content and facilitation of each session is shown in Figure 10.

mind: to reduce what is likely to be a large amount of information, to display it clearly and to draw conclusions about key themes.

With regard to the analysis of data, over-riding notions of transparency, simplicity, and collaborative sense-making were the drivers of my practice here. Reed (2007) suggests that the purpose of making sense of information in Appreciative Inquiry is 'to organise it in ways that will enable researchers understand what people feel they have achieved and how this can be helped to happen again' (page 139) and was keen to present my data in this way.

Due to the quite transparent nature of the research questions there was an extent to which findings were discussed in part as they emerged at the focus group meetings. A degree of coding and identifying themes was done as an integral part of the research. Following the first session I listed, in their own words the things the TAs had said they did to promote pupil progress and presented them on post it notes at the second meetings. They then organised these into categories, to which they assigned names. The main coding and identification of themes was carried out following the meetings and results presented. It is intended that a summary of findings presented in an accessible form will be shared at a follow-up meeting with participants.

I found it difficult initially to decide on a method of data analysis. I had come to the research and collected my data with plans to apply some sort of thematic analysis but had not selected a precise approach. Given the aims identified above, much of the theoretical texts regarding the analysis of qualitative data seemed far from simple or transparent. Many were also highly prescriptive in their approach. More than this, many of them seemed to be underpinned by a whole theory and methodology of

their own, which had not informed my research up to that point and which I therefore felt uncomfortable adopting. As an example of this, I initially considered the possibility of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, (IPA) since this works with texts generated by participants, and 'attempts to capture the quality and texture of individual experience' (Willig 2008). Further reading led me to feel that IPA was actually rather too closely wedded to phenomenology as a branch of psychology, a particular theory and approach with which my research journey had not previously engaged. Further, I questioned the extent to which the aims of my analysis matched those of IPA 'to unravel the meanings contained in accounts' (Smith 1996) and the extent to which gaining a sense of 'the 'texture and quality of experience' (Willig 2008) was actually relevant to my research aims and questions.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a process of 'searching across a data set – be that a number of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts, to find repeated patterns of meaning' Braun and Clarke (2006). This was an approach that was able to encapsulate the practical elements of many other approaches, such as IPA, but one that was independent of the accompanying theory, assumptions and prescriptions that I found incompatible with my own research. Indeed Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that 'through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data.

Further advantages of Thematic Analysis approach cited by Braun and Clarke (2006) were that the results are generally accessible to an educated public and that it is a useful method for working within a participatory research paradigm with participants

as collaborators. These factors were important for me given the aims of my research and the spirit of the Appreciative Inquiry methodology that I adopted.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that Thematic Analysis is compatible with a range of epistemological standpoints, from positivist to constructivist. This seems to relate most directly to the way in which the researcher views the data and explains the process. Thus as Braun and Clarke (2006) assert 'if you are working within an experimental framework you would not typically make claims about the social construction of the research topic, and if you were doing a constructionist thematic analysis you would not treat peoples' talk of experience as a transparent window on their world'. The context of my own research and my reflections on my epistemological stance clearly place my own research with the latter approach.

However, Willig (2008) questions whether a genuinely constructionist approach requires more than just a recognition of the active role of the researcher in the research process. She argues that an engagement with the role of language in the construction of categories and with the notion of discourse may be necessary to claim a genuinely constructionist analysis. Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that a constructionist use of thematic analysis would be one that 'examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings and experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses in society', (page 9). These views presented a difficulty with my own position. For my research, though explicitly constructionist in nature, I was interested in the data at a primarily semantic level, albeit against a background that acknowledges the way in which individuals make meaning of their experience. There is a sense in which my approach to data analysis may be seen to occupy less a constructionist and more a 'critical realist' approach which as

described by Braun and Clarke (2006) 'acknowledges the ways in which individuals make meaning of their experience and in turn the ways in which the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining a focus on the material and other limits of reality' (page 9). I felt this was the best approach to answering my research questions, and feel confident that the analysis remains compatible with the epistemological issues set out earlier by clearly acknowledging the socially constructed nature of both the data gathered and of the process of analysis itself. Indeed Boyatzis (1998) describes thematic analysis as - 'a way of seeing'. He acknowledges the subjective nature of the approach - that 'often what one sees through thematic analysis does not appear to others, even if they are observing the same information, events or situations'.

Due to the transparent nature of the research questions there was an extent to which findings were discussed in part as they emerged at the focus group meetings. For example, in responding to the question 'How might the work of TAs be conceptualised?' participants organised extracts of their comments from the previous session into categories to which they applied a name. This is presented in the results in Chapter 6.

Boyatzis (1998) suggests that there are three different ways to develop a thematic code: a. Theory driven, b. Prior data or research driven and c. Inductive (ie from the raw data) or data driven. Boyatzis proposes that these may be seen to represent a continuum from a theory driven approach to data driven. In the analysis of the data in the present study I was keen initially to utilise an inductive, or bottom-up approach. Braun and Clarke, (2006) explain that this method involves the researcher coding data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame. This was felt to be

compatible with my aim of giving TAs a voice, and of appreciating the information gained rather than imposing on it predetermined ideas. As Boyatzis (1998) notes of an inductive approach 'previously silenced voices or perspectives inherent in the information can be brought forward and recognised' (page 30). This said, the constructionist approach taken in my research acknowledges that it is never possible to be unaffected by previous ideas, that 'researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum', Braun and Clarke (2006).

During the data analysis stage I decided also to apply a deductive analysis to the data. Deductive analysis approaches the data using a 'top-down', more theory driven approach (Boyatzis, 1998). This type of analysis tends to produce a less rich description of the data but it can enable a more detailed analysis of a specific area (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I used the factors of preparedness, deployment and practice, highlighted as the three key important factors in the work of TAs that form part of the Wider Pedagogical Role model (Webster *et al* 2011). Whilst I have been critical of the premise of the model as an explanation of the negative impact of TAs, it nevertheless reflects current thinking about key factors in the work of TAs and provides relevant headings that I felt would be interesting to apply to my data, from an appreciative perspective, as opposed to the problem focused stance adopted by the authors of the model.

I carried out the main coding and identification of themes following the completion of the three focus group meetings. The data was coded first inductively, focusing on the data itself and on the identification of themes that could be picked out from the transcriptions without conscious regard to previous research or the themes and

research questions considered in the planning of the research and gathering of data. I then repeated the process applying a deductive approach utilising the headings of preparedness deployment and practice put forward by Webster *et al* (2011).

The process I engaged in followed broadly the steps set out by Braun and Clarke (2006) as detailed in Figure 11.

Phase	Description of the process and important features	Notes relating to my research
<i>Phase 1</i> Familiarizing yourself with the data	Transcription of data, reading and re-reading of the data, noting initial ideas. Immersion in the data.	I transcribed my own data, enabling a detailed familiarity with it. Conversations were transcribed verbatim, attempting to represent accounts as closely as possible to the participants' (see appendices 4,5 and 6). Transcriptions were re-read several times with the audio recordings to check for accuracy.
<i>Phase 2</i> Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code	I went through the entire data coding items that may begin to form repeated patterns. In accordance with Braun and Clarke (2006) I coded as many themes as possible, kept a little of the surrounding data so that they remained contextualized, and coded data regardless of whether it had already been fitted into previous themes (so some data was being coded more than once). This process was carried out first inductively and then deductively (See appendix 7 for an example)

Phase	Description of the process and important features	Notes relating to my research
<i>Phase 3</i> Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.	Potential themes were written on postcards along with corresponding codes. The relationship between codes, between themes and sub-themes' was considered (from Braun and Clarke, 2006).
<i>Phase 4</i> Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts, and the entire data set. Generating a thematic map of the analysis.	Checking of themes against coded extracts to consider how well they seemed to fit. Two colleagues checked samples of data to verify a good fit of data into themes. Thematic maps were developed and adapted for both the inductive themes and from the deductive approach. (appendices 8 and 9 respectively)
Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.	The name and scope of each theme was refined and a final thematic overview produced, one for the inductive and one for the deductive analysis (see Figures 14 and 19 respectively)
Producing the report	Final analysis. Selection of compelling extract examples relating back to the research questions and literature. Producing a scholarly report of the analysis.	See Chapters 5 and 6 containing a report on: 1. inductive analysis 2. deductive analysis; 3. themes within AI framework and research questions

Figure 11: Overview of stages in Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006)

Ensuring Validity and Reliability

There has been debate with regard to the meaning, relevance and importance of the terms reliability and validity in relation to qualitative research (Morse 2002, Lewis 2009,).

Reliability relates essentially to 'consistency', that is the extent to which a measurement device yields the same results when repeated under similar conditions. In the present study this would relate to an evaluation of the extent to which the same or similar results would be gained if another researcher were to engage with the TAs in my study, or whether similar results would be achieved with a different group of TAs. Banister (1994) argues that the term is not appropriate to qualitative research, because, as in the present study, the research is interested in the specifics of a particular context rather than a search for generalisable 'truths', as such my research does not necessarily expect nor seek consistent accounts.

Willig (2008) defines validity as the extent to which a piece of research describes, measures or explains what it aims to describe measure or explain. In relation to the present study this may be considered as the extent to which the research gained the 'true' views of TAs, and to what extent the research procedure adopted may have presented barriers to or distortions of the genuine views of the participants.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that within qualitative research the terms reliability and validity should be substituted with the parallel concept of "trustworthiness".

Robson (2002) describes threats to trustworthiness in flexible designs, in relation to three main issues – those of reactivity, respondent bias and researcher bias.

Reactivity refers to the way in which the presence of the researcher may interfere

somehow with the research setting and possibly affect participants' behaviour.

Respondent bias encompasses a range of positions taken by participants that may mask their 'true' views, such as behaving in an obstructive fashion if they perceive the researcher as a threat or conversely, giving responses that they think will place them in a positive light. Finally, researcher bias refers to the way in which the views or assumptions made by the researcher can affect participant selection, the types of questions asked and the selecting and reporting of the information gathered. Each of these will be addressed in turn, first with a comment on the appropriateness of the criticism within the constructivist approach taken in the present study, and then with descriptions of the relevant practical steps that were taken to promote 'trustworthiness' within the research process.

Reactivity

This relates to the effects of my presence as a researcher.

The methodology adopted in the present study is one that wholeheartedly acknowledges the active role of the researcher to the extent that the research process is seen as one of active collaboration between the researcher and the researched.

It follows that the data gathered is viewed and presented as the outcome of joint working between a particular educational psychologist working with a particular group of TAs in a particular context. What is important in terms of the credibility and trustworthiness of the study is that this is acknowledged, shared and reflected upon.

Nevertheless, in a study where the aim is to gain TA views there must be some attempt to facilitate these in a way that is encouraging and that allows the TAs to

Speak as freely and readily together as possible. To this end I started the TAs off with a key question or topic for discussion and then remained largely quiet, with most of my further comments being ones of clarification rather than attempts to change the course of the discussion. This allowed the group to take the discussion on in a relatively unstructured way. Thus while the key questions were quite clear and necessarily restricting, there were just four of them across the three, hour- long sessions during which the TAs had opportunity to talk about them, to challenge some of the assumptions within them and to stray into other areas that may be considered to be more of their own agenda. A friendly and welcoming approach was attempted with the provision of tea and biscuits / sweets and friendly banter encouraged.

Respondent Bias

This relates to the threat to validity that the TAs responses and contributions may not have been their 'true views', due to some limiting or distorting factor within the research context.

One response to this is that the social constructionist stance adopted in the present study would question the extent to which 'true views' exist in any static 'tappable' sense, acknowledging that truth is co-constructed in a more dynamic way that is, of course, dependent on the particular context.

It is perhaps more appropriate to consider the extent to which the TAs' contributions and responses were felt to be honest open and genuine. Again it is important to acknowledge the particular context and the impact of the specific details of it on the data presented in my own research.

Green and Hart (1999) highlight the effects of sampling and the environment as well as the research relationship on the production of data in discussion groups, suggesting that 'different kinds of stories are told in different contexts'.

In the present study it felt important that the school SENCo (the line manager for those TAs who worked at the secondary school) and the lead TA at the school were not present during the focus group meetings. This was discussed with both members of staff who were persuaded, readily, that their presence may inhibit the TA's sense of freedom to be honest about their work, and they were keen to stand back from the process.

The way in which the wider purpose of the research was presented may also be viewed as relevant here in the promotion of a forum in which participants could be open and honest. This was presented transparently as research for the purpose of my doctorate and my interest in finding out about the positive aspects of TAs work, rather than, for example, a project funded by the school with a view to improving TA practice.

Researcher Bias

This refers to the notion that the particular views and assumptions of the researcher can pose a threat to the validity or trustworthiness of the research. This is viewed rather differently from a social constructionist and relativist stance. The view taken in this research is that all researchers bring their own particular identity, experiences and beliefs to their work. Further, this is positively embraced as an interesting, valuable and integral part of the research process. My research does not seek or claim objectivity but rather explores the ways in which the identity of the researcher

has structured the way the study is defined and presented. As such the researcher's subjectivity is viewed as a resource rather than as a problem to be overcome (Parker 1994b).

Steps were nevertheless taken that enhance the 'trustworthiness' of the study. For example the participants were involved in some aspects of the coding of data, when conceptualising their effective practice (see section on data analysis). Colleagues were involved in checking the accuracy of samples of the transcripts and aspects of my interpretation of data, and I have been as transparent as possible in the presentation of my own methods of coding and identification of themes.

Willig (2008) talks about reflexivity as an important feature within qualitative research. This is where the researcher continuously and critically scrutinizes and reflects on his or her role in the research as a person (personal reflexivity) and as a theorist / thinker (epistemological reflexivity) a process which 'discourages impositions of meaning by the researcher and thus promotes validity' (Willig page 16). This has been attempted in the present study in a way that is as clear, honest and informative.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has detailed my thinking, planning and execution of the research project. It has contextualised the research within a personal and theoretical framework that has been described from a social constructionist perspective. It presents an Appreciative Inquiry methodology that has framed the approach and design of the research, and the focus group method used to generate and gather data from the teaching assistant participants. Practical and ethical features of the

project have been outlined. Finally, a thematic analysis approach has been described as the selected method of data analysis including the application of both an inductive and a deductive approach.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS - PRESENTATION OF THEMES

Chapter Overview

This chapter and the discussion in the following Chapter 6 relate to the final, 'written report' stage of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework.

This chapter will summarize the findings from the inductive and deductive thematic analyses described in Chapter 4. The main themes and associated subthemes identified will be presented, defined and illustrated with data extracts.

There are two parts to this chapter. The first presents the findings from the inductive analysis that was undertaken, providing a relatively unrestricted data –driven approach without reference to any theoretical frameworks, headings or specific questions. The second part describes the themes identified from the deductive approach that applied the headings of *preparedness*, *deployment* and *practice* as prompts for analysis, given that they have been highlighted in the research as important factors in the work of TAs (Webster *et al* 2011) and to offer a balance to the inductive approach.

Data extracts from the focus group transcriptions are included to provide examples of data that contributed to the themes. (full lists of data extracts for each theme are presented in appendices 11-16). As recommended by Braun and Clarke, (2006) I have attempted to provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data, by presenting two or three supporting data extracts that illustrate each sub theme.

Braun and Clarke suggest that it is important to retain a little of the context of the extract, to aid meaning, which I have done. I have also assigned codes to extracts to show where in the data gathering process the extract was obtained. Thus, data

extracts are identified as 1, 2 or 3 to indicate from which focus group session they were obtained, and as a, b or c to show which topic focus or question the extract was drawn from. This gives some indication of the topic of discussion from where the extract came (although the conversations of course meandered in a natural way that meant there was some backtracking in the discussion to previous points and some discussion that may be seen to have departed generally somewhat from the focus). Also indicated in some extracts in brackets is a P or S to show whether the response was from a primary or secondary TA. I was not able to identify this with certainty for all extracts but have given this information where I was both certain, and where it is seen as particularly helpful or relevant. For clarity this coding approach is set out in the table below. By way of example, an extract coded 1:b (P) indicates the extract was from focus group session 1, during the conversation following the prompt to share examples of high points / rewarding experiences in their work and that it came from a primary TA.

Focus Group Session	Summary of prompts for discussion
1	A. What works? Effective things you do to help the pupil to progress B. What's important? A particular high point / rewarding experience in your work
2	A. Discuss categories for examples of practice given in session 1 B. How things would be in an ideal world / considering what <i>could</i> be
3	A. Sharing examples of effective practice related to teaching and learning B. Things that would make your work more effective C. Concluding comments / reflections

Figure 12: Illustration of codes given next to data extracts

The inductive and deductive analyses were conducted separately, (the inductive approach was completed first). Comparisons, links and commonalities between the two were considered after the themes for each had been finalised.

I have been careful in my use of language to avoid reference to themes 'emerging' from the data as if they reside within the data waiting to be discovered. The term 'identified' is used instead, to reflect the extent to which this was an active process for me as a researcher, and an acknowledgement that

'if themes 'reside' anywhere, they reside in our heads, from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them'

(Ely *et al* 1997), from Braun and Clarke (2006).

Different levels of themes are presented - the main overarching themes and then subthemes within them. Braun & Clarke, (2006) explain that 'a theme 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (page 82). Subthemes are "...themes-within-a-theme." (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92) which give structure to the overarching, larger themes.

Data extracts represent as far as possible verbatim transcriptions from audio tapes of the focus-group interviews. Punctuation has been added in an attempt to give a sense of the correct intonation. Pauses are represented by dots:and where I was unable to hear precisely what was being said this is represented by crosses: xxx. Un-emboldened words in brackets are my additions to aid understanding or clarify context.

To aid clarity and transparency of the data analysis process from start to finish, this chapter is supported by examples in the appendix which provide illustrations of outcomes from each stage of the analysis:

- The complete transcribed data of three focus group discussions (see Appendices 4, 5 and 6)
- Sample of coded data (Appendix 7)
- Evolving thematic maps, showing earlier versions and the final version of the final themes and sub-themes for the presented in this chapter (inductive analysis: Appendix 8, deductive analysis Appendix 9)
- List of all supporting data extracts for final themes and subthemes from the inductive analysis (Appendices 11,12,13 and 14)
- List of all supporting data extracts for final themes identified from the deductive analysis (Appendices 14, 15 and 16).

In summary, the aim of this chapter and the following Chapter 5 is to provide, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), 'a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell - within and across themes' (page 93).

Themes Identified from Inductive Analysis

This section will present, describe and explain the main themes and subthemes identified from the inductive thematic analysis process described in the previous section. It represents as far as is possible, a free, unfettered and open look at the data that asks what seem to be key themes here?, regardless of any theoretical or methodological framework and even, at this stage, without direct reference to my specific research questions.

Diagrams showing the themes and subthemes identified are presented as shown in Figure 1.

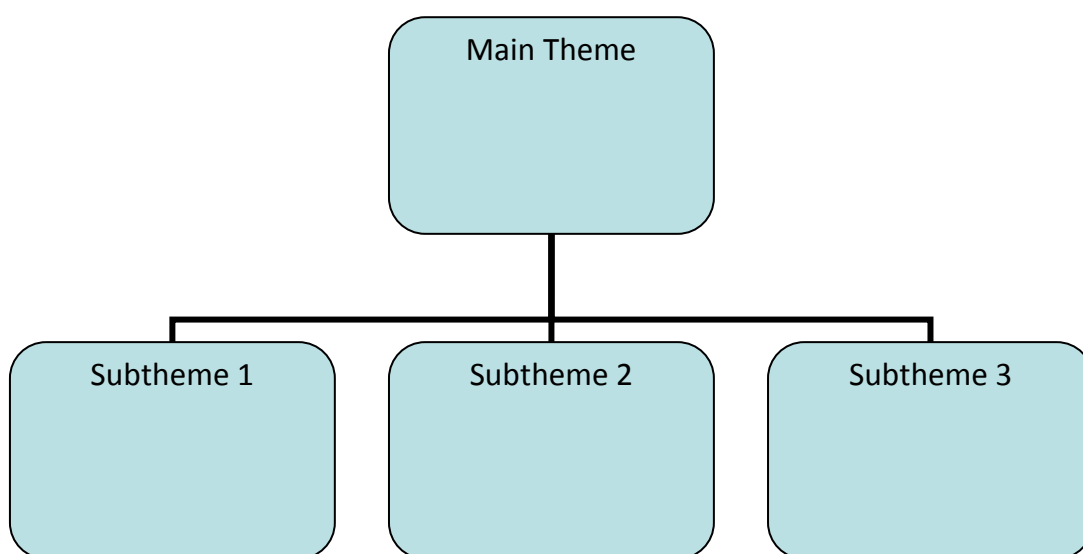


Figure 13: Format of presentation of themes and subthemes

There were 4 main themes identified during the inductive analysis. An overview of these themes and the corresponding subthemes that seemed to represent important elements within the main them, are shown in Figure 14.

Main Theme Identified and defining features of the extracts comprising that theme	Subthemes identified within the main theme and their defining features
Enabling Coping Defining features: TA support that seems to go beyond being just helpful, and without which the pupil would struggle to stay in school / class.	Social Emotional coping (TA support focused on helping pupils to control their emotions or cope with social pressures) Keeping up (TA support focused on helping pupils to keep up with peers / tasks/ pace of school)
Relationship with pupil Defining features: examples, including interactions with and feelings towards the pupil that say something about the TAs relationship with them	Closeness: The TAs close bond with and knowledge of the pupil at a personal level Advocate: TA as champion of the pupils cause Status : Issues relating to the TA's perceived status with the pupil

Main Theme Identified and defining features of the extracts comprising that theme	Subthemes identified within the main theme and their defining features
Relationship with Teacher Defining Features: Examples, including interactions with and feelings/ opinions about the teacher that say something about the TAs relationships with them	Critic: TA is critical of the teacher Supporter: TA supports the teacher Status: Issues relating to the TA's perceived status in relation to the teacher
Constraints of the school system Defining Features: Description or reference to constraints that make the TAs work difficult or less effective	Views of progress: TAs views of progress for pupil broader than those of school Rigidity of Curriculum: TAs expressing frustration with rigidity of the set curriculum and/ or wish to break out of curriculum constraints Time for communication: TAs expressing need for more time to talk with teachers

Figure 14: Summary of themes and subthemes identified from the inductive analysis

Main Themes and Subthemes

Figure 15 shows the first main theme identified, 'enabling coping', and the two subthemes associated with it entitled 'social emotional coping' and 'keeping up'.

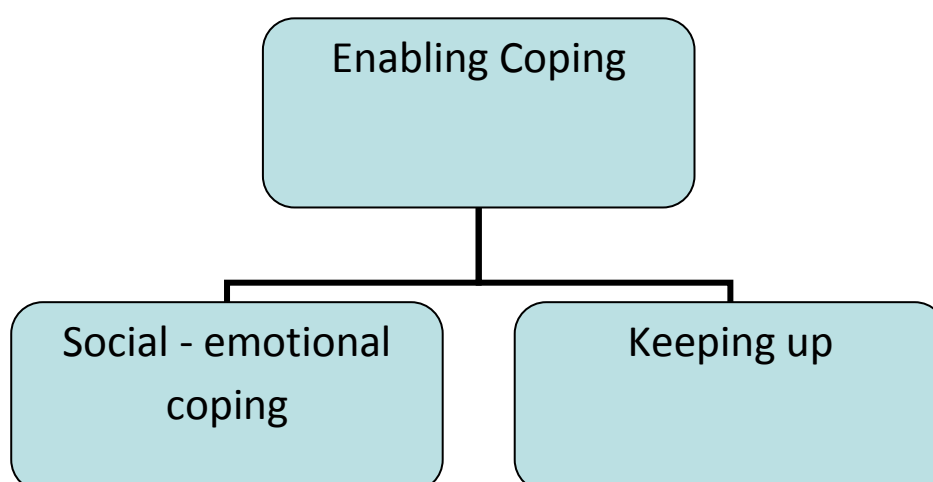


Figure 15: Main theme 1: Enabling Coping and subthemes social emotional coping and keeping up

This theme represents a view that what the TAs do is not just useful to the pupils they support, but necessary for the pupil's survival in a mainstream setting. This was expressed explicitly by TAs and there were examples suggesting that the support given enabled the pupil to perform at the most basic level required to function in class and around the school.

The social emotional subtheme comprised examples of the TAs support that enabled pupils to remain calm and to avoid panic or frustration:

She starts working herself up and gets into a panic, I think if she didn't have a TA with herShe would turn to me and like, immediately I can see in her face that she's panicking and she'll start to say what she's worried about (1:a S *social emotional coping*)

Once the frustration builds up that's going to be him gone for the rest of the lesson so because you're there with him recognizing that, which has been built up over time of working with him you see the small sign of when he's about to go(1:a *social emotional*)

There are links here with the theme relating to the TA's relationship with the pupil, particularly with the subtheme of closeness, to be discussed later in this section.

The examples above suggest that the TA is well placed to enable coping because of their often close physical proximity to the pupil and their personal knowledge of the pupil.

The social vulnerability of some of the students supported by the TAs was evident and the TAs role in providing social protection:

She is incredibly vulnerable and if, you know she ..if she didn't have someone with her she would be an immediate target (1:29 aS *social emotional*)

There is a sense that without TA's social emotional support the consequences could be significant:

If the TA wasn't there to deal with that one particular student, to be able to take them out of the room, calm them down, talk to them, you know...(1:b *social emotional*)

The subtheme of 'keeping up' comprises examples that suggest that the TAs provide support that enables the pupil to keep up in class and when moving around school. These were not examples of supporting pupils to keep up with curriculum content as such, but rather of support to keep up with the pace or to manage the immediate task or situation.

When he was like last in class to leave the lesson, (I) made sure everything was packed reasonably quickly so he could walk with the group, rather than pack his bags last and be 100 meters behind the rest of the class, so little things like that I think are really key for stepping into the secondary world (1:aS *keeping up*)

..with copying from the board I always allow her to start, but she's so slow she'd get to the second line and that'll be it (2:bS *keeping up*)

Whereas these examples suggest a hands-on approach, with the TA stepping to help directly as they see a need, the following example suggests a more indirect approach that involves talking to the pupil about coping:

A lot of it is how to cope with the lessons he's in.....we'll discuss any issues he has in the classroom, and how we can resolve them, or how I can talk to the staff (3aS) *social emotional*

And a view that such high levels of support may be required only occasionally temporarily or only when absolutely necessary was expressed:

It's just that reassurance and when he's lost out there, just to, sort of, point him in the right direction... but after 2 weeks he doesn't need that (1a25S *keeping up*)

Then he'd be late for lessons and that's almost destroying his ability to socially interact, so then I will step in and help out so he can move along at the same time as his classmates (2:b77S *keeping up*)

The sense that the TA is vital for the pupil was expressed directly:

Cause they 100% wouldn't be able to cope in a mainstream school if they didn't have a TA (2:bS *Keeping up*)

She wouldn't be able to cope in mainstream secondary school unless she had a TA with her I don't think (1:aS *social emotional coping*)

Main theme 2, 'Relationship with the Pupil' is shown in Figure 16.

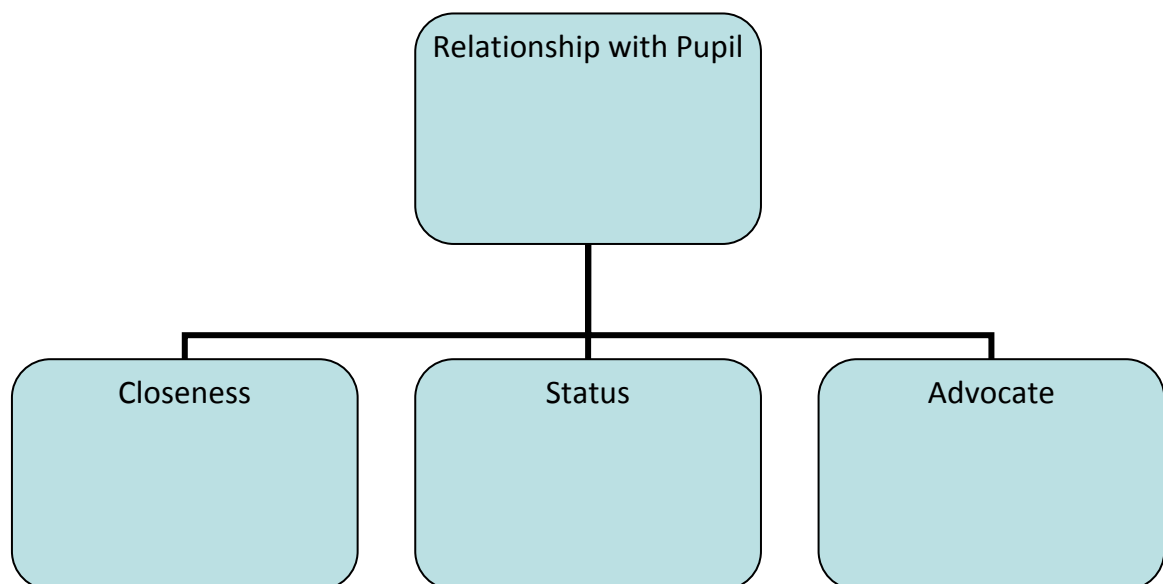


Figure 16: Main theme 2 Relationship with the pupil and subthemes closeness, status and Advocate

Many of the TAs' descriptions of their work conveyed a strong sense of the relationship that they have with the pupil they support. The nature of this relationship seemed often to be key to the support they provided, and unique to their role as a 1:1 supporter for the pupil. There was some evidence that issues within each subtheme represented both positives and negatives for the TA.

Closeness

TAs gave examples of the closeness they felt to the student:

You're not their parent....sometimes you take on that role you know, you love them a bit (2:b *closeness*)

**I said you've had a really fantastic lunchtime and he said 'can I have a cuddle?'
(aahh) and I thought that was lovely' (1:b P *closeness*)**

In some instances the relationship the TA described that they had developed with the pupil seemed to enable them to provide a personalized approach to support, based on their knowledge of the pupil:

You build up a relationship and you learn about, you know, how to calm them down or pinpoint the reasons why they're getting like upset sometimes, nip things in the bud..it's important, xxx it's rewarding when you get that bond (1: b S *closeness*)

And there was a suggestion that this relationship was one that enabled a level of knowledge of the pupil beyond that of the teachers:

They (the pupil) trust you and are willing to share that information, and then you get a bigger picture, of what's going on at home as well, sometimes you know, the teacher has lots of students, they don't necessarily have that..(1b *closeness*)

She's started to feel more confident with me and she'll actually open up about a lot of things that are going on in her life at home, (1: b75S *closeness*)

Most of the examples presented the closeness of the relationship very much as a positive and as a basis for the effectiveness of their support. However there was a suggestion that it could present a difficulty:

I tend to get too emotionally involved...you can't take every child home with you and solve all of their emotional problems, you can only be there for them for the 6 hours you're at school with them (2b P closeness)

Advocate

One aspect of the relationship with the pupil that TAs spoke about was being an advocate for the pupil, protecting them and speaking up for their rights in both social and academic contexts:

I see myself in a protecting role, I am there as a sort of buffer between maybe the rest of the group and my student (1a29S) advocate

You know, the other students in the class and their understanding of certain, erm, disabilities, you do have to act like a buffer, make sure things aren't said out of turn and that they do truly understand the situation of other people (1a S advocate)

Instead of just being the TA that is there to support them, write the date, you are recognized as somebody that is probably..the person pushing for them (3:b advocate)

There was a clear sense of passion in the tone of some examples and reference to a need to fight for pupils:

It's that you're fighting for your student - you're fighting on behalf of them, I don't want him just to be shuttered out of the room erm..you know because he is a bright..you know he has got it..he may not be the top bright boy but you know he's got something.. (3.b P advocate)

When you've been with someone for 2 years and fought their cause.. you know, you just want to help big time..(3:bP advocate)

Status

There are links here between the TAs' references to closeness of the relationship. This subtheme referred to the TA-pupil relationships in terms of power, respect and position. There were examples of the TA as an authority figure:

I give him boundaries, which I don't think he has at home, the teacher, she's you know the nice guy and I'm you know, come on you have to sit and do this..(1:a status)

TAs also gave examples suggesting that their relationship with the pupil could be as a friend or equal. At times this appeared to be a deliberate strategy by the TA:

In some lessons we're actually part of the group, we're actually a team member, yes we actually work on a table with so many students and we're

actually part of the team so if they have a quiz or something the teacher includes us...we obviously hold back and let the students give their answers ..and ..then..yeah..unless we get a bit competitive! (3:aS status)

This was highlighted as a different relationship with the pupils than that of teachers:

Also I think sometimes that they (pupils) think of us...we're not the same as the teachers..we're sort of more on their level...yeah (1a:S status)

This 'equal' relationship was presented in some instances as a positive, allowing greater knowledge of the pupil:

As they see us more as equal, they come to us a bit more..(2:b S status)

You're almost invisible sometimes, you see a lot of interesting things..(2:b S status)

However, it was also a source of tension for the TA, where some ambivalence was evident:

He turned round and said well you're not a teacher you're more like a friend than a teacher and I thought that's quite a nice compliment , and then thought hmm is that a compliment? (laughter) You know it's like you said, they don't actually class you as a teacher or as a member of staff, you know they kind of see you as more on their side really..(1:aS status)

There was a sense that being an equal may make it difficult to manage behaviour effectively:

It's when they don't see you as a member of staff, it's a difficult position to be in as a TA because you don't want to be a teacher you want to keep that relationship equal, but if they are being naughty they need to know they can't..in your presence they can't just continue (2:b S status)

But then..if...so maybe if I was stronger..and just went 'Uh No' or there's consequences...then it wouldn't happen as much (2b .S status)

Figure 17 shows main theme 3, TA relationship with the teacher and the subthemes entitled critic, supporter and status.

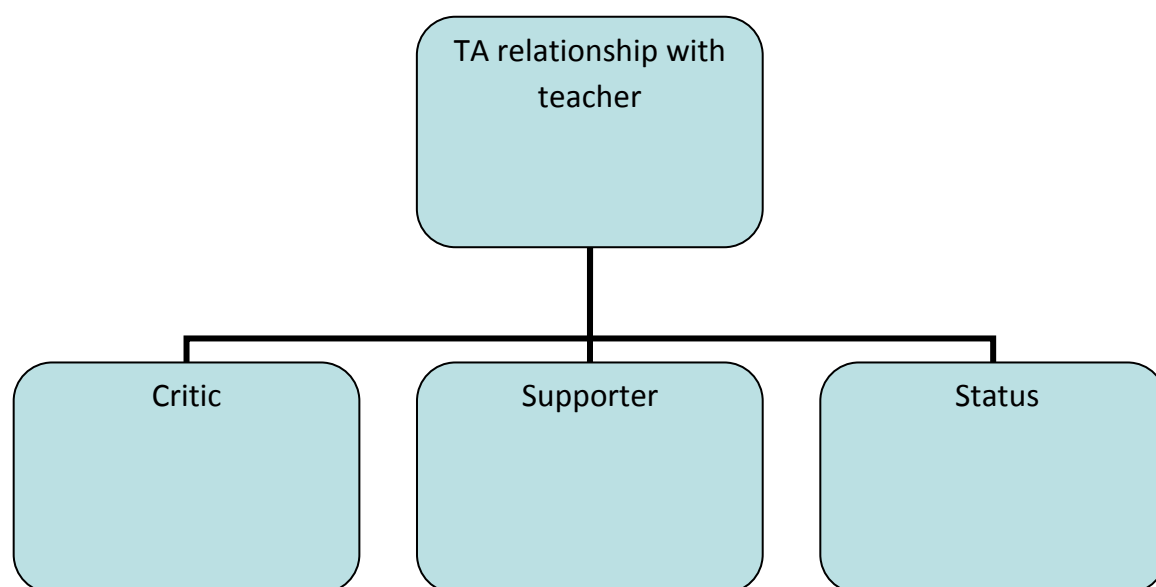


Figure 17: main theme 3, TA relationship with the teacher and the subthemes entitled critic, supporter and status

The TAs' relationship with the teacher, in the case of the primary TAs, and with the many teachers with whom they came into contact, in the case of the secondary TAs, came across as an important feature in much of the TAs discussions about their

work. The TAs were at times critical of the teacher's practice and approach, both in relation to the pupil they supported and sometimes more generally. The TAs also gave examples of how their own practice and their effectiveness related to directly providing support for the teacher and of the teachers expressing appreciation for support. Echoing the subtheme of status within the 'relationship with pupil' theme, the TAs' description of their status with teachers seemed to be an issue involving some tension.

Critic

TAs were, at times, critical of the way that teachers delivered lessons particularly in relation to the particular pupils that the TA supports:

they (the pupil) don't have any choice, they've got to be in there doing it, but sometimes it's delivered in such a dry way (3:a S critic)

There were some critical comments about teachers' practice more generally

..a lot of the time the instruction is in their heads, and they don't always fully transfer that to the children (3: a critic)

And there was some criticism of the way in which teachers interacted with pupils:

They don't really get a lot of praise from the teachers (3:a critic)

..often when a student doesn't understand and asks the teacher, they just keep repeating the instruction x xx or say listen more carefully...so they listen..but..it's seeing things from a different perspective sometimes...especially dyslexic students – some of them think quite differently .. it's knowing..(3:a *critic*)

There were also examples of the teachers' lack of awareness or acknowledgement of pupils' curriculum needs:

it's when the teacher just looks at the curriculum and thinks right that's the learning goals, that's what we need to achieve and I'm just going to plough on through regardless of where the kids are actually...(3:b.*critic*)

And they made comment about the effects on their own practice of teachers' failing to explain adequately to pupils:

3.94 we're spending a lot of time re-teaching what should have been taught the first time in the ... at the appropriate level for that child..(3:b *critic*)

In contrast to the TA's close relationship with the pupil there was the criticism of teachers that:

..they don't have that level of..they don't touch base with the children enough, not individually, not...this...nowhere near enough for them to realize the gap between the curriculum and a child.(3:bS *critic*)

In one case the TA clearly had very different views from the teacher about the needs of the pupil:

The problem I have at the moment is that I think my little boy is more intelligent than the teacher thinks he is, and she's trying to give him lower work or put him out on to the computers (3.b Pcritic)

Supporter

The TAs often described their effective practice in terms of providing support for teachers. During the focus group task of assigning categories to the examples of effective practice that had been given it was suggested that:

we could do with a section on supporting staff, supporting teachers, because we really do support them as well (2: a supporter)

they (teachers) do need to be given the confidence too sometimes, be given a pat on the back as well, (3:b supporter)

Support was at times related to the TAs' having superior knowledge of their pupil's needs and to knowledge about particular strategies:

I guess it's like helping the teachers too, because they're not always aware..

(3:b) supporter

and to the TAs' positioning as experts in the area of supportive and differentiated approaches:

We spent a lot of time talking through the sorts of things they could do with them in lessons, erm.. and certainly the English teacher was very aware that her syllabus really was going to go out of the window..(3:b supporter)

There were references to the teachers' appreciation of the TAs support:

3.121 b My teacher is lovely, she's always saying thank you very much - couldn't do it without you (3:bP supporter)

he brought in some chocolates because of the work the TAs do, xx he's a new teacher, xxx he said thank you, because he teaches a subject that's quite hard to teach and there's a lot of disruption so without the TAs in the room.. you know...1:b S supporter)

Status

In some of the examples in both the critic and the supporter subthemes, there was a sense that the TA is implied as superior to the teacher, at least in their knowledge, appreciation of and sensitivity to their pupil's particular needs. The status subtheme comprises examples where status was more directly referred to. This was clearly an area of tension and anxiety in some instances.

There were examples where effective practice was couched in terms of a relationship with the teacher where the TA felt respected:

the teachers knowing that you know your student, so if you say, you know, I really don't think this is going to work, you know, they respect your opinion and allow you to do what you think is best (1:a *status*)

There were also descriptions of anxiety around having inferior status that seemed to act as a barrier to effective communication:

I could be a bit more proactive in going in and ..talking to..tackling teachers on this..I don't know if it's because.. I'm.. it's being a TA or what, there is a feeling that they're the teacher, ..I shouldn't really be dictating, what ..they tell me..there is an element of that .. I feel a bit scared sometimes (2:b *status*)

and I think when you are a teaching assistant , you feel it's not your place to sort of question what the teacher does (3:b *status*)

Figure 18 shows main theme 4 entitled constraints of the school system and subthemes broader views of progress, rigid curriculum and limited time for communication.

'Constraints of the school system' represents a recurring theme of frustration described by the TAs in relation to their work. Each of the three subthemes refers to an issue where the TA's views about what is important for their support for pupils, as presented during the discussion, are at odds with what they describe as the realities of the school system.

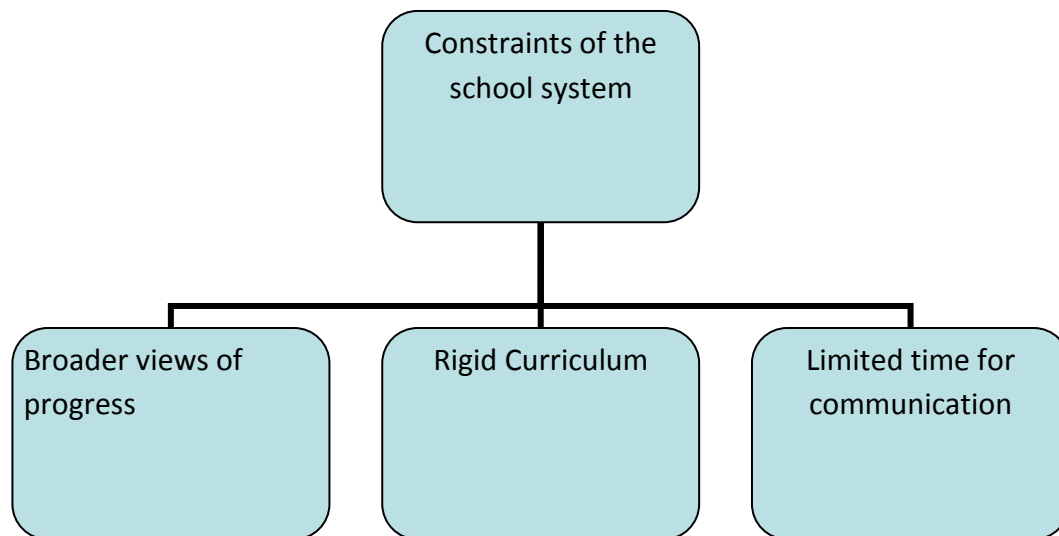


Figure 18: main theme 4 constraints of the school system and subthemes broader views of progress, rigid curriculum and limited time for communication

Broader Views of Progress

The issue of what constitutes progress and how it should be measured was expressed as a frustration in relation to the pupils they support.

The TAs presented views of progress that were focused on social targets and on a holistic view of the pupil:

and so we see progress in lots of different ways, not necessarily just, you know a progression from 4.2 to 4.5, and for me, progress is a student that school- refuses and, you know, and is finding school life so difficult that they can't come to school - to them being comfortable to come to school and being happy in school, (1:bS broader views of progress)

He circulated, he talked to people and that is- that for me was real achievement, seeing him so comfortable in that situation, (1:bS *broader views of progress*)

another student who came in year 7 who was deemed to be so disruptive that he would never get through school and now he's in year 11, to me that's progress, that's what I think of when I think of progress, but then I guess that's because I don't do literacy interventions I don't do those type of interventions but to me it's just about, you know, the whole person rather than...(1:b S *broader views of progress*)

The idea that progress should be viewed from the pupil's perspective and that the focus should be on things that are meaningful to the pupil was expressed:

I've seen lots of progress but sometimes he'll say yeah whatever – you can see when he's really pleased – that 's when you know it's made a difference - when it helps him, and he's moved on quite a big stage.. (1:b *broader views of progress*)

..he's using writing now as a way of communication which he didn't before – that, to him, he's pleased with that, that's an achievement .. (1:b S *broader views of progress*)

This was also expressed in terms of progress as a measure of the TAs impact:

In an ideal world the measure of a student's success should not necessarily be what they come out with at the end of year 11 the kind of students we work with on a daily basis – the measure of their success is whether they've, some of them, have managed to get up and get here and if we're encouraging them to do that every day then we've been effective.. (2:b S *broader views of progress*)

The idea that for some pupils, seemingly small steps represent a big achievement was expressed:

Our targets are to see a student concentrating or listening for a certain period of time, and like with IEPs..if they can attain those targets then as far as we're concerned yes they've moved forward (3:b S *broader views of progress*)

They've achieved..or if they can stay in school or get to school in the morning (3:b *broader views of progress*)

Rigid Curriculum

The TAs spoke about the rigidity of the curriculum and the constraints and inappropriateness of this for some pupils in class:

We're restricted when we go into class because we've got to work to that curriculum (1:a S *rigid curriculum*)

you've got students in a mainstream school, who cannot cope with the curriculum that they're being given (1:b S *rigid curriculum*)

There was reference to the school's focus on levels and targets that may not be appropriate for the pupil:

Would it be realistic to say that he will you know go up 2 levels in a year? No probably not..but that might be the expectation (3:b *rigid curriculum*)

The school has targets that have been set *always* having to push, push, push all the time so the school keeps its standards..(2:b *S rigid curriculum*)

There's a lot that seems to be having to be covered isn't there, due to the curriculum and it's just so fast it's a large range ...key stage..if you are sat at the bottom ..it's a real struggle (1:a *rigid curriculum*)

The desire for a more flexible curriculum was expressed:

If I could just say we'll do a whole day of life skills, that would give her independence, but I can't do that because she has to go to English xxx we are stuck with the constraints (2:b *rigid curriculum*)

It's so difficult sometimes getting students out of lessons that aren't appropriate for them.. they'd be a lot better doing life skills or spending more time on a subject they really do need some help with...I'd be happy to spend time..(3:b*S rigid curriculum*)

And there was a view that assessment is not always arranged in a way that allows the pupil to demonstrate their skills and knowledge:

I think we're so rigid with our assessment of students and just because they..he can't write it down , doesn't necessarily mean that he doesn't know it..so alternative ways of assessing especially with, you know, our student..(3:b S *rigid curriculum*)

The assessment process..it's not really geared to some students (3:b *rigid curriculum*)

Time for communication

The TAs discussed how much-needed communication with teachers was limited and this was, in most cases, expressed in terms of lack of available time in school:

communication would really help xx but it's an impossible scenario, nobody has the time (3:c *time for communication*)

I think the problem is time restraints ..you talk about time for planning but when would that happen? (2:b *time for communication*)

Time for communication was presented as something that was important for the TAs effectiveness:

if you had a bit more time to communicate with the teacher about what's going on, you'd be..have more confidence that you are teaching it exactly how she wants it..(3:b *time for communication*)

Even if it's like 5 minutes in the lesson ...even if you said when you've got them set up, you know they can do the date or whatever on the board, left them to do that and we had a few minutes..because the amount of help you'd be able to give them in that hour lesson would completely outweigh him losing..the teacher losing 5 minutes (3:b *time for communication*).

Themes Identified from Deductive Analysis

This section presents themes identified through a deductive analysis. Having begun with a relatively 'free' look at the data in the inductive analysis, I approached the data this time, applying the headings of Deployment, Preparedness and Practice within which to search for themes. The headings are taken from the Wider Pedagogical Role model of TA practice (Webster *et al* 2011) described and critiqued in Chapter 3. The model is presented by the authors as a one that 'conceptualises the most likely explanations for the negative effects of TA support' (Webster *et al* 2011). Whilst I have been critical of this problem-focused approach and of the assumptions that underpin it, I have taken the headings themselves as potentially useful ones, acknowledging the authors' aim for the model 'to articulate the key facets of TAs' work and the effects of the support they provide'.

The definition of these headings as applied by the authors is presented in the literature review in Chapter 3. In this section a definition of the headings as I applied them in the deductive analysis is presented in table 4:2 These represent summarized

versions of the concepts, and do not necessarily refer to the particular examples and precise assumptions embedded in the authors' use of the terms, nevertheless, I have retained what I feel to be the main essence of the ideas.

The present study clearly focuses on TAs *talking about* their work, as opposed to observations of direct practice. As such this analysis asks what (if anything) do the TAs have to say that relates to these three key ideas?

An overview of themes identified from deductive analysis is provided in the Figure 19.

Heading from Wider Pedagogical Role Model (Webster et al (2011) and definition as applied in the analysis	Themes identified within the heading
Deployment References with a focus on where, with whom or in what capacity the TA is placed to work	Importance of feeling factored in Examples where TA's felt purposefully deployed in the lesson; or expressions of a wish to be more factored in
Preparedness	Importance of having information about the lesson TA's express the importance of being informed about lessons Lack of time to talk with teachers TAs express a lack of time for effective communication
Practice References where there is a focus on the nature or content of TA-pupil interactions	Social Talk Nature or content of interaction is social, rather than related to curriculum content Planned interactions TA-pupil interactions are proactive rather than reactive Re-wording teachers' explanations TAs are simplifying or going over what the teacher has said

Figure 19: Overview of themes identified from deductive analysis

Deployment

Figure 20 shows the single theme that was identified for the heading of Deployment:

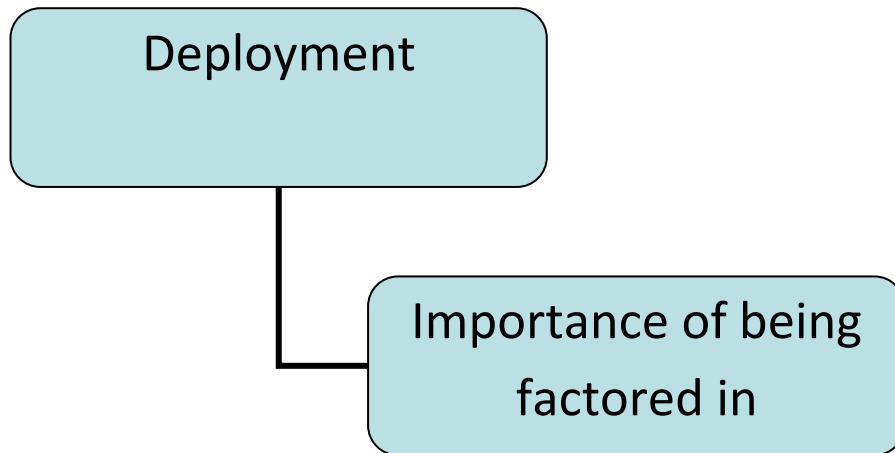


Figure 20: Theme identified from deductive analysis under heading of deployment: Importance of being factored in

There were fewer data extracts that could be coded readily as relating to deployment, than for the headings of preparedness and practice. This may be related to the fact that I had recruited TAs for the research on the basis that they were employed to support a particular pupil individually and as such some issues around deployment (with whom they were placed to work for example) may have been taken for granted.

I found that the notion of deployment was somewhat problematic for the purposes of coding. One reason for this is that it implies an assumption that someone has made a strategic decision about the TAs role in a given situation. Whilst direct references in the data about who had made decisions were often lacking, I gained a sense that many of the factors involved in the notion of deployment were decisions made by the TAs themselves, on an ad hoc basis, for example whether the TA worked with an

individual or a larger group seemed often to be a decision made by the TA, in the moment, depending on what they viewed as required by the immediate situation.

In relation to deployment there were examples during the discussion that focused on a wish to be more included and integral to the lesson:

In an ideal world the teacher would factor you in to that lesson...the worst thing ever is to walk into the lesson... and feeling you have to stay in that lesson, I suppose you can go to other students..but.. (2.b *importance of being factored in*)

And a sense that the TA felt their role was less effective when it was one of helping the teacher in a possibly rather purposeless way:

Not going to mention the subject, but last week I was in...only way she could do progress reports was to see the students in the classroom doing that xx So I was going round keeping them occupied ..dealing with hands up xx so that was an obvious way of the TA being used in a good way – but is it the right way?(2.b *importance of being factored in*)

Sometimes when you're wandering round, the teacher is catching up with stuff or what's happening next (2.b *importance of being factored in*)

There was an example of TA s having been deployed in place of the teacher:

We covered Art didn't we – because we've been in all..for all of the art lessons and the teacher was going to be off...she was like we've got cover but because you two actually know what we've been doing, do you mind doing the introduction and a demo?

And this linked to the theme of the TA's feeling involved in the lesson:

And now I feel much more integrated, I don't know about you, in that art group, a lot more of them are coming up to me and going miss what do you think about this?(3:a *importance of feeling factored in*)

Reference was made to the way in which the teacher introduced the TA role in class:

It's the way the teacher involves you as well, in the class so sometimes, you know, sometimes the teacher will actively say oh yes Mrs x is here to help so you can ask her, and then that sort of opens it up for anybody who wants to have help then.. they (the pupil) don't feel bad about you going over , because it's been said to the whole class (3:a *importance of feeling factored in*)

And the way some teachers had made the TA integral to the lesson plan was presented as a positive:

The teacher in RE .. he actually started designing his lessons so that he can split the group between the 3 TA s that are in there, and then he does group work, and we lead the group work, and then he will go round and check that everything's been covered, and the kids really enjoy it, they get to sit on a

group with one of us.. we've done role playing and we've done all sorts of different things yeah its worked really well, surprisingly well actually ...it's a difficult class to teach..So he's really embraced the TAs, and I mean he gives us what needs to be taught in that lesson, what we'll be doing xxx and then he'll go round the groups as well. (3:a *importance of being factored in*)

Finally there was regret that it wasn't happening as much as they would like:

and it's been flagged up before ..thinking about using us more and integrating us more, it doesn't always seem to be happening in every lesson at the minute... (3:b *importance of being factored in*)

A range of other issues were raised that may be seen to relate to Deployment which, although not felt to be sufficiently prevalent or recurring to be identified as themes in themselves, were nevertheless interesting:

There were examples of the TA working with other pupils as well as the pupil they were deployed to support:

I know I'm there for one person, but I take on a lot of them - some of them are quite happy to have that, but sometimes...(3 a)

The issue came up regarding subject knowledge, particularly in the higher secondary years and a related comment was made about the deployment of TAs:

That's when you come round to do you have a subject TA or do you have a TA for each student? (2:b)

And an example of deployment of TAs as experts or advisers on differentiation was presented:

We had a differentiation workshop with staff didn't we, although not many came but the ones who came all dealt with the same class..it was a year 8 class and we spent quite a lot of time talking through the sort of things that they could do with them in that lesson..(3:bS)

Figure 21 sets out the three themes identified under the heading of Practice

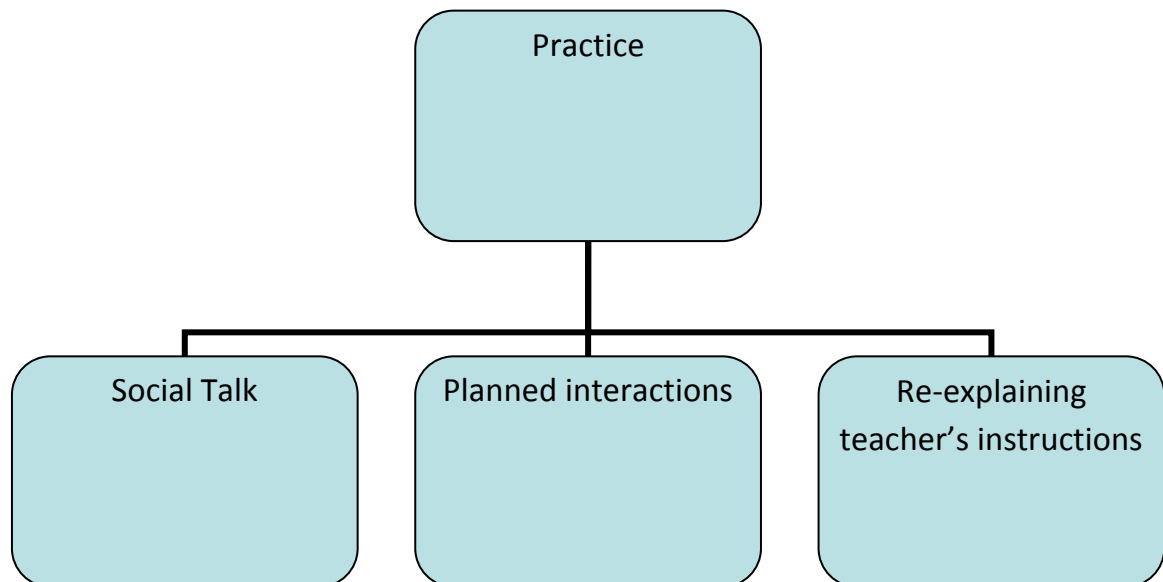


Figure 21: The three themes identified under the heading of Practice from deductive analysis

Practice

Extracts were included under this theme if there was either direct reference to the TA talking with the child or if this was implied as a key part of the interaction. Because the TAs were talking about their talk, as it were, there is more of a focus on the nature or purpose of the talk than precise content, although there were some references to direct speech.

Social Talk

The TAs gave examples of verbal interactions that seemed to be more about social aspects of learning rather than curriculum content. Some examples related to getting the pupil to stay on task:

I'm, you know, come on you have to sit and do this, and by the end of the session you know he's actually done something really good, I mean it's hard to get him to sit there and make him do it and I say 'look you've done the work! '..(1a *social talk*)

So basically, sort of giving him that time to just, well, have a chat...talk about what's..just sort of 5 minutes and then its bringing him back on task again so that he's had like a bit of a rest (1:a *social talk*)

Other examples of social talk were to do with encouraging the pupil to participate in the lesson:

So I would try to encourage him to put his hand up a bit higher and when after a couple of days eventually he got picked out to answer a question..(1:a *social talk*)

And to engage with the other pupils:

..tends to do what she wants rather than listening to the group, she was selecting the squares that she wants..to.. (I was) trying to get her to listen to

other people's opinions.. even if she doesn't agree with them, you know, to just to try and compromise a little bit, to listen to what they're saying (1:a S *social talk*)

Giving encouraging praise was a feature of social talk:

And then say 'that's fantastic, perhaps you could do one more line for me that would be brilliant' – the more you praise him the more you can get out of him (3:a P *social talk*)

I said you've had a fantastic lunchtime (1:b P *social talk*)

Some social talk had a purpose of building up positive relationships, not just with the focus pupil, but with other pupils in the class:

Probably difficult for a teacher to go round 25 different children and show an interest in every page, whereas I could spend the time doing that and that helped to build.. building on the relationship with each child, not necessarily the one I'm supporting but with the others in the class (1:b S *social talk*)

Planned interactions

There were some examples of TA practice that involved interactions that seemed to be very much planned and purposeful, rather than reactive or in the moment:

She was panicking ‘cause she’s got a test tomorrow and so I showed her how to read a section, highlight some key words and write that down in a notebook, and then test herself a little bit..she found that really effective, rather than just reading and reading and reading it and getting into a flap because she couldn’t memorise it (3:a S *planned interactions*)

He got 1 out of 10, and we had a maths session after and he just took it so personally, he had a real issue - he thought he couldn’t learn.. and we’ve been going through it week on week – mainly it’s just rushing, he’s a bright boy..(1:b S *planned interactions*)

There was a sense, in some examples, that quite a lot of planning had gone on prior to the interaction

I watch him quite closely in the lesson to see what areas he’s missing, I’ll then go back and look at the key stage levels, what he needs to know, what his knowledge base has to be in order for him to meet the next target and that’s what I teach him in his 1:1, so it’s quite target-based, but its driven by what I can see he doesn’t understand(2:a S *planned interactions*)

Re-explaining teacher instructions

There were many examples where the TA described their practice in terms of simplifying, rewording or reformatting the instructions or explanations of teachers.

Rather than..you know, the way the teacher might have explained something, they might not necessarily understand the way they explained it, if that makes sense, so you word it..explain it in a way that they understand (1:a *re-explaining*)

He hasn't understood it at all, so it's essential to catch him before he starts (3:a *P re-explaining*)

And it was just simply saying to them how many 2s will get you to 18? And then they could do it on their hands - it's just literally just rewording what they're asking and like oh that's so simple! (3:a *S re-explaining*)

This included quite detailed explanations, and a sense that the TA was going beyond the teacher's role in a pedagogical sense:

He just couldn't understand the whole idea of a metaphor and I had to break it down..every single bit..until he understood - oh ok actually a cushion is soft and fluffy and sits on a sofa..right..so why is he saying this about ..likening that to a cat? ..well, a cat can be soft and fluffy and sits on a sofa..so it's really breaking down every little piece..so ..it's doing the teacher's job but at a much deeper level (3:a *re-explaining*)

Preparedness

Themes under this heading were readily coded suggesting that it represents a good match with the data. Two themes were identified as shown in Figure 22.

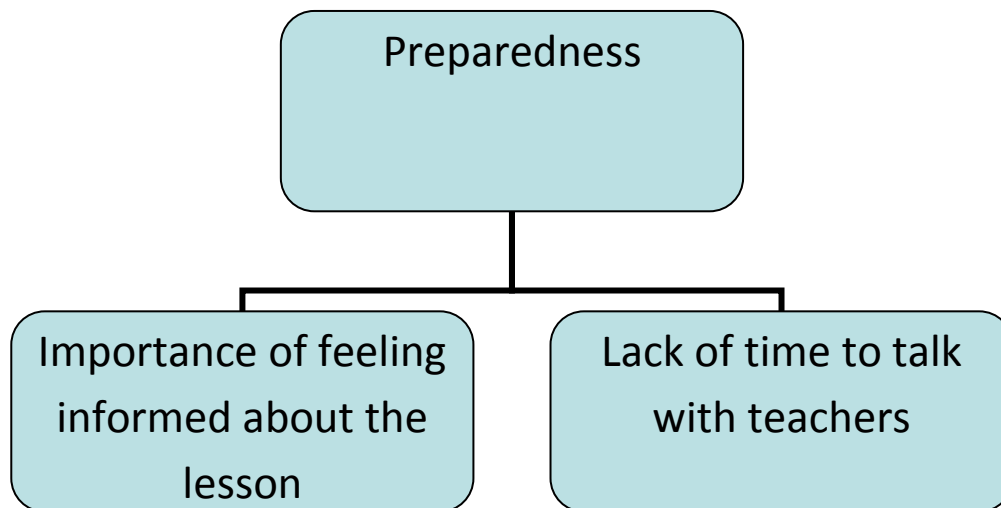


Figure 22: Two themes identified from deductive analysis under heading of Preparedness importance of feeling informed about the lessons and lack of time to talk with teachers

Importance of feeling informed about lesson

These were examples where the TA's expressed a sense of the importance of feeling informed about the content of lessons in which they were supporting, for the effectiveness of their work. This links with the idea of wanting to be factored in to lessons, the subtheme identified for Deployment. The importance of feeling informed about the lesson related more directly to being given information, rather than to being deployed in any particular fashion.

If we don't have a plan of what's going on in the lesson we need to listen to the task as well..like you said, it doesn't look good...(2:a *importance of feeling informed about lesson*)

I've gone to a lesson where if I'd known what the teacher was trying to get to at the end of the lesson then I could have helped them so much earlier and you get to the end of the lesson and you go 'oh that's what you were trying to do!' (2:a *importance of feeling informed about lesson*)

It would be nice to have a bit more information about the lesson..xx know more what's going to happen in the lesson..some teachers still think that..you tend to feel you go into a lesson blind, you know the student, but you go in and you don't know what the actual lesson is.. (2.a feeling informed about lesson)

There were examples of the benefits of having the required information:

People say don't you get bored, doing the same things, but no you don't 'cause that is the beauty of knowing the curriculum..(2:a *importance of feeling informed about lesson*)

Sometimes it's a case of pre-teach – you have the plans for the next day and in the afternoon take the child out, so that you can pre-teach to a certain extent the lesson that he's going to be in..so he can stay in the lesson cause he's had a head start on what's coming – he can take part, he can put his hand up..(2:a *P importance of feeling informed about lesson*)

Descriptions conveyed a sense that feeling informed about the lesson would help to make the TA's input more effective if it happened more often:

Sometimes children in another group will be doing slightly different work and they'll put their hand up and you don't want to ignore them so.. and he's up and running.. and so you go over to see them....What am I supposed to be doing at this point? – well I don't actually know because I haven't had the

chance to find that out – so at that point you're not a lot of help to them (3:b P *importance of feeling informed about lesson*)

If they'd just thought about that in their planning, or they'd let me know in advance, things I can do, so maybe make plans..(3:b *importance of feeling informed about lesson*)

Lack of time to talk with teachers

Linking back to the theme of constraints of the school system identified in the inductive analysis, lack of time for communication came up as an issue here.

Examples included in this theme mentioned time explicitly as a barrier to preparedness in relation to the lesson and to communication and feedback about the pupil:

Communication time ...Cause time is a big issue (3:b P *lack of time to talk with teachers*)

I think the problem is time restraints..you talk about time for planning but when would that happen? (2:b *lack of time to talk with teachers*)

You never get a chance to stop and talk..well sometimes we'll stay later with the teacher or he'll try and grab us and ask how did that go..(3:b *lack of time to talk with teachers*)

Communication would really help xx but it's an impossible scenario nobody has the time...the focus is just on the task and trying to..yeah (3:b *lack of time to talk with teachers*)

Having presented and discussed the themes identified from the inductive and deductive thematic analysis, the next chapter will consider how these themes relate to the research questions set out in Chapter 1 and to the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach that framed them.

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS IN RELATION TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to consider the themes identified from the thematic analyses, in the context of my original research questions and of the Appreciative Inquiry that framed them. The thematic analysis presented patterns and important ideas within the data and this chapter now aims to organize them and to 'make sense' of the themes in relation to the key aims of the research. Reed (2007) suggests that 'the purpose of making sense of information in AI is to 'organize it ways that will help researchers understand what people feel they have achieved and how this might be helped to happen again' (page 139). Reed is clear that this might also include a look at factors that people have identified as problems or as things that are not going well but that the purpose of this would be to add depth or detail to appreciation, and should not be a starting point.

The key research questions of the research are presented in Figure 23 along with the corresponding element of AI to which they correspond.

Each question is taken in turn and answers are presented and discussed, drawing on the themes identified in the inductive and deductive analysis. Links are also made with ideas presented in the literature review in Chapter 3.

Research Question	Corresponding stage of AI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do TAs describe as the most effective and positive aspects of their support for pupils identified as having SEND? • How do TAs conceptualise their contribution to pupils' progress? 	Discover Participants explore what works well, what 'gives life' in their work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what terms do they describe ideal practice in their work? 	Dream Participants envisage 'what could be'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do they suggest would increase their contribution to pupil progress? 	Design: Participants consider ways to develop, to move forward

Figure 23: Research questions and corresponding stages of AI

Question 1: What do TAs describe as the most effective and positive aspects of their support for pupils?

TAs Enable Pupil Coping

One answer to this from the present study is that the TAs enable pupils to cope in a mainstream setting. Questions about the impact of TAs in the DISS study have been framed very much around the extent to which TAs are seen to promote pupil progress. Setting aside for the moment debates about what constitutes progress and how it should be measured, there is a sense here that the TAs are describing something more fundamental, without which many of the pupils they work with would struggle to come to school or to remain in school at all. A range of examples suggested that they were supporting the integration of the pupil in often physical and practical terms and the inclusion of the pupil in broader social and task related terms.

In relation to the themes and subthemes identified from the inductive analysis, examples of enabling coping seemed to cluster into those with a social and emotional focus, and those that helped pupils to keep up in a more practical way. Support with a social focus included preventive support where the TA's helped the pupil to remain calm, to avoid frustration and where they were able to 'catch' pupils, often stepping in at the first signs of difficulty or panic, having noticed small signs as a result of their close proximity and personal knowledge and experience of working individually with the pupil. A responsive approach was also described where TAs were well placed to deal with behaviours and responses that required direct intervention. The notion of helping pupils to keep up came across as equally important, with examples of TAs supporting pupils to keep pace with tasks in class, or with their peers moving around the school. These 'keeping up' examples seemed lower key than the social-emotional ones described, but arguably equally important for the enabling of coping in a general sense with the demands of a mainstream primary or secondary school. As an educational psychologist the reasons for suggesting special school placement so often seem to be phrased in terms of the pupil 'not coping' in mainstream. In many cases the TAs seemed to be describing practice that may be making the crucial difference between coping and not coping. This may be one way in which they are at the heart of the agenda for inclusion as described in Chapter 2.

TAs Develop a uniquely personal and holistic view of the pupil in school

TAs' enabling pupils to cope is closely linked to the theme of their relationship with pupils. The special relationship that TAs develop with the pupils they support may be seen as another answer to what they do effectively. This certainly featured strongly in the TAs' descriptions of positive and rewarding aspects of their work, during which

they often spoke with evident emotion. Examples clustering into the 'closeness of the relationship' subtheme from the inductive analysis suggest that they become quite attached to the pupils they work with, getting to know them on a very personal level. In a secondary school setting the TA's role is described often as one of being like a friend or equal allowing a greater level of openness, whereby the pupil is able to confide in them in a way that they would not with teachers. The notion that TAs fulfil a role of 'pupil advocate' as part of the relationship with them further suggests an important function of their work and impact. Given that these pupils are often vulnerable and with the most complex needs, TAs may offer a vital and uniquely personal and holistic view on the child's needs in school.

TAs Promote progress in a holistic sense

Examples of pupil progress were given as illustrations of ways in which the TAs had been effective and also as rewarding aspects and high points of their work. As shown in the subtheme 'broader views of progress' the TAs' examples of progress often related to social-emotional issues and to what may be considered more 'holistic' views of progress, beyond measures academic attainment. These were often presented by the TAs as being at odds with wider school views of progress, which were more related to curriculum subject levels and examination grades. They can also be seen as very different from the notions of progress on which the DISS study based its conclusions. Whilst the DISS study does include an evaluation of what they call 'softer' measures of progress for example motivation and distractibility, these are given far less focus than the academic levels in the core curriculum subjects - and it is on the basis of the latter that they conclude that TAs have a negative impact. Examples from The TAs in the present study included a pupil's increase in confidence – to put his hand up in class, a pupils ability to mix in a social

situation with others; coming to school at all; staying in school; feeling happy in school; having the right equipment or developing a desire to write instead of draw pictures were all examples of progress described by the TAs as important. Such examples may either be considered to be small steps, or go unnoticed by those with a less close relationship with the pupil, or by those focused on curriculum and levels based measures of progress.

TAs Provide Support for Teachers

Support for the teacher was another way in which TAs described their work as effective. This came across as an important feature of the relationship the TA had with the teachers they worked with. Some of these examples seemed to relate to general support for the teacher with the whole class rather than directly in relation to the particular pupils with SEND that they supported and which is the particular focus of the research. An exception to this was the way in which the TAs at the secondary school related their putting on a workshop on differentiation for teachers as an example of effective practice. Here they described talking through with teachers the sorts of strategies that they could use to support pupils with SEND. This is interesting in relation to the role here of the TA and the contrast it highlights with the presentation of teachers and TAs in the DISS study, where teachers are very much viewed as the pedagogical experts. In answering the question about what TAs do that is effective and positive in their work this may suggest that TAs can provide a different sort of expertise. An expertise that is different from that of the teacher's training and which may be based on experience of dealing with particular types of difficulty, familiarity with particular resources and the close working knowledge of the likes, dislikes, habits, responses and feedback of the pupils they support across a range of situations on a daily basis. This echoes the findings of Devecchi and Rouse

(2010) discussed in Chapter 3. Their research found that features of effective collaboration between TAs and teachers included sharing knowledge, skills, resources and ideas useful to support individual children and the whole class' and that 'personal and affective knowledge was as important as technical knowledge' (Devecchi and Rouse 2010). This also relates to questions posed by Fletcher Campbell (2010) in relation to the conclusions from the DISS study regarding the notion of 'valued knowledge in different contexts' and, crucially, whether those with the highest qualifications are necessarily the most effective supporters of learning.

TAs Provide planned interactions for pupils

Features of particular TA practice that have a positive impact are highlighted within the identification of themes where the heading of *practice* as conceived of in Webster *et al* (2011) was applied to the data.

The focus here is specifically on TA-pupil interactions. Examples from the subtheme of *planned interactions* were notable because they offered a contrast with the view expressed by Webster *et al* 2011 that 'TAs' interactions with pupils could be broadly characterised as reactive, because unlike teachers, who guided lessons with planned learning aims in mind, TAs had routinely to respond to the needs of the pupil(s) and the lesson in the moment' (page 12). The data extracts from the present study, illustrated in the results in Chapter 5 suggest that there were many occasions where TAs interacted with pupils in planned and purposeful ways, often guided by clear learning aims. There were examples of TAs helping pupils to prioritise their learning; to approach revision in a systematic fashion, and to work on areas of weakness in maths that had been identified previously by the TA's observation of the pupil's performance during the lesson.

TAs Adapt explanations for pupils

The subtheme 'rewording of teacher's explanations also identified under the heading of 'practice' highlighted recurring examples that seemed to be about the TA's personalizing the instructions or explanations that had been given to the whole class, so that they were meaningful to the pupil that the TA supported. Webster *et al* (2011) report that in their research, analysis of the quality of talk between TAs and pupils showed that 'TA's explanations were often inaccurate or confusing' (page 12). In contrast, many of the examples by the TAs in the present study suggest that they felt it was the teacher's explanations that were often confusing, or inaccessible, from the viewpoint of the pupil they support, and that supplementary or alternative explanations were required. This may reflect an important difference between judgments made about the effectiveness of an explanation by 'expert' observers who are focused on its content, and evaluation by those actually involved in the interaction who are focused on its outcome (i.e. whether the pupil was able to proceed successfully following the interaction). The view was expressed from one TA that in re-explaining to the pupil the TA was 'doing the teacher's job, but at a deeper level'.

Many of the findings discussed so far in relation to research question 1 are consistent with conclusions examined in the literature review in Chapter 3. For example Lacey's (2006) findings were reflected whereby TA's described that they were effective in:

- Promoting inclusion (encouraging independence and interaction)
- Promoting learning (providing access, prompting and encouraging)
- Teaching (working on IEPs, explaining, adapting work)

- Pastoral and personal care (toileting, behaviour, ensuring safety).

The finding from Lacey (2006) study that 'TAs were essential to the inclusion of pupils with SEN' is also reflected within the theme of enabling the pupils to cope with mainstream school life in the broadest sense.

The findings are also consistent with some of the less widely publicised and more positive conclusions from the DISS study. For example the finding that 'teachers felt that support staff had affected the learning and behaviour of pupils... through taking on specific pupils; bringing specialist help to teacher & classroom; allowing individualisation/ differentiation; improving pupils' attitudes and motivation to work; and having general positive effects on learning and behaviour' (Blatchford *et al* 2009b page 34). Also the finding from systematic observations that 'TAs had a positive effect in mainstream classrooms in terms of reducing off-task behaviour and disruption, and allowing more time for the teacher to teach'.(Webster *et al* 2010 page 321).

Question 2: How do TAs conceptualise their contribution to pupil progress?

Before discussing the themes from analysis that may be seen as relevant to answering this question, the categories described by the TAs are presented as a valuable starting point. During the second focus group discussion I presented the examples that the TAs had given of effective practice during the previous session, on post it notes, asking them to discuss and organize them into categories. Through this process the TAs agreed on the categories or headings as shown in Figure 24.

Categories arrived at by TAs during discussion about examples of effective practice given the previous session	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing the student, relationship with the student • Promoting independence • Providing specialist resources/equipment • Supporting with the task the teacher sets • Building relationship with staff: communicating both ways, on pupils behalf, taking a lead, informing • Supporting appropriate behaviour and social interaction • Monitoring progress • Teaching and learning (identified by the TAs later in the process) 	

Figure 24: TA categories for their effective practice

Links can be made and a degree of overlap observed between the TA's categories identified here at the start of session 2, based on the examples they had given in session 1, and the themes that I identified looking at the data afterwards from across all three of the focus group interview sessions. As discussed in Chapter 3 the headings identified by the TAs represent a blurring of the ideas of role and purpose, for example 'supporting appropriate behaviour and interaction' may be seen to represent a little of each. Of interest was that the teaching and learning category was identified by the TAs after the others. I prompted the TAs to reflect on whether they were happy that the original categories on which they had decided seemed to represent a comprehensive list of the effective things they do and it was then suggested and agreed that another category – that of teaching and learning should be added. It may be argued that this category perhaps comes closest to the 'pedagogical role' of TAs that the DISS study has highlighted and questioned. It is

interesting therefore that for the TAs in the present study this was added almost as an afterthought, or at least was not at the forefront or most prominent in the examples that they offered of effective practice, although it was quickly recognized as an omission. The categories provided by the TAs link to the findings of Alborz *et al* (2009) discussed in the literature review in Chapter 3. Their conclusions, that TA s viewed their functions as ‘creating an accessible learning environment, increasing pupils opportunities for engagement ...and developing their ability to become independent learners’, are supported in these categories and to some extent within the themes identified, although there were few direct references in the data to practice that exemplified developing independent learning. In the inductive thematic analysis of the data, presented in Chapter 5, very few of the themes related to pedagogy directly.

Whether TAs view their role as primarily ‘pedagogical’ is perhaps questionable. Relationships, communication and social and emotional aspects of learning may be seen as the most prominent concepts involved in what makes TAs effective. The extent to which it is possible or desirable to detach pedagogy from these concepts is questionable. For example, an accurate and articulate explanation may be worthless if it is not provided within a positive and trusting relationship, or if a pupil is too anxious or distracted to process it. It may be that the pedagogical role model as presented by Webster *et al* (2011) is too sterile a conceptualization of what makes for effective TA support and that it would be enhanced by a greater focus on concepts based on relationships and communication. The findings here echo a key theme in the stories told in the research by O’Brien and Garner (2001): that ‘Teamwork and relationships seem to be the ‘defining motif’ of the TAs work’.

Positive relationships with pupils and teachers

From the thematic analysis, positive relationships were key concepts within the TAs' descriptions of effective practice. Positive relationships with pupils related to the close bond that TAs develop with the pupil, their personal knowledge of the pupil's needs and their championing of the pupil's cause, as seen within the 'advocate' subtheme. Positive relationships with teachers were conceptualised in terms of mutual support and of feeling appreciated and valued. The concept of 'status' presented some difficulty within the TAs' relationships with both pupils and teachers. Effective practice was conceptualised as that where the TAs' status was viewed as equal to that of teachers. This enabled the TAs' communication with teaching staff to be respectful, open and effective in discussions about pupils. It also facilitated effective communication with pupils, allowing the TA to be respected as a teacher by the pupil, particularly in relation to behaviour management.

Whole child focus

A focus on the whole child was another way in which the identified themes suggest that TAs conceptualised their effective practice. This concept is evident within the 'broader views of progress'. It can also be seen to some extent within the 'rigid curriculum' subtheme within which the TAs expressed frustration with a focus on academic targets and with the way in which National Curriculum levels remain the focus for measuring progress of the pupils, and their impact as TAs. Examples of their effective practice that resulted in improvements in the pupils' social skills, confidence and feelings of well being in school suggest a wider focus for the TA on all elements of the pupil's development. The 'closeness' subtheme reflected that the TA's relationship with the pupil goes beyond the promotion of academic learning.

The categories arrived at by the TAs and the themes identified from analysis give an insight into what is important from the perspective of TAs in the work that they describe as effective. There is some evidence that TAs do not view their remit as one of promoting progress in the narrow terms (National Curriculum levels) suggested in the DISS study (Blatchford *et al* 2009). Certainly no examples of good practice given by the TAs made direct reference to the pupil having progressed in relation to these curriculum based measures. What TAs believe to be the specific goals or purpose of their practice in supporting pupils with SEND remains unclear and may be a valuable focus for future research.

Question 3: In what terms do the TAs describe ideal practice?

Themes from the inductive analysis that answer this question relate to a view of ideal practice that is free of the constraints of the school system. Themes identified suggest that an ideal situation would be one where there is more flexibility regarding the curriculum and an acknowledgement by the school (and of the systems that govern schools) of broader concepts of progress. There was a sense that a less pressured 'push' in relation to curriculum targets would be beneficial for the pupils and a greater flexibility with regard to lesson content, perhaps with a greater focus on 'life skills' that may be useful in the short term but also in the longer term, beyond school. Linked to this was a sense that ideal practice would involve greater acknowledgement - for both the pupils and the TAs, of successes that whilst not directly related to curriculum targets nevertheless represent important progress.

Ideal practice would involve a greater level of TA – teacher communication regarding pupils and planning. This relates closely to the notion of 'preparedness' but perhaps

goes beyond this to say something about the forging of more positive partnerships with teachers.

The TAs descriptions suggest a high level of agreement with the conclusions from the DISS study, that preparedness is both an important feature of effective practice and one that requires development. This was particularly true in relation to day-to-day preparedness regarding lesson content, there being in fact no direct examples of an expressed desire for greater training or for knowledge in a broader sense.

Another theme that provides answers to the notion of ideal practice as viewed by the TAs relates to the status of TAs with teachers, a subtheme identified within the 'relationship with teacher' theme. Here there were references to the TAs' wish to be more assertive and proactive in speaking to the teacher about the pupils needs – able to overcome concerns that they should not be questioning the teacher. Linked to notions of status and views of progress there was a suggestion that in an ideal world, the contribution of the TAs would be more readily acknowledged.

Findings about what the TAs envisaged as ideal practice are consistent with some of the key features of the stories from the research of O'Brien and Garner (2001) discussed in Chapter 3, including that 'notions of success are located around 'small steps' and 'the paradox of being pivotal to the process of educational inclusion but having low status'.

Question 4: What would increase TAs' contribution to pupil progress?

Answers to this question link closely with themes running through the ideal practice stage of discussion, the difference being that this question is concerned more with

the somewhat smaller, realistic changes that could move the TAs' practice forward. The notion of preparedness was prominent again, with TAs expressing in particular a wish to be more informed about the content of forthcoming lessons. This was part of a broader expression of need for greater communication generally. Being informed and prepared for lessons was one aspect of this, but two-way feedback about pupil progress and time to plan and to develop a joint vision for the pupil were also mentioned. Crucially, the need to be given time for this was expressed as important. These are all dependent on the TAs developing and maintaining positive relationships with teachers. However, the 'critic' and 'status' subthemes identified within the 'relationship with teacher' theme identified some potential barriers to the development of such positive relationships, for example differing priorities and views in relation to pupil needs. Here there are echoes to some extent of the findings of Mackenzie, (2011) presented in the literature review in Chapter 3 that 'relationships between TAs and teachers are full of tensions, misunderstandings and antagonism'. The 'supporter' theme provided a balance to this containing some positive features of the TA-teacher relationship. The findings of Devecchi and Rouse (2010) discussed in Chapter 3 are reflected, where TAs and teachers highlighted important features of supportive and collaborative practice.

More flexible assessment was also felt to be something that could be done to allow pupils to demonstrate more readily their skills and knowledge. TAs also expressed a wish to feel more 'factored in' to lessons, more directly referred to by the teacher, or included in the planning and format of the lesson in a more specific way. As with the responses reflecting what would constitute ideal practice, there was an expressed need for greater flexibility within the curriculum and linked to this, broader views of progress for the pupils the TAs support.

A summary of the key answers to each of the research questions (and corresponding elements of the Appreciative Inquiry) is presented in Figure 25.

Research Question	Appreciative Inquiry Phase	Key answers to the question
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do TAs describe as the most effective and positive aspects of their support for pupils? 	Discover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enable pupils to cope in school Develop a uniquely personal and holistic view of the pupil in school Promote progress in an holistic sense Support teachers Adapt explanations for pupils Provide planned interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do they conceptualise their contribution to pupils' progress? 	Discover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive relationships (pupil and teacher) Effective communication Whole-child focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what terms do they describe ideal practice in their work? 	Dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More flexible curriculum Broader views of progress from school Greater communication with teacher More informed about lessons TA contribution acknowledged
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do they suggest would increase their contribution to pupil progress? 	Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time and opportunity for communication with teacher – about lessons and developing joint plans for pupils TA confident and proactive in approaching teacher Being more 'factored-in' to lessons Broader views of priorities and progress

Figure 25: Research questions, corresponding stage of AI and key answers

Summary of Results

Chapters 5 and 6 have presented the results and findings of the study.

In doing so, I have gone through a process of considering the data through three lenses, each providing a slightly different, though related view of the TAs discussions. The first view was a presentation of themes that were identified from the inductive thematic analysis described in Chapter 4. This allowed an examination of what seemed to be important patterns in the data generally, without reference to any particular headings or theoretical frameworks. This was followed by a presentation of themes identified from a process of deductive analysis applying the headings of *preparedness*, *deployment* and *practice* (these headings in effect pre-defined the overarching themes, within which subthemes were sought) This allowed a view of the data in relation to factors identified as important for TA effectiveness by Webster *et al* 2011, which, as discussed in the literature review of Chapter 3, may be seen to represent the latest and most widely applied ideas from current research in this area. In Chapter 6, findings were presented within the Appreciative Inquiry context that framed the methodology adopted and the research questions posed in the present study. This final view was an attempt to 'make sense' of the themes identified from the inductive and deductive analyses, discussing them within the context of the original aims and questions of the study.

CHAPTER 7: REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Chapter overview

This chapter sets out to reflect on the research process, to evaluate the extent to which the aims of the research were achieved and to consider limitations of the study.

The broad aims of the study were stated as follows in Chapter 1 and will now be considered in turn:

Substantive Aims:

To identify what TAs describe as key factors regarding:

- effective aspects of their support for pupils identified as having SEND and
- how their work might be improved and developed.

Theoretical Aims:

- To add the voice of TAs to current literature regarding the impact of their support for pupils identified as having SEND

Methodological Aims:

- To adopt an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach that seeks to explore with TAs what is important in their work, what is working well, and how this may be developed.
- To use focus group interviews as a way of facilitating a collaborative and discursive situation for data collection.

Evaluation of substantive aims:

I believe that the research achieved the aims of gaining the TAs' descriptions about effective aspects of their work and about ways in which it might be improved and developed. Examples of effective practice given provided rich data regarding what the TAs do that promotes progress and what is important in their work. In conceptualizing their effective practice a distinction between role and specific purpose remained somewhat blurred.

In evaluating the substantive aims considerations of validity are central. I was successful I believe in creating a transparency to the process, whereby the context of the research was openly discussed where there were no 'hidden' agendas that may have caused the TAs to feel constrained in what they could say. That they were at times somewhat critical of the practice and attitudes of some teachers and of the school system suggests that they did indeed feel able to express themselves with a degree of honesty. The research questions were presented directly to the TAs as prompts for discussion (albeit in a rather more discursive fashion than their written form). That they directly formed the basis of prompts for discussion allowed the TAs an awareness of and 'closeness' to the aims. One acknowledged limitation was that there were just two primary TAs in the group, and as such there was a bias towards secondary examples within the data generated. That the secondary TAs were on 'home ground' may have further effected this bias, they may have felt more relaxed and in familiar company –and as such more inclined to make contributions. Nevertheless the primary TAs did contribute much to the discussions, sometimes supporting the contributions made by the secondary TAs and also offering points and comments of their own.

In relation to whether my analysis was able to identify important features from the TA's descriptions, I feel confident that this was successfully achieved. There was a degree of overlap in the themes I identified and the categories arrived at by the TAs regarding effective features of their practice. Two colleagues commented on samples of data and themes verifying both the themes identified (not with exact words but reflecting very much the same ideas) and in the matching of data extracts to given themes. The degree to which the themes identified are consistent with previous research also suggests a degree of validity to the findings. That the discussions took place over three sessions, with two weeks between each further strengthened the validity. This allowed reflection between sessions, and a cumulative approach, each session beginning with a recap on the content of the previous one, building in a degree of checking/ verification about what had been discussed. The discussion often referred back to previous topics or points made, adding to a sense of validity in the data. In practice the Appreciative Inquiry questions were effective in this respect. There was a degree of agreement and consistency across the data, between what is effective, how things might be in an ideal world and what would improve practice adding further to a sense of validity. For example the TAs gave examples of the pupil's social and emotional progress as illustrations of their effective practice and then described ideal practice as that where broader views of progress were valued and acknowledged.

Evaluation of Theoretical Aims

The extent to which my study was successful in adding TAs' voice to current literature regarding the impact of their support concerns issues of reliability and generalisability, in addition to those of validity discussed in relation to the substantive aims. In Chapter 3 I discussed the epistemological position adopted in the present

study, which set out a world view in which generalisable truths are not seen as the purpose of research, nor even to be possible. This highlights the limitations not just of the present study but with regard to all research. With this in mind it is perhaps more appropriate to say that the study was successful I believe in adding 'a' voice of TAs, to the research literature, an informative, helpful and interesting voice that represents a group of TAs working in a particular context. Within the context of the learning community of schools where the research took place it is perhaps possible to make a bigger claim that this offers a perspective on 'the' voice of TAs, one which has potential for further work with those involved.

My decision to consider the data in relation to some of the key themes presented in current literature (Webster *et al* 2011) I believe provided a valuable link between the descriptions of the TAs in my research and the literature more generally. By applying the headings of deployment, preparedness and practice to the data there was a sense in which the TAs' voice could be heard to comment particularly on those ideas. Importantly, the Appreciative Inquiry framework adopted allowed a positive voice to be heard in relation to these frames of reference, potentially as a response to a framework that has been applied to explain a negative impact.

Evaluation of Methodological Aims

An evaluation of the success of the focus groups as my method of data collection and of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a framework for my research will now be considered. Issues of their separate impact and success will be considered as well as their combined impact and their compatibility, within the aims of the study.

The focus groups felt very much 'somewhere between a meeting and a conversation' as suggested by Agar and Macdonald (1995) and this seemed to create a situation

suitable to my aims. In particular it fitted well with the notions of getting together and taking a collaborative approach that formed the basis of my research aims and that are central ideas in AI. However, there were some practical issues in the use of focus groups. First, although the group is taken to be the same across the three sessions this was not actually the case. The first group included some spectators, the impact of which has perhaps been underestimated, and the group composition was not quite the same each time. For example the one male TA was absent for the final session and one of the two primary TAs was absent for the second, skewing the data from this discussion even more towards secondary examples. This relates to the general difficulty, and a disadvantage of focus groups, of ensuring consistent attendance.

From a practical point of view, a second researcher would have been helpful to have had present during the sessions, as suggested by Kidd and Parshal (2000), to make notes and to identify the order of speakers. This would have helped with the identification of the individual speaker afterwards from the audio files which was difficult and in many cases not possible. However, I don't feel that in the approach taken this was a particular problem, because there was not an attempt to differentiate and compare the responses of different individuals within the group.

On reflection, there was a potential incompatibility with regard to the purposes of focus groups and of AI relating to the degree to which the facilitator controls the discussion. With AI there is arguably a need for the facilitator of the discussion to ensure that in the language of AI of 'the windsock keeps blowing in the right direction' (Cooperrider and Whitney 1999). It is particularly important to keep the discussion in a generally positive and appreciative direction, especially where the

conversation seems to be becoming very negative and problem focused. In contrast, focus groups provide an opportunity for group discussion that is free from too much control, allowing analysis of areas of agreement and controversy and of the processes by which perspectives arise and are modified in a group (Sim 1998). This purpose of focus groups was arguably under-utilized in the present study and the potential benefits possibly undermined by my greater rigidity as a facilitator. Whilst I felt during the discussions that there was a genuinely high level of agreement within the group in relation to the ideas and examples presented, it is accepted that the potential for self –censoring of members of the group with alternative viewpoints was perhaps under-acknowledged and that as such the results possibly over-play the degree of agreement suggested. Kidd and Parshal (2000) suggest that it is helpful to devise analytical approaches sufficiently flexible to identify any undue influence of the group on any individual participants, or vice versa, before drawing one's conclusions. Whilst I did not build in such checks in any formal sense I was aware of the need to prevent such influences as far as possible during the facilitation of the groups. With these issues in mind, it may be argued that individual interviews would have been more suitable as a method of data collection within an AI framework. However, overall I feel that something of the aimed for spirit of collaboration and camaraderie would have been lost with individual interviews. The focus group method had the added benefit of being close to my usual way of working with the TAs as the EP for the participating schools.

One criticism of Appreciative Inquiry is that it presents an overly positive and sanitized view of a situation rather than a true reflection of it (Reed 2007). Within the current research context of the contribution of TAs it has been argued that there is already plenty of negative evaluation and comment on what is not working. In

practice it felt a very useful approach to gain an alternative view to add to and balance current trends. I also found that in practice it did not actually prevent the TAs talking about problems. On the contrary, I was at times a little uncomfortable at the degree to which negativity seemed to dominate the discussion. Importantly, I think it allowed problem-focused talk within a broadly positive and appreciative context that I believe was supportive, enabling and motivating for those involved.

Finally, I will reflect on some difficulties and contradictions in issues of epistemology that I have encountered during the research process. During the research and on reflection, I have questioned the extent to which the study has worked towards the integration of theory and practice that is a central theme within AI. There is a sense in which I have at times returned to the traditional separation of theory and practice that Reed (2007) warns against. Traditional chapter headings in doctoral theses may be seen to encourage this separation, with a focus on the high ground of academic debate followed, towards the end, by a consideration of the implications for the 'swampy lowland' of practice and with a huge conceptual and experiential gulf between them (Schon, 1987 cited in Reed 2007). This has presented a challenge throughout the research. It links with notions of disengagement that more traditional methodologies have presented as a hallmark of high quality research. My own beliefs as an EP and the underpinnings of AI as a methodology take a view that disengagement serves to distance research from the real daily issues and experiences of practitioners. For myself, in particular, it has been difficult at times to reconcile a perceived need to analyse the data and present results in a relatively neat and traditional fashion, with a wish to work collaboratively at all stages. Linked to this, there is arguably a perceived inconsistency across the study, from a broadly social constructionist approach advocated at the outset in my planning and methods,

to a more realist approach towards the data. Arguably, both the focus group method and the thematic analysis could have been utilized in more constructionist ways, for example by paying greater attention to group processes, to features of the language used, and to the way in which narratives about TA practice are constructed and become dominant. I think these are interesting and important issues and have a slight sense of a missed opportunity in relation to the present study. I tended to take the individual as the unit of analysis when coding the data, rather than units containing contributions from two or three individuals highlighting features of interaction. Yet I believe I did remain true to the aims of my research. The aims of AI, which framed the aims of the research, whilst coming from an overtly social constructionist perspective, focus, nevertheless, on gaining answers to deliberately simple, face-value questions: What is working well? What is important? What would make things better? There is a sense in which, as long as the data is acknowledged as complex, multi-layered and socially constructed, it is acceptable and appropriate to use the data gathered at face value. To apply a deeper level of analysis to the answers of participants in this context may even work against the important themes of transparency, collaboration and accessibility. Far from 'making sense' of the issues, there may be a danger of distancing the research from the participants and overcomplicating it, making it ultimately inaccessible to those involved.

Importantly, there is a sense in which the constructionist nature of the research will be revived after the closing point of this thesis, with feedback to participants offering an opportunity for further reflection, response and collaboration with a view to utilizing the findings in ways that may move practice forward. This will form the final phase of the AI framework 'deliver' making the vital link between research and practice that AI seeks to forge.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has reflected on the research process and discussed the extent to which it was successful in achieving the substantive, theoretical and methodological aims set out in Chapter 1. It was suggested that the substantive aims were met, the study offering a credible and trustworthy account of TAs descriptions of their work. The theoretical aim was also judged to be broadly successful in adding a TA voice to current debates about the impact of TAs, albeit one from a particular context. The methodological aims were evaluated slightly less positively, with some challenges and contradictions highlighted in the research, particularly with regard to the underpinning epistemology of the approaches taken.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS

Chapter Overview

This chapter will consider overall conclusions from the study, within a discussion of its broad contribution to knowledge in this area. It will attempt to bring together the themes identified from the inductive and deductive analysis with answers to the AI research questions, in the context of current literature and in view of the limitations that have been identified within the present study. Key messages from the research will then be considered for the different audiences of TAs, School managers, Policy Makers, Researchers and Educators / Trainers. Finally future directions will be considered.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study has analysed TAs' descriptions of their work, gathered over three focus-group interview sessions, with TAs from a secondary school and two primary schools, in a rural learning community in the South West of England. The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach adopted, aimed to bring a positive lens to a situation that has been viewed negatively in recent research (particularly Blatchford *et al* 2009b and Webster *et al* 2011). It also aimed to bring the perspective of TAs to these findings, within a collaborative action research –orientated approach. The social constructionist and interpretivist epistemology that underpinned the approach to the study meant that its aims were to provide knowledge at a local, contextual level rather than to produce truths that can be readily generalised to the practice of all TAs.

Nevertheless, it is hoped that the messages contained within the research may be found to be interesting and relevant to others.

Whilst there has, deliberately, been a positive view gained of TAs' practice, the study has also served to highlight problems and tensions within the TAs work. As such the study has provided a rich picture of what is working well and what could be improved, within the context studied.

The themes identified from the inductive analysis suggest that the TAs play a vital role in 'enabling pupils to cope' in mainstream settings, helping to create the conditions whereby pupils feel able to come to school, to stay calm, and to keep up with the pace and practical demands of daily school life in the classroom and around the school.

Two of the four inductive themes identified related to relationships, with the pupil and with the teacher suggesting that this is an important issue. Both of these contained positive aspects and also negative elements, or areas of tension. The uniquely close and personal quality of the relationship that the TA develops with pupils is important in considering their positive contribution, this appearing to be a key feature of their effective support. This focus on relationships, highlighted in the present study and by others (O'Brien and Garner 2001; Devecchi and Rouse 2010) and on teamwork highlighted by Cremin Thomas and Vincett (2005) has been arguably largely overlooked or dismissed in frameworks currently dominant in this area (Blatchford *et al* 2009b and Webster *et al* 2011).

Issues of status as an area of tension and difficulty were present in the identified themes in relation to both pupils and teachers, echoing concerns raised in the

literature regarding issues such as professional status, pay and conditions (O'Brien and Garner 2001, Mackenzie 2011; Hammett and Burton, 2005).

The 'constraints of the school system' theme highlighted some of the difficult contexts in which TAs work, pointing to practical issues such as lack of time, and to wider issues related to rigidity within the curriculum and of limited views about what constitutes pupil progress and how it should be measured. These themes link back to some of the historical and political contexts identified in Chapter 2, within which TA work may be seen as situated. For example views about the meaning and value of inclusion are highlighted within the 'rigidity of the curriculum' subtheme. Indeed some of the examples here illustrate a tension between making the curriculum accessible to all, and singling out some pupils as requiring something different. Within the 'broader views of progress' subtheme there is a reminder of the role of the TA in raising standards, highlighting that there are differing views about what this means.

The present study has placed the findings and conclusions of the DISS study conducted by Blatchford *et al* (2009b) as central to current thinking about the work of TAs and has to an extent offered alternatives to these views in relation to both to the conclusions drawn and to methodology. Focusing on narrow measures of progress has been a criticism of the DISS study and this may be seen to undermine their basic premise that TAs have a negative impact. Indeed broader views of progress, particularly with a social focus, underpinned many of the examples of effective practice offered by the TAs in the present study.

The findings of the present study, although presented from a very different perspective do also suggest a degree of consistency and agreement with some of

the conclusions from the DISS study. This is most obvious in relation to the notion of preparedness. The day-to-day preparedness of TAs for lessons had already been referred to in the inductive analysis, framed here as a lack of time to speak to teachers. Within the deductive analysis, themes identified suggest that in the description offered by the TAs there is agreement that day-to-day preparedness is both important for the efficacy of their work, and also an area that currently works against their successful impact. The issue of training and professional preparedness for their role more generally was not identified as a theme and was referred to just once, and rather obliquely, where there was a comment that TAs are expected to be experts in all subjects. Within the present study it may be argued that relationships and factors that enable effective communication seem to be important determinants of success, rather than the formal pedagogical knowledge suggested by Blatchford *et al* (2009b).

Deployment and Practice were more difficult to consider as key factors within the present study. Deployment was problematic because in the present study this was to a degree a given – the TAs were recruited on the basis that they were deployed to work with a particular individual pupil. That TAs want to feel ‘factored in to lessons’ was identified as a related theme, though perhaps one that could be seen to relate back to the issue of preparedness for lessons. Practice has been framed by Webster *et al* (2011) as the quality of interactions, as judged by analysis of recorded TA-pupil conversations. Within the present study, themes relating to practice suggest that TAs interactions are, from their perspective, and in contrast to the findings from Blatchford *et al*, often planned and purposeful. Further, their explanations were presented as helping the pupil to make sense of the teachers’ initial instructions, which according to the TAs are often inaccessible to the pupils that the TAs support.

The current study was framed within a methodology that seeks to produce local and contextualised knowledge that is meaningful to the participants involved. Whilst Blatchford *et al* (2009) produced conclusions that served as a catalyst and motivator for the present study, the aims and scope of my research do not enable me to engage with the Blatchford conclusions directly, because they are presented as saying something about the practice of TAs in general, whereas my findings claim and seek only to have direct relevance to the particular TAs involved in my study.

The study does nevertheless suggest some interesting challenges, questions and alternatives to the conclusions of the DISS study, along with some points of agreement. It is I believe appropriate to discuss these, whilst always acknowledging that the aim is not to suggest that one of these views is right and one is wrong, but rather to highlight that different perspectives exist.

I believe that the findings from the present study may contribute to knowledge in this area in the following ways:

- Bringing a TA perspective to questions of efficacy in TAs work
- Providing an *Appreciative* lens to the question of the professional development of TAs
- Considering important themes within the work of (a particular group of) TAs, (e.g. relationships, status, constraints)
- Highlighting that there are alternative ways of interpreting terms that have been presented as straightforward and unproblematic (e.g. progress, efficacy)

- Exemplifying a potentially useful process for engaging with TAs in their work that is respectful and collaborative

Ultimately, the present study takes a methodological stance that questions the extent to which it is possible or helpful to make broad generalisations about TAs in relation to their efficacy and impact. The current study focuses on specific contextual factors and experiences that are key to exploring issues of impact for a particular group of TAs. The issues raised in the current study also suggest that the central role of relationships, communication and collaboration for TAs should not be underestimated - both in their daily practice and for the process of their continuing professional development.

Key Messages from the Research

The key messages considered here relate primarily to the particular context of the present study and the particular TAs who participated. The extent to which I suggest that the messages may be applicable beyond this setting is to some extent limited by the epistemological approach adopted, which, as has been discussed, views the possibility of establishing generalisable truths as problematic.

I think it remains compatible with this view to suggest that whilst the messages may come from work in one particular context, they may offer insights or highlight issues that could be applicable in other similar contexts. This relates to a view that readers of research are active participants, and that they will critically reflect on the content and process of the research and make their own decisions about where and how this information could be applied.

Reed (2007) suggests that in thinking through the dissemination of AI research it is important to have awareness of the interests and needs of different audiences and gives consideration to who these might be. Figure 26 summarises the various audiences as presented by Reed (2007). I have included in brackets particular readers that may constitute members of this audience within the context of the present study. Features of the message that Reed (2007) suggests may be useful in each case are presented.

Potential Audience	Useful features of the message
Practitioners (TAs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextualised • Focus on practical application • Accessible and concise language that links to practitioner terminology • Focus on achievements and strengths • Clear message that invites reflection and challenge
Managers (School Senior Management Team (SMT) ; SENCo; lead TA; head teachers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on how practice can be managed • Clear implications for what can be achieved • Points to effective monitoring and goal setting • Points to ways that achievements and strengths can be built on
Policy Makers (School SMT; Local Authority Managers; Local and National government Education departments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights the best of what is happening on which to build • Inclusive of a range of different views and voices

Potential Audience	Useful features of the message
Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes into account the issues presented by AI and the differences from 'traditional' research. Need to set out the legitimacy of AI. • Informs discussion about methodology and theory
Educators (EPs, advisors, providers of training for TAs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights model of building on achievement to effect change • Moves away from a didactic approach to learning • Emphasise wide and open access • Focus on importance of experiential knowledge
Service Users (pupils, parents, teachers?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider dynamics between service and service users • Offer clarity about the service • Shape expectations of the service

Figure 26: Audiences of Research and useful features of messages for them

[from Reed (2007)]

Key Messages for Teaching Assistants

TAs have a lot to say about their work and can offer valuable insights into what works well and what could be improved. The contribution of TAs serves a vital and fundamental function for the pupils who are supported. TAs enable pupils to cope with the demands of mainstream school. Without them the pupils would struggle to survive in a mainstream setting. TAs enable pupils to cope socially, for example by

helping them to stay calm and stepping in before problems arise. They also play a vital role in helping pupils to keep up with the pace of school and activities and with their peers.

The TAs develop special, close relationships with the pupils they support, and often act as an advocate for the child. This allows them to offer a uniquely personal and holistic view of the child's needs in school.

The TAs promote the progress of pupils in ways that are fundamental. This includes progress that may seem to represent a small step, but that is a huge achievement for the pupil in question; examples include progress in relation to confidence, social skills; being able to come in to school and stay in school; being comfortable to interact with others; being able to attend college; having a successful lunchtime; having the right equipment; avoiding getting in to trouble; developing independence; life skills.

It may be useful to consider in more detail the specific aims of the TA's support for a pupil, particularly in terms of promoting independent learning.

TAs provide valuable support for teachers, generally and in relation to the management and inclusion of the particular pupils they support.

Respectful and collaborative relationships – with the pupils and with the teachers are key, both to current success, and to future improvements.

The things that would really make a difference to the TAs work are:

- Being more factored in to lessons

- Having more time to talk with teachers, to discuss pupil's needs, give feedback, to develop joint plans and targets for the pupils, to talk about the content of lessons.

Much with regard to these developments is beyond the direct control of TAs but there were some things that TAs could do themselves to move things forward:

- Be more pro-active and assertive in approaching teachers
- Establish clearer boundaries with pupils with regard to behaviour management

Key Messages for Managers

The TAs have expressed a view that they serve a vital function in relation to the inclusion of pupils identified as having SEND. Ways of acknowledging this contribution may be considered, particularly in view of negative findings in recent research that have questioned their impact and that are likely to be demoralizing.

Factors identified that would improve practice for the TAs are:

- More time and opportunity built in for communication with teachers

This was expressed in terms of opportunities to:

- Talk about the pupils' needs;
- Develop joint plans for pupils;
- Give and receive feedback about the pupil's needs and progress
- Discuss the content of lessons and the TAs role within them

It is acknowledged that these are dependent on time and flexibility within the school day that is often limited. Nevertheless, it may be useful to consider features of organization, timetable and planning that may enable these things to happen more readily and more frequently.

A greater focus on social aspects of progress for the pupils the TAs support, rather than exclusively on curriculum levels and grades was presented as an ideal. This would enable TAs greater flexibility within the curriculum to focus on more 'holistic' targets and activities such as life skills with their pupils, where appropriate. It may be helpful to consider ways of more readily acknowledging and celebrating success and impact, based on a broader view of what progress means and how it can be measured.

A key theme was the special close relationship that TAs develop with their pupils. A conclusion from the study was that TAs offer a uniquely close and personal view of the pupil's needs in school. It may be useful to find ways of utilizing this to a greater extent, for example asking for the TAs' views about pupil groupings, involving them in discussions and decision making; inviting them to attend review meetings and provide feedback to parents, getting feedback from TAs that can inform planning and target setting for the pupil.

Key Messages for Researchers

This study may be seen to have highlighted a contextualised 'practice based' view of TAs role and impact, as an addition to the bigger picture that is currently dominated by research based on the assumption that TAs have a negative impact on pupil progress (Blatchford *et al* 2009b). Important themes of relationships and

communication are identified as central to the TAs in this study and the place of these issues within frameworks that focus on more mechanistic processes may be considered in future research. More generally, links, contrasts and questions may be further considered by researchers, regarding the extent to which theory in this area has meaning in practice and as far as the TAs experience their work.

The study has highlighted some alternative interpretations of terms whose meanings are often taken for granted and this may be a useful issue for research. The interpretation of what it means for a pupil to make progress has been focused on in this study. What is meant by 'good quality' practice has also come under scrutiny. For example, descriptions of practice from the current study suggest that TAs judge the quality of their explanations more from the pupil's perspective, and by whether the pupil is enabled to proceed successfully with a task as a result of their explanation. This contrasts with methods that judge quality by the application of external criteria to the content of the interaction.

An absence of clarity about what the TAs viewed as the precise aims and purpose of their support for pupils in relation to academic learning and progress has been highlighted and this may represent a useful focus for future research. Linking back to the ambitious goals of mediated learning of Feuerstein, (1980) presented in Chapter 3, it may be interesting to explore what TAs view as the potential for change in the pupils they support.

This study may inform discussions about theory and methodology in addition to the more practice- based features already presented for TAs and managers.

Although this research was not directly an evaluation of the utility of AI as an approach, on one level the study exemplifies AI as a potentially useful tool, particularly in relation to work and research with TAs. AI may be seen to offer an appreciative lens that is particularly relevant given the current debate about the impact of TAs, offering a contribution in respect of both meanings of appreciation – of valuing what is working well and also importantly, increasing the value of the practice. As Reed (2007) suggests, rather than arguing that AI is better than other approaches it is helpful to consider what place it may have in developing practice and knowledge, as one contribution to fuller picture. Its origins as a tool for organisational change and development arguably mean that it is well placed to consider the role of TAs. Indeed a consistent theme in the literature, including the present study is the way in which the school system as an organisation impacts on TAs. Whilst this may be true for all school staff, including teachers, there is a sense in which teachers are more autonomous, their status more established, and their professional boundaries more clearly defined. There is a sense in which AI may offer clarity about the role of the TA, a problem that has been highlighted in research as discussed in Chapter 3. That this has proved difficult at a general level suggests that TAs roles differ depending on their particular context, and on the particular needs of and views around the particular pupil they support, whose needs have after all been identified as highly individualised. Focusing as AI does at a local and contextual level, clarity may be offered not of ‘the role of TAs’ but the role of this TA or this group of TAs in a particular context. The importance of a local, micro and macro view of TAs in their practice may also be particularly relevant due to their varying levels of qualification and training. Setting aside epistemological grounds for avoiding generalisations, drawing conclusions about TAs as a group may be particularly

problematic because they represent a less homogenous group in this respect, than , for example teachers.

In summary, as Reed (2007) suggests, AI is offered not as the only or best methodology, but it is one that may be particularly useful for exploring with TAs and those they work with, the potential for building on achievement.

Key Messages for Educators /Trainers

What the TAs described as positive and effective in their work provides a useful starting point on which to build. Ways in which TAs enable pupils' inclusion, develop positive relationships and support teachers are key examples of the good practice identified. Reflection on their own practice, particularly in relation to their relationships with teachers and pupils are likely to be key to further development and joint training with teachers may provide an opportunity for reflection together, satisfying the TAs expressed wish for more time to communicate with teachers.

educational psychologists may be well placed to apply an AI framework working at whole school level, or to apply it as a guide for consultation with TAs and teachers discussing their practice together, including consideration of organisational, practical, relational and emotional aspects of support for pupils. A less traditional focus on factual knowledge may be appropriate, that emphasises practical and experiential forms of knowledge.

Frameworks such as the wide pedagogical role of TAs (Webster *et al* 2011) may be further considered and adapted to take account of the features that seem to be important for the TAs.

Key Messages for Policy Makers

At the time of writing there is much heated discussion around the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove's, expressed intention to cut funding for the training of TAs and to reduce their number in schools (Times online, April 2013).

The findings of the current study may be held up as one example suggesting a positive if not vital contribution of TAs to the inclusion of pupils identified as having SEND and a contribution to their development in ways that go beyond narrow measures of progress in terms of curriculum levels and contribute to their social and development as a whole person.

Consideration of the positive relationships that TAs build with the most vulnerable pupils and of the uniquely personal view that they can offer as a result on the pupils' needs in school, may be considered in decisions about their impact and effectiveness alongside the support they provide for teachers. Rather than viewing the practice of TAs as wrong or ineffective it is important to see that it can be built on.

A key message is to consider the voices of TAs themselves as well as other stakeholders and the contributions of small, local practice-based conclusions alongside larger-scale more generalised conclusions, to gain a fuller picture.

Key Messages for Service Users

Teachers may be considered to be a service user of TAs. The TAs descriptions of their work suggest that they support teachers in general ways in the classroom both in relation to practical and administrative tasks that TAs take on, for example giving

out materials, and in relation to their support and management of pupils identified as having SEND. The study also suggests that teachers value and are grateful for the presence and support of TAs. A key message for teachers is that the work of TAs may be enhanced by greater levels of communication and engagement with the teachers in whose classes they provide support for pupils. In particular, time together for joint planning and discussion of pupil's needs and progress would be valued. In addition, TAs expressed a wish to feel more 'factored in' to lessons, that is, to know what it is that the teacher wants from them and to feel that they have a particular role and purpose in the lesson. Further, issues of status seem often to undermine TAs' confidence to approach teachers in an assertive and pro-active way. A key message to teachers therefore is perhaps that TAs would welcome initiation from them regarding opportunities for greater levels of collaboration.

Parents as service users were perhaps surprisingly absent from discussions in the present study about what TAs do well and what would move their practice forward. Key messages for parents from this study may be the key findings about what TAs describe as effective practice. This may serve as a basis for comment and evaluation by parents. TAs suggested that their relationship with pupils is in some respects more like that of a parent than that of a teacher in that they have a closer and more personal relationship with the pupil than teachers and that they often find themselves in the role of advocate for the pupil. Further, TAs maintain a view of the 'whole child' where social and life skills and what is meaningful to the child are central to what constitutes progress. Parents' views about this and levels of agreement would be useful to invite. The notions of a 'joint vision' that TAs wished to develop with teachers for the pupil may be useful to consider in relation to parents too.

Pupils lie at the heart of debates around the effectiveness of TAs and of whether they are effecting progress. TAs referred to pupil's views, likes, dislikes and sensitivities as central to their practice and to notions of effectiveness. Knowing their pupil was key in many examples of effective practice and the TA relationship with their pupil (s) an important theme throughout. The closeness, particularly in relation to serving as a confidante for the pupil and to knowing them across a range of situations underpinned many of the positive examples of effective practice. It was not however a wholly positive theme. At times there was a tension between, on the one hand being like a friend or equal with the pupil, and on the other requiring at times to be a figure of authority. Some issues with behaviour management were raised here with TAs feeling they needed to be firmer with pupils in setting boundaries for acceptable ways of speaking and behaving in the TAs presence. Pupils' experiences of this close relationship would be interesting and useful to invite as would their perceptions of the status of TAs in school. Their perceptions of TAs' support more generally would be valuable particularly in relation to some of the key issues here around being singled out as different, opportunities to develop independence and feeling distanced from the teacher.

Future Directions

As Reed (2007) points out, AI studies may be difficult to draw to a close, as AI 'has an open ended nature that makes it difficult to decide when the work is ready to share' (page 155). Although the thesis presented here is almost complete there is a sense in which the AI study that has been detailed within it will continue. The dissemination of findings has yet to be presented to the TAs who took part and that this will be an active and reflective collaboration suggests that the findings, far from

being static, may change and evolve as part of the process. The writing of the final stages of the thesis and the consideration of various audiences to whom the study may have relevance has enabled me to consider possible ways of sharing the study in the school where the research was conducted. Inviting representatives who may take an interest including school managers, parents, pupils and representatives from the local authority may, it is anticipated, provide an opportunity to collaborate with others in process of what McNamee (2003) calls 'co-ordinating a generative future together'.

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APPENDIX 1

Dear Teaching Assistant

For research that I am undertaking at Birmingham University I would like to speak with teaching assistants, particularly those whose role involves supporting an individual pupil with special educational needs.

The research will involve meeting with me and other teaching assistants to talk about the work that you do, what you feel are the most effective and rewarding aspects of your role and how your work might develop in the future.

If you might be interested, and would be happy for me to contact you in the next few weeks to talk about the possibility of getting involved in the research please could you complete your contact details below .

Thank you

Julie Cozens

Yes I'd be happy for you to contact me about getting involved with the teaching assistant research my details are:

Name.....School.....

Telephone.....Email.....

Information for interested TAs

Hello

Thank you very much for expressing an interest in participating in my research project. This information tells you more about the project and what your participation will involve.

What is the title of the study?

It's called 'An appreciative inquiry into the work of teaching assistants (TAs) who support pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)'

What is the study about?

The study is part of my Doctorate in Educational Psychology at Birmingham University. The purpose of the study is to gain the views of TAs about the work they do. This will be done through group discussions. I will be asking you to discuss what you consider to be the most effective and rewarding features of your work and how you think the types of work you do might be categorised. I will ask you to consider and discuss how your work might be developed and made more effective in the future.

Getting involved

If you decide to participate you will be invited to attend 3 group discussion meetings at the secondary school. Dates have yet to be agreed but they are likely to be on Mondays from 2.30-3.30. I will be asking you questions and encouraging you to talk about and discuss your work as a TA. I will be using an 'Appreciative Inquiry' approach that seeks to gather positive information about what you do well and to build on that in relation to thinking about developing your work. It should be a positive experience and a useful opportunity to share your thoughts about your work with other TA's.

I will be recording the meetings onto an audio file and I will also make written notes.

Stopping your involvement

It will be great if you can attend all 3 sessions. However if you decide to take part in the research, you can of course change your mind and withdraw at any time. It's fine if you decide to do that for any or even for no reason. If you decide you don't want your contributions to be included I should be able to identify you from the audio tape and will do my best to make sure I don't include in my write-up the things that you said. You

can decide to withdraw at any point during the period of the meetings and afterwards up to Feb 1st 2013 when I will be analysing and writing up the data, just email me to let me know that you want to withdraw your contributions.

The information you share as part of the study will be confidential within the group and anonymous. The audio files will be kept safely at my home office. In line with university guidance the data will be kept for 10 years, after which it will be destroyed. There will be nothing in it that identifies you personally.

I'm not able to pay you or reimburse your travel costs unfortunately but refreshments will be available at the meetings.

Results

I will be writing up the results as part of my thesis. I will arrange a meeting when I have done this, to talk about the results of the research, to which you will be invited. It may take some time for me to write things up and so the meeting is likely to be during 2013, but hopefully still during this school year.

Next Steps

Let me know by email if you would like to take part - if not that's fine too, your expression of interest is appreciated and doesn't put you under any obligation. If you do want to take part I will let you know about the date and venue for the first meeting, at which I will ask you individually to sign up if you decide that you still want to go ahead and are clear about and happy with all the information. Do let me know if there is anything else you would like to ask about the research or anything you're not quite sure about before deciding.

Look forward to hearing from you!

APPENDIX 3

Thank you for volunteering to take part in my research project looking at the work of Teaching Assistants. The research will involve 3 or 4 group interview meetings where we will discuss the work that you do and your views about it.

Please can you complete the brief details about yourself below and sign to say that you give your consent to take part, for the group sessions to be recorded and the data written up as part of my thesis for Birmingham University.

NB No names will be used, and there won't be anything that identifies you personally.

Thank you again!

Julie

Name	Primary or secondary	Years working as a TA	Type of difficulties experienced by pupil you support	Signature giving consent

Transcript session 1

So The first thing I want to set you off with then is for you to share and describe and discuss all the things that you feel that you do as a TA that contributes to the progress of the pupil that you work with: 13.30

I almost want to sort of gather a list if you like of .. of the things that TA s do in their daily work that promote pupil progress. And and I mean that in the widest sense - anything at all that you feel erm contributes to that.

And also if we can maybe start to dig down to get a little bit of detail about what it is you do -so you know, if you say you know I think I help him to feel included or something, try to think about what it is that you do exactly – what you say and how you do that, so that we’ve got a little bit of detail.

So in other words then, if I can set you off..

What do you think are the most effective things that you do in terms of helping the pupil to progress? Any want to start off? 14.35

Can I throw in Making the curriculum accessible..

Do you want to say a bit more about that?

Well I’m really interested in.. in providing resources, that’s part of my role is providing resources for the students, and there are so many different ways erm to make the resources, to make them visual, erm, especially for the student I work with who is much more of a visual learner, words don’t always mean an awful lot to him erm so I like erm doing things with lots of pictures, finding pictures that are relevant, erm, if they are watching a film then I find pictures from the film so it, it ties in...erm

I think it’s about helping with understanding as well because it’s like Jill was saying sometimes how some things are explained doesn’t necessarily work for my student and erm so its like trying to help them process it in a different way so that they understand it personally to them rather than you know the way the teacher might have explained something, they might not necessarily understand the way they explained it if that makes sense, so you word it explain in a way that they understand

It's splitting things up into very small units

Yeah...Yeah

I also find that often children don't always, .. can't prioritise their learning and because particularly if they have dyslexia or there's a spelling issue, then in order to keep up with the level of the rest of the class they.. they really struggle with that so you kind of have to help them prioritise their learning in terms of what actually needs to go in, and what they shouldn't be worrying about - instead of worrying about spelling one word over an hour session that they're actually keeping up with the class

I suppose that's all to do with differentiation which is ..you know .is what you make..One of things I do with a student that I have because I'm not actually in the lesson is to spend quite a lot of time 1:1 with him obviously, talking about the problems he's having in class and how we can sort them out – and facilitate the learning –I mean just this morning we ordered some exercise books that were erm tinted paper for a couple of students 'cos they like, some of them like to use cream erm paper for worksheets and you can get different exercise books, ones with the spaced lines ..when I discussed it with this particular boy he was amazed that anyone could do that and agree that he could have them, erm so its, for me its discussing problems they might find in class and finding ways ...and because he's not in the class discussing them, he's out of the class we actually have quite good conversations about what he finds difficult, and that involves conversations or emails with staff, ..so although I'm not there in the lesson erm we have a conversation after the lesson and that he's having trouble in English with copying, or the books aren't the right size, or whatever - so then we can work out ways of helping him

I think sometimes yeah it can be a really small barrier to learning that the teacher just wouldn't be able to pick up on erm but as a TA being...working so closely, you can very quickly recognise that barrier and overcome it, whereas otherwise if you go on for lessons and lessons and lessons this is where they miss out on..

And also if they feel that they've had an input in removing that barrier, and that you value what they say, erm that you've come up together with a solution for sorting it out, it's quite empowering for them

And I think like emotionally as well - like you said – with working so closely with them, I find like with the student I work with like she tends to worry, and quite quickly if she's not understanding

something or she's thinking it's too difficult straight away, she starts working herself up and gets into a panic I think if she didn't have a TA sat with her.. she would turn to me and like immediately I can see in her face that she's panicking and she'll start to say what she's worried about, whereas I think if it was in the class in general she would probably sit there and stew and you know try to get on with her work but not get it right because she doesn't understand it or she's worried about it or she's not sure what she's you know trying to achieve, where as having someone sat there with her closely to work with her she can relay straight away to me her worries or anxieties and I can, you know, put her mind at ease and give her more confidence to do the task, so that she then understands what she's doing because it's been explained to her properly and she's been able to relay that to me straight away to her rather than her sitting there stewing and getting more worked up and missing out on doing what she's supposed to be doing...

Yeah.. (sorry) the lad I work with is much the same but he wouldn't actually tell you, but because you're with him you can recognise (*yeah*) that he's starting to get frustrated and you can see that he's gone off task but because you're with him you're there straight away to help him even if it's just writing the date for him because he's got left behind he'll then get really frustrated and once the frustration builds up that's going to be him gone for the rest of the lesson so because you're there with him recognising that.. which has been built up over time of working with him, you see the small signs of when he's about to go...

The the..the lad I support is a lot different he likes to work by himself and he'll show to the teacher he's not making any eye engagement head down, erm so.. so when instructions are given he's off and running erm but he stays on task really well so he may be given two or three instructions and he's absorbing it - even tho he's not showing to the teacher that he's actually listening, he's got the ability to actually do the work and still listen – it's the other way round it's the children that aren't actually statemented – they're getting too many steps there are 4 or 5 in the class that need the constant reassurance of what they are doing what they are doing next..so it's just ..I'm just saying that from my angle it's not every child with SEN who struggles .. it's ..and this lad I'm working with is a lot different

And from a physical point of view, obviously the TAs role - ..the student just wouldn't be able to keep up with the normal day to day life in a secondary school without TA support, there's just no way..

Any examples of that?

Erm yeah he needs.. he needs specific equipment.. erm a writing slope...and a back support and a foot stool that has to be taken to each lesson erm so they're distributed around the school in certain places so that they are always easily accessible and obviously not carry around too much.. I carry his bags for him get books in and out of his bag erm so its yeah he.. simply wouldn't be able to keep up with this sort of life – speedy secondary school life - without a TA

On ..in a completely different way that would be the same for my student she erm she wouldn't be able to be in a mainstream secondary school unless she had a TA with her ..I don't think

I think that's the restrictions of a.. of a secondary school like this there.. you've got a a set curriculum and we're restricted when we go into class because we've got to work to that curriculum I take.. the boy I work with I also work with him on entry level maths so I take him out and it ..that lesson is so different because we're working to our own curriculum almost, and we 're working at the speed that he needs to work at rather than in class were working at the speed the teacher sets, erm and its it's not easy trying to keep up..

Cause there's a lot that seems to be having to be covered isn't there due to the curriculum and it's just so fast it's a large range..key stage .. if you are sat at the bottom the difference between the top and the bottom.. is a real struggle

If they do one to one I find that he.. the the lad I work with -he feels that it's a real achievement if he's achieving himself, rather than trying to keep up with everyone else in the class - if he feels good about himself as well ..

The boy that I work with what he, the positive things I give him - I give him boundaries which I don't think he has at home, the teacher – she's you know the nice guy and I'm you know come on you have to sit and do this and by the end of the session you know he's actually done something really good I mean it s hard to get him to sit there and make him do it and I say look you've done the work and you know if you haven't said you must finish this by the time we go to break then he just wouldn't do anything, fortunately in the session he's actually done something

Just from my angle one of the issues for the lad I support is obviously engagement around him in team work and group work or working in pairs, ... pack of cards and there turning cards on his side of the table and I dip in and out to make sure he shares, you know cause he prefers to work by himself and thinks he knows everything he knows all the answers, but you know encouraging him to share the answers is the role I see myself doing with this individual

Yeah I do the same thing as well erm my student tends to get very erm she was a bit nervous today in class working with her team, we were trying to find squares in a treasure map and they were all likexxxxshe tends to want to what she wants to rather than listening to the group she was selecting the squares that she wants to trying to get her to listen to other people's opinions ...even if she

doesn't agree with them you know to just to try and compromise a little bit, listen to what they're saying xxxxxxxxx

Anything else? anything else you do?

Mines in year 7 so his first few days here are really important and .. little things -making sure he got to the lesson on time ..if he lost little bits of equipment - football boots...and we found those boots, because we looked as soon as he realised they were lost - those first step into school first 2 or 3 days days are really important, so making sure he had what he needed – very much guiding him around.. to the library ..to the catering area..really key for him erm but also key that there's a period of weaning off he's weaned off that ..after 2 weeks definitely weaned him off that

Could you say a bit more about that - weaned him off, how did you do that ?

Erm... erm.. made sure that I stepped behind the group when they were walking to the next lesson - you know the first few days they were getting to the lessons 5 10 mins late all the time - the teachers were very good, so you know so rather than walking alongside very much walking at the back of the group and just watch him as he er..walked with the group so he didn't isolate himself again, walk behind the group erm so when he was like last in class to leave the lesson made sure everything was packed reasonably quickly so he could walk with the group, rather than pack his bags last and be 100 metres behind the rest of the class – so little things like that I think are really key for stepping into the secondary world, erm cause its..you know most of the children in this area come from tiny primary schools and there's a lot of stuff done in secondary schools to support year 6 and 7 but when there's.. everyone's in the same blazer, lots of other children around him and some giants in year 10 and 11 walking around its quite intimidating so it's just that reassurance and when he's lost out there just to sort of point him in the right direction.... but after 2 weeks he doesn't need that

..Because my student I work with is you know physical needs ..I am really conscious of how he socially interacts with the children and how they react to him, erm so there was a conscious decision to include the other children in helping him so that it seems very equal, and his extra needs are obviously around the school and I'll walk behind him ...we get on really well but if there is another child around I 'll always want him to go to his peers and it's you know and maybe I encourage a bit more of alternative ways of ..where he'll have break or where he's going to have lunch and those times when he can sit in a circle..

That's a good point actually because like some erm students find it a little bit embarrassing to have all the attention don't they – they find it a bit embarrassing they don't want to be seen as different or you know erm..it xxxx like trying to give them the help that they need you know the vital support they need but not you know make them feel embarrassed or erm that they are a bit different from the group and like you said like help other pupils as well not always sit next to her give her choices whether she want me to sit by her or if she wants me to stand at the back of the class..she'll tell me or give me a sign if she needs help and I'll help her but at the same time keep a careful eye on her so

if she's not understanding something erm cause she does ..tend to say she has when she hasn't – you know try and spot the sign and not do too much really..

It interesting you saying that because in our lower ability sets..the R4 sets ..as you see them progress through the school when they get to year 10 or 11 the whole class the whole group are so used to you being in there that they all respond to you no matter whether your working.. they all know who you are there to work with but there's sometimes the most wonderful banter going on in the whole class and with you included erm

..but also myself in the same respect for myself I almost see myself in a protecting role I am there as a sort of buffer between maybe the rest of the group and my student (yeah) because she is incredibly vulnerable and if you know she .. if she didn't have someone with her she would be you know an immediate target..

..erm we are talking about the lower sets and therefore there level of ..empathy - you know of the other students in the class and their understanding of certain erm disabilities, you do have to act like a buffer make sure things aren't said out of turn and that they do truly understand the situation of other people..but quite often you know..they xxxx

I find that they need just as much help within the classroom as my student does..

My boy I have to recognise when his brain's sort of had too much and you can tell he's starting to sort of veer off ..so basically sort of giving him that time just to well...have a chat talk about what s... just of 5 mins and then its bringing him back on task again so then he's had a like bit of a rest

Yeah I had that with a girl at primary school she used to have we used to have a set amount of time so we'd have like have a like a a sand timer so you'd work for that amount of time and then stop and have a break make it clear to her that that would be the time that Id chat to her cause she'd try to have conversations about her tea or what she was doing last night .. just trying to get her to remain focused on the task that she's doing but letting her know she can have like a reward xxx where she can chat and discuss whatever she likes it doesn't matter what it is I think it was a 5 minute timer that allowed her ... its like you know if their brain is switched off they're not learning that's it ..there's not much you can do so it's getting them back track..so it's letting them know they don't have to focus for very long..sometimes it's a bit daunting but some some of them, helping them to stay engaged for a long long length of time and erm it works really well she always knows she'll have a bit of time for a break xxx

I think it's quite important that we build up good relationships with the teachers that we work with so that they know that we.. we have the knowledge of that individual so that we can recognise when they get to that point and the teacher trusts our judgement, so if we think, for example that, you know they are completely off task and there's no way to get them back on task for that lesson then we can choose to do something else. I was just thinking of erm my student in particular..erm the fire alarm we had a problem with the fire alarm and it kept going off and she absolutely hates fire alarms and add to that it was raining and we had to go and line up and ..and I knew when we came back in to that maths lesson that there was absolutely no way she was going to be able to concentrate and so you know I was allowed to take her out and go and do something completely different, and I think that is quite important ..

Yes - Its about having the confidence ..to to work with the teachers like that

Yeah and the teachers knowing that you know your student so if you say you know I really don't think this is going to work, you know, they respect your opinion and allow you to do what you think, is best

Very much so, I think that particularly erm ..I basically stay with one group and you get to know every single person in that class and the teachers are very good at listening .. to ..you know how they are going to react in different situations to types of learning ..erm so you can.. the teacher will come and say you know is it ok to do that, certain times of day xxx and also because you're the TA that is always with them you've got a very calming influence over the entire group I've found... erm ..if you are out when they come back in they'll say we missed you and its.. you are the 1 person going to different lessons and you will do that throughout the school but that TA will stay with the class...

It's that constant..

Yeah.. yeah.. you become that link between them and the teacher xxxxx

I don't think they always say they miss you but I think they mean it (laughter)

Yeah they probably don't always say that

also I sometimes think that they think of us..we're were not the same as the teachers.. we're sort of more on their level..yeah, so...

I agree..I think it was .. a few weeks ago I think ..I cant remember what he was saying now..but he turned round and said something like.. erm..oh yeah he was using foul language.. in front of us - and you know I'm a member of staff ..and teachers listening ...we're not like a pupil you can't say those things and he turned round and said well you're not a teacher your more like a friend than a teacher and I thought that's quite a nice compliment, and then thought hmm is that a complement? (laughter) You know it's like you said, they don't really class you as a teacher or as a member of staff you know they kind of see you as more on their side really .. but like what you said about working with the teachers.. I definitely agree with that I've been trying to do that find some info and pass things on sometimes you aware that something's happened - like this morning student council erm she was really upset about that and you know .. the teacher knows why that student might be off task not as focused as normal they might not necessarily have known that and erm I find in science as well xxxx all the activities erm its one of the things my really student doesn't like, its loud noises and pops and things like that, and its being able to talk to him at the start of the lesson - the teacher, find out what's going on in that lesson so that I'm aware if they're doing something where it's a loud reaction and if it's something that got a lot of loud noises then I can take her out or prepare her let her know this is going to happen and perhpas to be xxx

Its more what doesn't happen because you're there, than what does, its more about what you kind of ..because you know the student so well you know there's going to be an issue with it ..it's kind of nipped in the bud before ...so you just keep that smooth flow to the day because you're always with them and you get ...checking cover to see if there's a different teacher .or yeah .just those kinds of things being aware that this could cause a problem so..you need to ..yeah..

If one student disrupts it, that's it for the whole class so although we're talking about bringing on one child.. if that child is very disruptive like mine can be, that's the whole lesson for the children in there

You've got to adapt from teacher to teacher in..at a secondary school cause you're moving around and its getting to know the diff ways the teacher teaches and you've got to change the way you work..

In the first few weeks yeah my student was very under-confident and the arm would go up there and most teachers in class could not see the arm so I would try to encourage him to put his hand up higher and when after a couple of days eventually he got picked out to answer a question the teacher said no and moved on and it just didn't work with that answer, and it took a day or two to get him to put his arm up again so its er..you can be there as a support and in the next lesson just have a quiet chat with the teacher and say this is the lad I'm working with he's very under-confident....and so you pick up things like that .. also a couple of erm pupils have said is their primary school they had different TAs - 2 or 3 TA s during the last year and they have asked are you with us

for the year – yeah.. I’m here in school for the year and er, so that’s feedback from the pupils, the pupils they like that constant person – they can trust -were not teachers but we can guide you through that first year of education it’s really quite important

Great..Thank you .. the next bit I wanted to ask you erm is.. for you to think of a particular high point in your work -a really positive experience – it can be something really small or maybe bigger where you really felt this is why I do this job something.. really rewarding or really positive erm and just to think about and share what you valued about yourself..what you valued about the work that you do or maybe about the place of work, the team that you work in

I think progress when you see progress, it’s really rewarding, when you see the impact you’re having with that child its actually getting results, and actually improving, and that’s partly down to the work that you are doing

Can you give a particular example?

yeah when I was at primary when I first started working with her her handwriting – she couldn’t you know she couldn’t follow lines you couldn’t read it and we did lots of practice, fine motor skills, you know exercises, dot to dot, mazes you know and after about of year of school and hard work with it, her handwriting was beautiful and I kept a progress book and was able to sit down with her and to actually show her the work that she’d done xxxxx see visually the progress shed made to the smile on her face – she was able to see – kids don’t think of it like that xxxxx she saw in that progress that she made so for me it was like she saw in the progress she’d made... full stops..capital letters..spacing cause she wouldn’t use finger spacing xxxxx and the fact that she was now able to do that ..and it was xxxx really rewarding to see that. Xxxx yeah

You can see the progression, that theyve done really and maybe theyre not particularly impressed but it’s when it actually something that means something to them – it means that they’re able to do something..it has an effect..Im thinking of my student who I worked with on and off, I’ve seen lots of progress but sometimes he’ll say yeah yeah whatever - you can see when he’s really pleased – that’s when you know its made a difference when it helps him and he’s moved on quite a big stage..

You can actually praise him because there is achievement there -you’re not just praising for the sake of thinking oh I must praise him for that because you’ve got to keep on praising – you’re actually praising because of achievement..something’s happening

And he’s doing things that you’ve been struggling with him..you know like doing things with the picture grids xxx he’s listened to a story and he writes it down using pictures and symbols that you

can read back but we were doing it the other day and he actually chose to write words xxx instead ..rather than do it with pictures ..it was suddenly easier to write words on there when he'd avoided writing – you know - a huge breakthrough –

he's writing things on the board .. is..the thing he always writes is can I go home now – he's actually writing it as he's talking to you now – so he's not thinking about it he's just doing it –

he's using writing as way of communication which he didn't before –

that to him he's pleased with that that's an achievement whereas he's had other achievements but it hasn't meant anything to him ..

I think as a teaching assistant were in quite a unique position really because we don't have to necessarily ..our progress that we make with our student s isn't necessarily erm level based, and so we see progress in lots of different ways, not necessarily just you know a progression from 4.2 to 4.5 and for me, progress is a student that school- refuses and you know and is finding school life so difficult that they can't come to school -to them being comfortable to come to school and being happy in school, and thinking now back to the student that I work with where she is now: just the fact that she's in school every day that she's happy she's now going to college 2 days a week, which you know when she first started in year 7 perhaps we never thought that would happen..or another student who came in year 7 who was deemed to be so disruptive that he would never get through (the) school and now he's in year 11 to me that's progress that's what I think of when I think of progress, but then I guess that's because I don't do literacy intervention I don't do those types of intervention but to me it's just about you know the whole person rather than..

The student I can think back to last year erm was a year 11 and he had huge learning difficulties linked to a medical condition erm and it was borderline whether he could actually cope in this school or not and you know why was he here - but he did he got through to year 11, -the last 2 years he followed the full curriculum he went to college 2 days a week, he studied English - he studied Macbeth - and why shouldn't he? Why shouldn't he have the chance.. to to know.. what Macbeth is all about ? And seeing him er..he wouldn't go to the prom, that just wasn't for him, his confidence wasn't enough to manage with the prom so we organised a party in school for him and seeing him take ownership of that party and seeing him welcome the male teachers who came in by shaking their hands, I mean it was..

It was unheard of he would never had physical contact with anyone in year 7

and one of the teacher's comments he said to me I can't even get my son to shake hands -

mm mm

they were surprised to see him so confident

and he just sort of circulated –

he circulated, he talked to people and that is – that for me was real achievement seeing him so comfortable in that situation

'cause its not just about the work and that its about them having ..as a person more confidence emotionally, and like you said when you see that, when they're coming out of themselves and you know it makes them feel good about themselves - confidence about what they have and when they're able to do something they didn't think they could do xxx

and that's got to be to do with way learning support supported him, you know it's got to be to do with us as a team how we supported him..

its learning life skills isn't it? Life skills ..

Yeah..yeah

Yeah.

And for some of the students that's so much more important than whether they get a grade E in er..English GCSE

But I suppose also for some, their frustrations and difficulties or I say that because that's what I sort of know ...when you help them with that that can have a knock on effect.. And actually helping them with that side helps them progress in many ways because they feel they're quite bright but they cant xxxx more confidence

More confidence as well

It can have I suppose it depends on the student ..

.I do have an example My student is a lovely boy who loves studying and he's really keen in every lesson ridiculously keen.. erm apart from in maths erm he just shrivels up in maths he won't answer any questions he really really has an issue with it in the first maths lesson he had this year they did a small 10 question test and he got 1 out of 10 and we had a maths session after and he just took it so personally, he had a real issue he thought it was all his fault he couldn't learn..and we've been going through it week on week - mainly its just rushing, he's a bright boy and he feels like it should come more naturally to him than it does so he was just rushing through so we went through really methodically going through everything and then the week before last he did a similar test again with 10 questions and he got 7 out of 10 and ..and xxxxx and now he'll stick his hand up for everything in maths again so..

I took a boy on 2 years ago he would very rarely stay in class disruptive and I feel now 2 years on he knocked tables over ...and I feel now 2 years on he very rarely leaves the classroom now and I think

it is having the consistency of knowing he's got the same person come in you know I've you know first he'd say things like you won't want to work with me for long 'cos nobody does..and you know 2 years on – he had something the other day and he got really angry I calmed him down and said you know well you know I care otherwise I wouldn't still be working with you and I think for him.. that was.. he just knows I'm consistent in his life and ..

Not only that ..but the fact that you're there to deal with that... I mean, the job I was in just before here I was only in it for about 4 months and I was working with a girl who had severe behaviour issues she'd be hurting other children, she'd be lashing out or kicking and punching.. and having xxxx because she had other problems as well she used to vent her frustration out on everyone else and if the TA wasn't there to deal with that 1 particular student, to be able to take them out of the room calm them down talk to them you know if the teacher had to deal with that therefore everyone else is missing out on their learning because of you know the teacher is not able to teach them.. the fact that.. and as you say you build up a relationship and you learn about you know how to calm them down or pinpoint the reasons why they're getting like upset sometimes nip things in the bud ..its important xxxx its rewarding when you get that bond ..

And the other way round – we've had a teacher in now he brought some chocolates in because of the work the TA s do xxx hes a new teacher xxx he said thank you because he teaches a subject that is quite hard to teach and there's a lot of disruption so without the TAs in the room.. you know..

..talk about a boy I work with a lot ..I work with a student who is in terrible trouble at playtimes, lunchtimes, finds it really hard to play nicely with the other children without hurting them..put loads of things in place for him.. he has gradually got better..but he sometimes slips back into his old ways...games, jump on people ..pretended to stab them or whatever, last week he spent the whole lunchtime playing with some girls, skipping - and at the end of lunchtime I said you've had a really fantastic lunchtime and he put his head on my shoulder and said 'can I have a cuddle?'..

ahhh..

..and I thought - that was lovely

I think as well like the one thing I've found working with the girl here with behavioural issues.. erm I was don't like these worksheets with her xxxx you know erm because she's started to feel more confident with me and the trust is there she'll actually open up about a lot of things that are going on in her life at home, to which you understand you know why she's behaving in a certain way she really will open up about a lot of things she'll talk about her home life and –you know just generally what she's xxxx like she's talking to a friend, you know she trusts me and its quite nice to like know that they trust you and are willing to share that information and then you get a bigger picture of what's going on at home as well , sometimes you know the teacher has a lot of students, they don't always necessarily have that xx

Yeah

And we can relay that back to the teacher..Mrs Rileys has just moved or whatever

This is why...

We did something in English recently - an exercise in year 7 'who am I'? that's what they had to write about and it's great seeing children who don't often say much .. just open up - you know they've got pictures of things in their life – talks about them, holidays, family Christmas..some of the real quite ones who hardly say anything just open up because they're so excited because someone's shown an interest - probably diff for a teacher to go round 25 diff children and show an interest in every page, whereas I could spend the time doing that and that helped build building on the relationship with each child not necessarily the one I'm supporting but with others in the class...

Look at that – perfect timing! Unless anybody's got anything they want to share xxxx

Thank you so much

Session 2 transcript

So last time, just to recap last time erm I was asking you to talk about what you do about the effective things you do as a TA and also to think about what the high points the rewarding bits of your job are.

This week what I wanted to do...I've been through and put on post-its everything you said you did, and to think about grouping these in some way, with regard to the purpose of what you do, so for example, I mean I don't want to put words in your mouth cause I want it to come from you really but if you thought that having looked at them all there was a group something to do with promoting pupil independence was one then that could be a category so it's about finding categorise to try and group these separate things so what I thought was you know if you want to move them ..put them.but. I want it to come from you

And you can call the categories whatever you like .. and do discuss and argue and..

So we've got:

Keep him focused on task

Making supportive resources, visuals

Give Structure to tasks

Make it clear what he's got to do

Provide physical support

Help him not to feel different

Help other students as well

Avoiding pupil panic

Giving them confidence reassurance

Break tasks down into small steps

Protect and be a buffer between him and other pupils

Make sure not a target

Talk with the teacher at the start of the lesson

Encourage them to have a go put their hand up

Give breaks, break up long lessons

Build up a relationship like a friend rather than a teacher

Email staff about the students learning

Giving boundaries a firm no you have to do this

Help them to be weaned off – walk at the back of the group

(I've tried to just put it in the words that you used)

Noticing small things, small barriers , stepping in before it becomes a problem

Preventing problems arising because you know the child

Being a constant, helping them adapt to different teachers, situations

Helping them with what they need, find things they've lost so they can get started

Recognising when they 've had enough, knowing what upsets them

Helping with understanding rewording instructions check they understand

Relationship with teacher, build trust so they have confidence in you

Talk with them about their learning and how to help

Helping them to feel good about themselves

Encourage engagement with peers, sharing/ listening to others

So do you want to just have a think and then ...do it yourselves and I'll stand back a bit , and you can discuss and decide it doesn't matter how many you have but if some start to seem to have similar purpose ...

Categories emerging through discussion:

Knowing the student, relationship with the student

Promoting independence

Providing specialist resources/equipment

Supporting with the task the teacher sets

Building relationship with staff: communicating both ways, on pupils behalf, taking a lead, informing

Supporting appropriate behaviour and social interaction

Monitoring progress

So does that feel like a pretty good representation of all the things you do effectively? 17. 21

Does it feel like there's a category missing? Or anything else?

Yes..

At this moment.. I think you need more than 6 elements I think there must be more but I'd need to reflect..

It's hard to categorise a lot of it is linked to different areas, it all links to form one kind of..

I think we could do with section on supporting staff supporting teachers because we do support them as well really, we do ...

And we support other children as well as the ones that are there..

In this bit we are focusing on what you do with a particular student so bear that in mind I'm thinking that it could be that - if that is about indirectly supporting the student you work with ..

The only thing that I think that's quite key that's missing is ..that we I think that we actively increase their learning capabilities and that doesn't seem to be there

Need something about teaching, we teach we teach a lot

Because this is about helping them to complete the task that's been given..

We provide the tasks,

Yeah, we do alternative tasks or like extra tasks to enable that learning..

Sometimes they simply don't understand what the teachers saying so we have to redo an entire lesson, re-word it xxxxx

So there's a difference between this..

Its supporting learning really

There's Supporting the task and supporting learning..

Can we not say supporting the teacher and supporting student to achieve

Theres definitely a teacher relationship isnt there?

Is that another post it rather than another heading? That's another task you do to support the task the teachers set - you sometimes have to re-teach it

Mmm

In areas where they completely struggle – so like I do additional maths

Additional Curriculum where we are the teacher,

We do Social skills, and differentiated

It would have to be if they can't do it in the lesson

Teaching and Learning

This is where they need to be how we going to get them there

So this is about helping them how to tackle any task almost, giving them the skills so when they come to the next task they're able to do that better?

Yes

So what sort of things would go in here then, in terms of post its?

Things ,like 1:1 teaching, extraction, when you're actually not in the lesson..

So I'm in maths with (my student) and then I do 1:1 with him so I watch him quite closely in the lesson to see what areas he's missing, I'll then go back and look at the key stage levels, what he needs to know, what his knowledge base has to be in order for him to meet the next target and that's what I teach him in his 1:1s so its quite target based but its driven by what I can see he doesn't understand in the classes

Anyone else got examples of that?

Sometimes it's a case of pre- teach, you have plans for the next day and in the afternoon take the child out, so that you can pre teach to a certain extent the lesson that he's going to be in, so he can stay in the lesson cause he's had a head start on what's coming, he can take part, he can put his hand up 'cos weve been through that , so he won't get left behind

Mmm mm

Yeah makes him feel really good about it he's keeping up

Yeah xxxxthere really struggling .xxxxx if you can pre teach a little bit before..xxxx (several talking)

Gives them confidence...xxxx

And we monitor were always monitoring their performance xxxx

So you're talking in quite a formal way there? About looking at assessments..Do you do that as well

It's not just the levels though either, it's also their xxx

its their social targets and their learning targets and then..

their emotional state,

yes its not just the target their expected to meet educationally it's a target personally for them that they ...it needs to be monitored all the time

its about 3 or 4 different targets isn't it for each student

and behaviour..

yeah..

needs to be a close eye..

So that feels like more of a comprehensive list?

(laughter)

Ok.. (clearing away the post-its)

So for the next 20mins or so erm, I'm struggling with how to explain this..what the next bit is about is thinking about ideal TA practice. So you've told me about different things you do well what you currently do well, erm what work,s what you feel erm pleased with, and rewarded about in a sense in your role. What I'd like to do now is get your thoughts about almost like in a sort of ideal world type situation what ideal practice would look like. – So in other words, if you were working in a way that was absolutely perfect if you like to promote pupil progress, you were doing everything as well as you possibly could be, everything was set up such that you were, you know , really promoting pupil progress. In an ideal world what would be different from the way you are doing things now? Ok, so its almost describing a 'what could be' scenario..so I want you to think about you personally, so you might think in an ideal world I think I'd be a bit more patient, because I tend to lose my temper - or something like that – so you might think about what you would do differently as a person, and also you might say something about the system, so you might say well ideally I'd speak to the teacher a bit more before the lesson or something like that – so ..part of it is about ideal for you – what you think when you're working to the maximum of your ability, and also to think about the system. So it's describing an ideal world: so I want you to say things like I would; there would be; I would be doing more of this; less of this...

Does that make sense?

Yeah, so I'll let you have that discussion now and just ...part of this is about your individual experience but you may also think there are more collective things...but particularly thinking about your practice in relation to supporting your particular student.. 28 :01

I'll kick off – I'm working with year 7 pupil, at the moment and half terms coming up where they'll be using different groups and..stay in tutor group it would be quite nice to be involved with that depending on...quite nice to know who he works well with, especially xxxxx who he socialises well with in group work, that would be nice to be involved with .. have some input on..

It would be nice to have a bit more information about the lesson.. xxx know more what's going to happen in the lesson.. some teachers still think that ...you tend to feel you go into the lesson blind, you know the student but you go in and you don't know what the actual lesson is..

Yeah I think ..we'd be more involved in lesson planning.. (yeah) it's beginning to happen a little bit because of the resources Im making ..they know they are as an integral part of the lesson, in a small way it's happening, erm but I'm thinking of the student I working with I don't think his needs are always taken into account when the lessons planned...individual students needs ..from the teachers point of view

Yeah that's right... I could be a bit more pro- active in going and ...talking to..tackling the teachers on this.. I don't know if its just because Im its being a TA or what, there is a feeling that they're the teacher .. I shouldn't really be dictating what... - they tell me...there is an element of that ..I feel a bit scared sometimes

Some are a bit easier than others..

I mean Knowing how sensitive (the student) is xxx I felt that extra info about the lesson content could have been given a bit more like to put her mind at ease cause what we were talking about ..talking mustard gas.. in graphic detail.. what happened and how it affects you (she)xxxx ..ther'e was a video and obviously she can't cope with anything very graphic..could have told me xxx

If he knew that xx I assumed it wouldn't be very graphic, xx a video as graphic as that.. but I felt the teacher could have said something .. you know we're going to be looking at a video about such and such xxxx mild content

So in an ideal world teachers would be? This is about communicating with you about what's happening?

Yeah And with the other students as well a lot were quite apprehensive about what they did see..

I htink the problem is Its time restraints..you talk about time for planning but when would that happen.. you know 5 lessons a day ..and those 5 lessons are in the classroom so..

So coming back to this thing about ideal world, then in an ideal world.there'd be more time?

Yes – but - and that comes back to finance again if you're going to give TAs and teachers more time then the TAs have got to be paid xx

And with the government..there's so much to be crammed in because of the curriculum.. like you said there's so much to cram into one lesson.. like I say in an ideal world there would be more time to talk to the teacher but at the same time she's trying to rush through the lesson..get everything she's planned done..erm every minute counts so I guess..

In primary school you've got one teacher teaching everything..its all with one person, if we were more involved in planning here you'd have be 6, 7 or 8 different teachers involved and the TA would have to find time to see each of those different teachers..

That's when you come round to do you have a subject TA or do you have a TA for each student?

You need both...

You really need a TA ...

You need a secure social aspect for the child otherwise they'll xxx

If you're planning at primary school level the teachers have time out to plan and I get to see the teacher's plan but then any preparation I do is in my own time and it's .. I do a lot at home in the evening because I want to be prepared for the lesson , cause otherwise I feel that I've let the child down, if I'm not prepared he could go away feeling frustrated because I'm not prepared to teach properly he doesn't learn anything and it been a waste of an afternoon so I do spend a lot of my own time...

In an ideal world that should be recognised

Yeah that should be recognised

The thing is you almost have to be experts in every single subject

Mm mm

I suppose going back to ideal world... a specialist TAs I year 7 and 8 xxxunderstand the curriculum..get more confident and maybe specialist in year 9 or 10 in the GCSE year I think if you have that consistency erm xxx turnover of TAs I imagine has been quite high so you're not picking up .. whereas teachers who have been here for several years lesson plans.. on the lesson .sometimes the curriculum changes .consistency of TAs is quite a key thing

People say don't you get bored, doing the same things, the same curriculum each year, but no you don't cause that is the beauty of knowing the curriculum..and also you've got different students quite often every year or that student has matured he's different or she's different

And teachers are all different Sometimes youve go the same lesson taught by a different teacher

You've got background knowledge of the subject xxx

Xxxxxx Ifit would be a lot of work xxx

I mean at the moment with the ofsted, there is an onus on the teachers themselves to make effective use of their TAs that is one thing there being asked to look at.. are you using the TA

effectively in the classroom? but how can you measure effective use of TAs? There's ..we don't produce anything we don't actually have anything to hand over at the end of the lesson to say we've been effective in this lesson .. its such a ..

And that's one of the diffs with this research .. this research is about what you know -how can it be measured in a sense but also to start with - what is effective TA support?

If a lesson had been witnessed this morning -where there were a large number of TAs sat at the back of the classroom listening to the lesson - it was really necessary, and it was so useful because we then took individual students off, erm ..to work with them – we knew -we didn't need to be sat next to the student to work that was the time when the students were listening to the teacher , but it didn't perhaps look very good – if someone had come and looked through the door and saw 9 TAs lined up at the back of the classroom the argument would have been well that's not effective use of the TA – but it was extremely effective we had the same notes..

Yeah..

If we don't have a plan of what's going on in the lesson we need to listen to the task aswell.. like you said it doesn't look good..

I suppose in an ideal world the teacher would factor you in to that lesson..the worst things ever is to walk into the lesson and feeling you have to stay on that lesson, I suppose you can go to other students but xxx

In an ideal world if you're not needed then actually you've done a good job, if your'e student doesn't need you then the teachers done a good job, you've done a good job..by not..

I think in an ideal world the measure of a student' s success should not necessarily be what they come out with at the end of year 11, the kind of students that we work with on a daily basis – the measure of their success is whether they've some of them, have managed to get up and get here and if were encouraging them to do that every day then we've been effective, if we're erm..making sure they get to each lesson with their pen then we're being effective.

Its having the chance to justify that – we don't get the chance to justify why we are sat in the classroom..

I think The best person to ask is the student they will tell you how it feels, they'll tell you if your, the TA s are effective.. they;; say she really helps me.. without her...

I think Some teachers.. with some of the students that we have here - the teachers themselves would say if there wasn't a TA in that lesson I don't know what I'd do..because I wouldn't know how to cope with that behaviour or that reaction or that...

Yeah - We had a particularly bad wednesday last week and erm and we had 3 TAs in the classroom, and the teacher and it was just horrendous, and each TA was having to deal with a separate issue, as well as the teacher and you think in that scenario, how - how would the teacher have dealt with that – it was end of the day they'd all had too much sugar, xxx it was just horrendous there's no way that one teacher could cope with all that

We're often in class on Weds Thurs Fri when there are 3 TAs in the class and even then its hard work because there are such a lot of characters in there with so many needs..you could almost do ith one TA per student

There's no way a teacher on their own would be able to deal with that level of tension..and behaviour issues..xx

Its helpful having an extra adult to help deal with ...

This having extra adults if you have one teacher dealing with one issue and there's something going on behind that's going to fester and fester and could you know start up another issue, .. to stop it festering stop things from happening

Just to add in.... Teaching Assistant in the classroom, xxxxx and to have another colleague that allows the teacher to differentiate hugely without that ...xxxx....it's simple maths having 2 adults in the classroom xxx it does aid their learning

You've talked a lot about the system and what would be ideal and what would be helpful in the system can you I know its harder – can you think about your own practice now, in relation to that ideal I think about what you xxx

A bit more proactive

A bit more confident in saying look I need this in order to help me in the lesson to help...

I've gone into a lesson where if I'd known what the teacher was trying to get to at the end of the lesson then I could have helped them so much earlier and you get to the end of the lesson and you go oh that's what you were trying to do ..and there are students that just won't catch up..

So its helpful if the teacher lets you know...but what you're saying it would be helpful if I could have just said ..

..exactly what do you want out of this lesson - yeah

I'm known as a patient person.. but My patience is stretched. sometimes . I have to gather every ounce of experience Ive got .. I just ...I just think why has it got to that situation something I should have done something earlier to prevent that situation from happening – you know should I have dealt with that student in a different way, xx so I suppose its every little bit of experience.

I'd like to be a bit more tolerant xx just maybe be a bit more patient not let things get to me..

Yes its when it goes over into your personal life and you're going home and still thinking.. you know..I wish I'd done that differently xxx

I think cause of the sort of the students we work with, behaviour probs, I tend to get too emotionally involved .. you cant take every child home with you and solve all of their emotional problems you can only be there for them for the 6 hours you're at school with them – and as you say I do sometimes go home stressed really upset - hit the bottle of wine..(laughter)

It's easy to brood over just something really small

yeah

And you're not the only person in that student's life, you have to remember to step back and let the student - however they are going to be mature they're going to be their own person

You're not their parent – sometimes you take on that role you know you love them a bit

There's things you can't change

Exactly and all the hard work you do you can't do it at home.. ultimately it's got to be at home

I think sometimes I need to be a bit tougher. I think sometimes ..especially year 11s you know you get a little bit of banter.xxx.

I'd quite like to be a little tougher..

I think I need to be tougher

Yeah and try and earn a bit more respect..rather than trying to be a bit like friendly ..you don't want to ruin some of the fun xx

Yeah xx

But ultimately..sometimes..

It's keeping that still being that figure of authority ..

It's when they don't see you as a member of staff, it's a difficult position to be in as a TA because you don't want to be a teacher you want to keep that relationship equal but if they are being naughty - they need to know they can't.. in your presence they can't just continue...

I think pupils see us as equals..don't they? Xxx I've only been here in year 7s and the primary system xx I'm sure I think they see me as equals...as you go up through the years

There's one or two in that class that because the teachers are out of the room they'll start and I think sometimes 'were still in here'

Is that cause you're always there?

Could be .. they're just used to my presence – but then if..so maybe if I was stronger and just went ah no or there's consequences..then it wouldn't happen as much

I think students will always try to push more when there are just TAs in the room .. they do sillier things

See I quite like the fact that ..I like to have a little bit of .. because I find that they tend to talk to you more.. about things so rather than talking to the teacher about something they might be able to relay a concern to me or xxx and I can help them to see a teacher's point of view a bit more.. calm down the situation maybe explaining to them that xxx maybe speak to the teacher about their feelings if they're a bit upset..if they're angry as they see us more equal they come to us a bit more.. but if there's not the respect..there

Yes, you're almost invisible sometimes..you see a lot of interesting things

My student really wants to learn, so when the student goes out and the other students kick off he's looking to me going .. its hard that

That's the hard part with behaviour,, teachers have different standards xxx that student will, inconsistency – difficult thinking that inconsistency xxx its difficult to handle that xxx frustrating

They just learn which classes they can get away with and which classes not..

(laughter)

Just sticking with this ideal world notion just remind you .. you have talked about the behaviour...just thinking about your own practice currently, and what might happen ideally in relation to these ..(categories)..some of these haven't been mentioned xxxx

We should know exactly what's going to be in the lesson xxx

It shouldn't be for us to have to do the chasing round it should be in place

A Bigger salary

In an ideal world xxx the work would be differentiated already xxx

It would be impossible..

with the time scales if each teacher had only 12 students per lessons and 4 lessons a day with planning then they could do it, but that would be horrendously expensive, whereas we aren't as expensive we do all of this instead

We are the cheap option

We are making things more ideal for the teacher

A good example of that not going to mention the subject, but last week I was in only way she could do progress reports was to see the students in the classroom doing that.xxx so I was going round keeping them occupied..dealing with hands up xxx so that was an obvious way of the TA being used in a very good way but is that the right way?

Sometimes when you're wandering round the teacher is catching up with stuff, or what's happening next , xxx

or handing things out getting resources out while the teacher is explaining or you know getting resources out getting things ready in time for the task little things like that..it would take time for the teacher to do it all

Things like scribing – that we mentioned earlier, it could be done differently xxx you know must be electronic ...must be other ways of doing it..erm

So, with the monitoring – what would that be in the ideal world?

We wouldn't have to - the teacher would do every single pupil in every single class (laughter)

Well they would sit down with you..

But in an ideal world you wouldn't have a class or 16 students with...

Yeah yep xxxx

I think tho you're talking about an ideal world in a sense since a policy of inclusion where the range of needs that a teacher has to deal with has changed and now children that may have gone to a special school previously are now in a mainstream setting and that TAs are very much a central part of enabling that to happen making that possible....

mmm..cause they 100% wouldn't be able to cope in a mainstream school if they didn't have a TA.

What about this one – in the research TAs in the research come in for some criticism about their practice isn't sometimes as promoting of independence as it could be? What do you think?

We've still got to work within the curriculum, got to help deliver that curriculum

Also just think of ... I have a girl in year 10 if you have if I could just say we'll do a whole day of life skills that would give her independence but I can't do that because she has to go to English xx we are stuck with the constraints

That came up before – a more flexible curriculum would be an ideal world where there wasn't such pressure to get through stuff...

It's how you judge independence – the little boy that I have he needs but then if I let him do them himself every time then he'd be late for lessons and that's almost destroying his ability to socially interact so then I will step in and help out so he can move along at the same time as his classmates, so they'd probably say I was doing too much but actually I'm promoting his ability to socialise and therefore its social independence

As soon as there's a TA helping a student they will .. staff sometimes see us as..smothering them a little bit and other students see we are giving them special help, very difficult..

My student I always write her homework down for her and xxxxx I go through it with her so when she gets it home she knows what to do and xxxx it's the same with copying from the board I always allow her to start but she is so slow she's get to the second line and that'll be it

But that's essential for her independent learning - if you didn't do that for her she wouldn't learn

Exactly so I end up writing on a notepad ..whats on the board..so xxx she's still got it ..or if they're asked to stop and put pens down to listen I will then finish copying it down for her so that she xx

Independence is a very personal thing – its personal to the student, you know what independence is for one student is completely different for another

And being able to justify what you do for them...

Again, you've got students in a mainstream school who cannot cope with the curriculum that they're being given it's a really fine line between allowing them access to the curriculum and providing a totally differentiated curriculum which side do you go to?

Its other students who say miss why are you doing that for them , so it looks like you're mothering them but the students have this issue – have us for a reason if you let them be independent but they wouldn't develop socially or

It's a fine line...xxxxxx they do need help its trying to find that balance, that fine line

It's also really we are working for the school and the school has targets, that have been *set also* having to push push push all the time so this school keeps its standards...

But then independence could be looked at separately for each student because my child's independence would be completely different from your child's independence xx

Within the class We can support that independence cant we...

Well We just do it naturally don't we but if other people ..onlookers might go they're mothering them but for that student its exactly what they need its how you then show..

If you manipulate it if were my student xxxx communicate in such a way xxx always point to the right child to go and work with the student .. who wont distract xxx

I was going to say that with some students .. erm with my girl in year 10.. she would.. is not able to work independently, she could be in there with the curriculum xx but unless she had someone next to her.. she cannot work independently, so someone like an assessor coming in and observing me in the classroom sat right next to my student might say well your'e not promoting her independence but she she isn't capable of that without me ...

It requires an understanding of the child

Yeah you have to know her

Thank you so much.

Session 3 TRANSCRIPT

Our small select group all female group this time

....

The first thing I d like to do this time is get to you talking and sharing focusing on particularly on one of those categories that you came up with last time. Well there were 2 really that I want to focus in on this time

One you called additional and differentiated teaching and learning – which I think you said was about supporting children but not just supporting them with the task the teacher 's set it was more about helping then with their ,learning , and ..erm ...so rather that just things like you know come on have you got your pencils you need to write the date but rather more stuff that was more about their learning, and I think you included in that things where they might be taken out and you might do some intervention with them to bring on their maths or literacy or whatever.

What I want to get you thinking about and give eggs of and talk about the detail of, is when you are in class supporting a student with their learning - so more than just the task but thinking about moving on their learning, promoting their progress and the sorts of things that that might involve, so anything really things you might say things you might do eggs you can bring to mind, just sharing what you would describe as working with the child in the classroom to promote their learning. I won't say much more on that ... can you give some

I'm not in the classroom at all ,all the things I do are in my own room,

Ok

So I'm not supporting in the classroom context

Yes...But its promoting the learning..

It wouldn't be - I said I wouldn't supporting alongside in the class it would be additional things ..so thats still

I think that s fine ...'cause you said there's a difference between just helping a child with the task in terms of organisational stuff almost... and actually helping them with their learning, and you made that distinction and it's that learning bit I want to just focus on and for you to share and discuss and think of eggs of things you do or that have done with students

I think sometimes it's to do with putting the task in a different way for the student, because the teacher might have put it across in a certain way and the class get on and start doing it and then perhpas the student your with or others sometimes come to you and say I don't actually understand what I'm (yeah) meant to have done, sometimes they may have done it for homework for example and its finding another way of presenting the task – maybe the concept in maths maybe a different ways of doing it , but the teacher isn't always able to do that in the class, and finding diff ways of

presenting the task or the information in a different way that they will understand , and its knowing your student what will work - some of its visual or even colour coding you know for some students

It..Yeah.. in the class that I'm in its reformatting what has been said into language that they understand..

So can you think of some particular examples of that, when you work with a particular student thinking about what the task was and what you said, and how you did that?..

Erm.. well one of my student has French, tho hes very good at general English spelling that side of it he's very structural so he really struggles with understanding scripts in French and things like that ..so its almost pulling everything back so if he has to write a descriptive piece..Im trying to think of an example.., so today we were doing metaphors and similies and they were asked to break down a similierm ..so something as a cushion- so he couldn't understand what he was being asked to do – basically he was trying to describe that this cat was like a cushion, so literally its like I had to sit in front of him and ask him to describe the cushion what is a cushion - he just couldn't understand the whole idea of the metaphor and I had to break down every single bituntil he understood -oh ok actually a cushion is soft and fluffy and sits on a sofa ..right so why is he saying this about .. likening that to a cat?.. well a cat can be soft and fluffy and sits on a sofa...so its really breaking down every little piece ...so ..its doing the teachers job but at a much deeper level...

What I do is ..is working in class...is actually carrying out the task with the student – or with a group of students... so whatever their asked to do ..it erm...so perhaps in geography...to start drawing a diagram or something ... I'll get the same paper, Ill get the same worksheet, and Ill be working on that alongside them, so they're looking... instead of saying you know you need to do this you need to do that they're looking at what you're doing and getting an idea for themselves then from that .. you know

So you are almost working like another student in that context?

Yeah – Yeah, I've done that lots and lots of times and it works really well...we were talking about – cause I've worked in primary schools as well ,where you are working , sat down with the children doing a lot of the work with them, alongside them, doing the work with them and that's how the .. the practice that I use , erm , even with the older students they still - I think they appreciate seeing you doing it as well and starting to get an idea

It gives them the confidence as well , that they can see that they're doing it right, without looking at one of the other students

So you're not always having to direct, you're not always having to say you've got to do this and this, just by sitting there with a pencil or pen in your hand and starting to do it yourself and then they can directly ask you ...without putting their hand up in front of everybody they can see oh that's how you do it

In some lessons we're actually part of a group we're actually a team member

Yes we actually work on a table with so many students and we're actually part of that team, so if they have a quiz or something then the teacher includes us

Mmm yeah

We obviously hold back and let the students give their answers .. and then..yeah..unless we get a bit competitive!

We're actively taking part in it which I think the students like, don't they..

I think definitely what you say that ...like different techniques of doing things, and how to reformat lessons sometimes they're not aware of different techniques or different ways of working things out, like you say I don't go into maths lessons but with..I was helping student with revision for science at lunchtime and trying to show her a different way cause she was just trying to read everything and remember memorise it..but actually showing her how to highlight different words and things like that to help her and it's like that in lessons and they might be trying to work it out in one way, but there might be another way to do it that might suit them better, but they're not always aware

So would ..did you show her how to do that at the time or..?

Yeah I was at a funeral on Friday in the lesson so I wasn't there but I met up with her at lunchtime today and spent half an hour cause she was panicking cause she's got a test, tomorrow and I showed her how to read a section highlight some key words and put that down in a notebook, and then test herself a little bit, she found that really effective rather than just reading and reading it and reading it and then getting in a flap cause she couldn't memorise it

Did she ask you if you would do that?

yeah

I think in the classroom setting erm I generally try and ...if you can see that they are struggling xx seeing how they've started ...xxx kind of trying to move back what they've done xx so its kind of seeing what they're trying to do and showing them either an easier way to work that out or a way that would be more better for them better suited and sometimes, like you say, it just takes re-wording a question for them so they understand it, so actually xx they say oh I know how to write that and they can write it down..

With (my student) he sometimes.. you'll get the impression that he's understood exactly the task in hand and if he was just left to do it he'd go off and start his writing but then if you look, its.. he hasn't understood it at all, so it's essential to catch him before he starts 'cos then he gets really frustrated if he's done it wrong and you say no you've got to start that again - so its catching him before he even starts, get him to repeat back to you what he's supposed to be doing and then perhaps write his date and his To Be Able To cause everyone's done that by then... and then he'll have some fantastic ideas but he will get frustrated if he can't get them down, so quite often I will do the writing for him and he'll be telling me what he wants written, and then he feels that real sense of achievement 'cos he's kept up with the rest of his group and he can put his hand up and say that he wants to read his work out 'cos if he's written it all himself it won't necessarily be in the right order...and then the rest of the class.. you can tell that they think he hasn't done very well, whereas if I've written it down for him, his ideas he - he can read it out and be like everyone else...

I think its easier to review with the students if they've understand what the teacher has said..but they've got to go right back to basics and - I think myself , well do I actually understand it?.. totally what's being said ?- no maybe not, so sometimes you've got to question the teacher as well, erm just to get them to clarify things ..

Yeah , a lot of the time the instruction is in their heads and they don't always fully transfer that to the children ,so it can be a s simple as where exactly did you want them to write?...

Mm yeah, they don't always have the confidence to ask that,

Even little things like that, but if students don't pick it up and you can see they don't really know where to.. again you have to check with the teacher so it's clear

Yeah certainly, they ll sound silly if they don't understand ..

Yeah appear silly ..ask for them...a simple instruction..

Quite often the instruction hasn't been given .. its just the assumption of the teacher, cause they know what needs to be done, but they haven't fully transferred it

In maths there's a lot of reformatting.. we had.. in maths lesson today we were just doing some simple sums and he..the teacher put up a division, and some students were aware he'd put it on the board...some of the girls didn't understand it at all, it was 18 divided by 2 .. they didn't understand, they just couldn't get what he was trying to make them do because they 'd been doing negative numbers. And it was just simply saying to them how many 2s will get you to 18? and then they could do it on their hands it's just literally just rewording what they're asking.. and like oh that's so simple

I think often when a student doesn't understand and asks the teacher, they just keep repeating the instruction xxxx or say listen more carefully ..so they listen .. but..xxx..its seeing things from a different perspective sometimes .. especially dyslexic students – some of them think quite differently .. its knowing

Its Just a division ... it's just finding 18 by 2 .. how many 2s get you to 18? Oh right yeah..

Sitting sort of with the child you can see other students xxxx it's quite nice to say to the teacher do you mean...divide 18 by 2 rather than the way they said it – then like you say it makes you look the one who's trying to ..

My student hates writing his writing's not very good at all and I have tended to I scribe for him quite a lot but what I tend to do is I leave a blank so he doesn't lose interest so I'm scribing away and I might have a white board and then I ll say right you write that down, and then I carry on scribing a bit more – just to keep him in tune with what's going on... so he's telling me what to write but I just stop from time to time so he has to write something, so he realises that he's got to write...

Yeah

Hopefully xxx

When you sort of ...described how you do a lot of work out of the classroom, can you just say a little about what you do there?

Erm It varies but for the particular student I've been thinking about in these sessions erm a lot if it is how to cope with the lessons that he's in.. erm I mean as well as doing handwriting practice his

handwriting is really, really poor and he uses Dragon Naturally speaking and there's a laptop with that on it .. but its working on sort of various skills like handwriting and spelling his spelling is really quite poor, erm but also you know, we'll discuss any issues that he has in the classroom and how we can resolve them, or how I can talk to the staff, cause he's in quite a high set so some of the things that are in place in the lower sets to help them -you know breaking the teachers will break it down - it doesn't necessarily happen for him because he's in a higher set and the speed of the lesson is quite fast so we try and find ways of making it a bit easier, try to encourage him to use mind-maps bullet pointing , writing key words, that sort of thing, erm you know he has problems if they give them a worksheet or a handout it will take him quite a while to read through it, erm ,so we've been practicing you know skim reading and that sort of thing so it's kind of putting things into place for him to take back into the lessons, as well as his basic skills of spelling and handwriting and that sort of thing.

So its learning aids as well...

Yeah...study skills

And then also I can send various emails to various staff about you know, paper or ..you know because the teachers they could have had an issue xxxx. or it takes too long he misses things so its providing that link between him and the teachers really.. erm

I guess it's like helping teachers with what they do too, because they're not always aware ..

No, no, it is awareness, awareness of his difficulties, and because he's very bright and very able in many ways, erm the written work won't match with what he knows, sometimes they try to assess him on written work and that's never going to show what he knows, so its making them aware and make them find ways of getting to him more quickly.. and that s providing resources or and you know things like that..

Anything else that you can think of that you do?..its great what you've done so far cause you're describing it in quite a lot of detail – the sorts of things you might say or do with that focus on promoting learning, differentiated teaching and learning?

Just making sure they stay focused in the lesson and that they're actually listening erm to what's going on, cause sometimes their minds wander and you can see they've switched off and they're thinking about their tea or whatever.. so trying to make sure that they're listening and focusing on what the teachers saying

So what would you do how would you do that then? have you got some examples?..

It depends what they're doing if they're messing around its a Id go over and say are you listening to what the teachers saying, if they look just blankand they're not taking it in its saying erm do you understand that? And kind of using key words to feed back to you as well when she's asking questions ask questions about what's been said really ...

Or ask a question about what's been said really....try and engage them..

The student I work with if he loses focus then that's it – I've totally lost him the teachers lost him, he'll fiddling about with his chair, I'm thinking of an ICT lesson where they have wheels on the chairs and he's going back and forwards and round and round.. and I can't stop that – that's -I can't make him focus he's switched off so you can't -I can't make his mind work in a different way, so I've got to carry on listening, then when there's chance I've got to get the info to him about what he's got to do..erm

With mine he's.. sometimes feel stuck on what we're doing .. I sort of have to say to him well Ive got to listen so that we know what to do later , so you know well have a little chat about that later but I need to be listening to what the teacher's saying even if you're not, sort of thing

So at least you can pass on the information that's needed at a time when they are focusing...

Mm yeah

Its hard..

It is yeah..

Especially if they're not interested it's a lesson they have to do, they don't have any choice, they've got to be in there doing it but sometimes its delivered in such a dry way which.. also sometimes it's the sort of information that can't be done in another way erm

I was going to ask about linked to that getting them to focus and getting them on task do you have any examples of things that you do to motivate..or to ...

Something you might miss that we all do more without even realising is ...I think particularly where our students respond really well to praise.. and they don't really get a lot of praise from teachers the teacher hasn't got the time to go excellent that's great work so I spend a lot of time thinking right

what is my goal for you out of this lesson ?– and then I can reward at the end of it if we've achieved that – so even if the teacher has, you know, set what were going to do this lesson.xx I want to make sure he understands that, make sure that's covered, and then I reward that and praise.

Some teachers reward in different ways some in yr 9 don't use credits anymore do they -they use sweets or stickers and things like that its like letting the teacher know that they've done a good job so they can then reward as well

I think from (my student's) point of view, he has to be set achievable targets - he doesn't enjoy writing so, obviously sometimes he has to write, ...I don't always scribe for him....so maybe just say he's got to do 3 lines of writing or mark where he's got to get to ..'cause you know he's capable of that, so once he's written that much he can put his hand up and say he's done that and then he can get the praise cause he's managed to achieve what you asked him to, and then say that's fantastic perhpas you could do one more line for me that would be brilliant - the more you praise him the more you can get out of him

Yeah..mmm

My boy, if you say can you go to, as far as here, then he'll ..he refuses flatly to go any further..you know - you said that was it that's as far as I'm going! - so I've lost him completely then, but erm and.. you know I encourage the teacher to say can you keep it an open book rather than you've got to get this or try and finish the whole of that set, then when obviously the times run out you say..lets do 3 more .. but er another thing he does is erm when he loses focus he just want s to chat about something so I sort of realise that that's the time we have our little 5 minute chat and then I have to slyly bring him back come on let's just do a little bit more here and then he comes back again but he just needs that time out..just to have a chat

Yeah I used to find that with the girl I used to work with in primary shed be the same and we used like a sand timer to say we've got this amount of time to do work , erm ..see how much we can get done, work for that amount of time and then when that s finished we'll have a little chat and then start again, turn it over, xx did work well at that time she used to respond to visual things very very well and you know wed have before had many a stubborn debate about that sometimes shed say do one word and say oh its too hard its taking too much time so it was good for her to see visually that she has to work for that amount of time so she could see xxxx actually sometimes she used to see as a bit of a challenge seeing how much she could get done or at least turn it into a bit of a game ...

Its going back to what you were saying about knowing the child..

Yeah..yeah

It's difficult to think of all the things that we do cause it will change so much depending on who you're working with

Some are quite competitive actually aren't they

And some of them hate praise..so if you used praise that would completely ..lots of them in class don't like praise from the teacher ,cause then the others will take the micky out of them but they actually like the praise if their behaviour hasn't been bad so if you go -you worked really well today well done its much better – there like oh ok, and they'll accept that but if.. yeah

Its like credit marks...they have credit marks in yr 7 and 8 some of them just completely refuse to have them because they don't want to be seen as being rewarded.

As well like you are saying about what we do.. some children get a bit funny about receiving help as well they don't like to be seen to..as different – I know one boy in year 11 boy that I teach, and I mean he doesn't mind, but he tends to sometimes get a bit of flack from the other students and today particularly he was getting some flack from one of the other students saying you know he was getting his bum wiped..and so he you know ..so he was a bit...reluctant to receive help, so it's doing it in a certain way..without causing too much..fuss .but then it depends on the students some do need intensive help need someone there but its trying to do it in a way that doesn't affect them.xxx like my student who I work with on a 1;1 basis she doesn't mind but she never gets any hassle from the other students at all.. but some of the older ones..they do

I was thinking of the girl in yr 9 that I work with on Monday and Tuesdays, she really doesn't like having a TA sat anywhere near her in the classroom so you have to maintain a different ..sit somewhere she.'s not... but she does need quite a lot of help and she recognises that..so we set up, you know, like a little code between us where I will sit somewhere else, she listens and I'm watching to see if she's listening and then as soon as needs some help then she'll give a nod or something then I know ...because she doesn't like to be seen as

A lot of them they catch your eye don't they...

I know I'm there I'm there for one person but I take on a lot of them and some of them are quite happy to have that but sometimes xxx

The thing is the others in the class don't mind, it's quite odd really they get used to you being there and when you're not there they say why weren't you with us today?

Yeah -Where were you?

It's the way the teacher I think involves you as well, in the class so sometimes you know sometimes the teacher will actively say oh yes, Mrs H is here to help so you can ask her, and then that sort of opens it up for anybody who wants to have help then it ..they don't feel bad about you going over, because it's been said to the whole class

Mmm

I think in primary as well, I've been usually within the same class for..last time it was 4 years I've been in this class this year is my 3rd year with them, so you get to know them so well they do come up to you very happily to ask you know even the bright ones..if I get a moment when I can leave my boy's side ..I just go round to...check everybody they know I'm approachable...

Even where in our year 10 group we do go round to them..

Yeah yeah we do

The teachers in RE that we do, he actually started designing his lessons so that he can split the group between the 3 TAs that are in there, and then he does group work and we lead the group work, and then he will go round and check that everything's been covered, and the kids really enjoy it, they get to sit on a group with one of us.. we've done role playing and we've done all sorts of different things yeah it's worked really well, surprisingly well actually ...it's a difficult class to teach..So he's really embraced the TAs, and I mean he gives us what needs to be taught in that lesson, what we'll be doing xxx and then he'll go round the groups as well.....yeah

So that's slightly different from what you've described in terms of just sort of being there, and the teachers sort of almost, not ignoring you, but.. but you're just one of the group almost..

All 3 of us are there for one specific child, but we spend the whole time helping the entire class so because literally separated so that they'll move round us or we move and they'll stay in their spots.

Are there any other examples of ways you've done or been used, that's the wrong phrase I'm sure , but you know the teacher has sort of seen a different role for you, rather than just I suppose the typical one you've been describing.

xxxxSometimes doing things in the classroom giving things out..erm

We covered art didn't we ?- (yeah) because we've been in all for all the art lessons and the teacher was going to be off she was like we've got cover but because you two actually know what we've been doing, do you mind doing the introduction and a demo - and I'll just let the cover teacher know, cause obviously they don't know what they've been doing, we do , and she was like if you can do that that would be great

Yeah and we did what the students have done up to the same point at home, we explained what they needed to do next and showed them what we'd done xxx so they could see..

And now I feel much more integrated, I don't know about you, in that art group, a lot more of them are coming up to me and going miss what do you think about this...or

They value us...cause a couple were saying before when they knew we were taking art, you d better be able to draw miss - and now we've proved that we can! They seem to have a bit more respect for you.. and like yeah they do...and ask questions a lot more..don't they..

Yeah..

But the teacher actually giving you...the plans.. because you don't often get the chance to do that .so .it just kind of changes the way that the children look at you I suppose

It depends what kind of child your with as well, I mean the one I'm with now I find it quite hard to leave his side, so I mean if she sort of said could you do something else in the class I wouldn't be happy to because you never know, he's quite unpredictable you never know what he's going to do next , whereas the girl I had before, I could easily have just gone out to do some photo copying laminating whatever, I could have been out of the class for a lot longer and erm you know cause especially in English she was on task and that was fine, maths she obviously needed a bit more help, but erm you know if the teacher if she had to leave the classroom she felt happy that I'd be sort of in

charge, whereas now I don't feel I can stand up and be in front of them all, I have to be sort of quite close to the boy I'm with..

mmm

I think going back to that lesson we were saying about, it's sometimes being able to carry on the same standards as the teacher's - like when we covered, a lot of the kids came in and just sit where they like out of the seating plan, don't they - and cause obviously we had knowledge of where they should be sitting we could shift it around anderm get them back in their place the other teacher wouldn't have any idea that there was supposed to be a plan or where they should be sat .. so ..thats another of ours, keeping teachers up to date..where she should be sat in that lesson seeing where she should be sat at that lesson who needs help xxxx

Yeah cause once we put them back into their seating plans they worked much better. which is great for our students..

Brilliant , thank you , the next bit - the last bit probably - erm again -you (name) weren't here for this but last time we did some talking around what would be the ideal .. in relation to your practice almost in an ideal world what would that look like?..So we've looked at what you do, what you do effectively and we focused in on some of that and looked at how you categorise that.(.laughter)...then we looked at in an ideal world what would be happening – I think some interesting things came out of that I think that I d like to look at in more detail..but for now, erm how shall I word this.. so what thinking more realistically now so not ideal world what simple changes or next steps would make your work more effective so that could be things that you could do differently or things about the system that sometimes make things diff for you.. I know a lot of them would be in an ideal world – some of those bigger issues about being a TA you know status..etc.. but I'm thinking realistically what simple small changes or next steps would make your work more effective? Both from your perspective or the system or the team you work in.

So working specifically with the child I'm working with at the moment or generally?

Yeah working with the child that you work with in mind, but if you want to get wider than that then you can as well..

.I guess if you were each sort of thinking 2 or 3 small things that would actually make your make your work more effective – and I guess coming back to that issue of for the pupil you work with..

mmm

Communication time.. 'cause time is a bit issue .. you've been given the plan for the week and then you sort of have 5 minutes to read that on Monday morning and then you go in to your work with him – or whatever group I'm working in cause sometimes the teacher will actually work with his work which is quite nice, so I get different groups to work with, but there may be times that I've looked at the plan and I don't quite know where she's coming from, but I think I do so..and I haven't really got that much time to discuss it with her, so it's a quick word of is this how we supposed to be doing it? –no its like this and then you're off and running with it..

So its communication about...

That you're doing it right..

Its..If you had a bit more time to communicate with the teacher about what's going on, you'd be..have more confidence that you are teaching it exactly how she wants it taught.

I think sometimes even if its like 5 minutes in the lesson..even if you said..when you've got them set up but you know they can do the date or whatever on the board left them to do that and we had a few minutes because the amount of help you'd be able to give them in that hour lesson would completely outweigh him..losing the teacher losing 5 minutes a bit of time explaining 5 minutes at the beginning of the class spending a bit of time explaining to the TAs..Cause were such a valuable resource ..that without knowing what...

Mm yeah..

Sometimes children in another group will be doing slightly different work, and they'll put their hand up and you don't want to ignore them so and he's up and running and so you go over and see them...what am I supposed to be doing at this point? well I don't actually know because I haven't had the chance to find that out – so.. at that point you're not a lot of help to them, cause you've got to go and ask the teacher anyway..so ...yeah communication, and time for communication..

Another thing as well is the teachers understanding about certain students when the teachers when they're actually their doing their planning xxx if certain things had been thought about before like her sensitivity hand that would make it easier for me and certain situations could be avoided if they'd just thought about that in their planning, or they'd let me know in advance, things that I can do, so maybe make plans xxx to take her out of the lesson for that bit

A bit more flexibility as well ...in the timetable - at secondary level it's so difficult sometimes to get students out of lessons that aren't appropriate for them ..they'd be a lot better doing life skills or spending more time on a subject that they really do need some help with.. I'd be happy to spend time especially when they get to yr 10 and 11 ...ermwhat's expected of them.. its.. we can't get there..we can't do it very often

Feedback as well –partly, knowing what you've got to do, its feeding back how they've done, I've got a book that I write down if I notice that any children are having particular problems with things, but sometimes it's better to have the conversation, rather than the teacher just..relying on a book for her to read later

I think assessment as well.. I think we're so rigid with our assessment of students –and just because they..he can't necessarily write it down, doesn't necessarily mean that he doesn't know it – so alternative ways of assessing, especially with you know ..our student..

Yeah... mmm..

That's a big..

What they can do rather than what they can't do..

Yeah..yeah..

Cause I find that a lot with some teachers ..theyre very .. erm you know they don't think that a student has done well enough, and had it a couple of times especially in English lesson there are quite a few students who are quite upset cause as far as they're concerned they've tried their best done to the best of their ability..the best that they could have done ..the teachers will say it s not good enough, but then they've redone it and it might be slightly better but not that much, and the teacher still said well that's not good enough you can do better.. and they're like well no I genuinely cant but I tried my best , erm so maybe their ability to understand what they can do rather than forcing them to do better because they think they can do better, and listening to the student who saying well no I have tried my hardest..its a bit demoralising for some of them aswell if they genuinely have tried xxand then they're told that's not good enough its...erm

You can see why it happens, because the teachers have targets to meet

Yeah

Yeah exactly

Yeah they've got that pressure on them

The students we work with they don't always fit in to to ..

No, No

And sometimes its about, you know, seeing what they can do andappreciating that, and doing more flexible work rather than having all that pressure..

We almost need like a parents evening with us and their teachers..

Yeah yeah with the TA teachers

Cause we go round with them all day every day, but you never get a chance to stop and talk..well sometimes we dowell stay later with the teacher or he'll try and grab us and ask how did that go..but ...

Yeah but...they don't have to have that level of .. they don't touch base with the children enough, not individually not..this ...nowhere near enough for them to realise the gap between the curriculum and a child...

Mmm

Which can be really vast

Yeah mm

The problem s I have at the moment is that I think my little boy is more intelligent than the teacher thinks he is, and she's trying to give him lower work or put him out onto the computers and I fought for 2 years to sort of keep him in the class, keep him doing.. you know ,what I think he can do, and erm she's sort of just.. and I find my communication with the teacher now is – I know she's sort of thinking she's annoying me, and I'm thinking you're really annoying me.. so we're at sort of loggerheads at the moment and erm yeah ..and I just think I need more communication with her...having got on really well with her .. with the last girl I went through with her so .. a bit of a battle at the moment

It's that you're fighting for your student you're fighting on behalf of them

I don't want him just to be shuttered out of the room erm you know, because he is a bright.. you know he has got it...he may not be the top bright boy but you know he's got something..

They're looking at the class and you're looking at the student its..how that..

I suppose in an ideal world..not a small change, but in an ideal world the staff would you know find out if he's in their class find out what problems they have and take advice from us you know..erm when you send an email saying could you make sure that the font is whatever size and that erm no copying off the board you know that's going to be done and that -not just the first few weeks..and then you know.. it lapses xxxx whatever– but actually that that's what needs to be put in place and that will continue..

I know the this teacher didn't even speak to the last teacher about him so ..

..And that really frustrating

Isn't it..but ..

I guess because they don't see the children, they're seeing different classes, different children in secondary, different year groups they're looking at the file and going right that's what we need to achieve that's the objective for this lesson I've got to push on through and get them through that .. and yeah, obviously we see the class and the child and every lesson every day, erm and it's trying to get that advice - it is advice, were trying to make it easier for them to teach these children and to teach these classes but..yeah..

Not only that they ...if they ...like you were saying with communication if .. if that teacher is not communicated about what's gone on before with that boy, it makes your work kind of go back doesn't it all the hard work you've put into it with the child to that point..it feels like I say it makes you feel like you're going backwards because they're misjudging their ability and thinking it's less rather than listening to you and finding out what kind of point they've got to ..and then giving them work that is lower than what they can do or higher than what they can do, whichever ways it goes..and then it's like all that hard work is going to waste really..

I know ..I know

It's not being used

And the other two teachers I worked with were really supported here , of me it was great and then suddenly to be put in this position for half a term with sort of, just feeling totally frustrated..

Mmm

..and I think when you are a teaching assistant,, you feel it's not your place almost to sort of question what the teacher does , but obviously when you've been with someone for 2 years and fought their cause you know you just want to help big time..

We had a differentiation workshop with staff didn't we, (mm) although not many came but the ones who came all dealt with the same class.. it was a (yes) year 8 class and we spent quite a lot of time talking through the sort of things that they could do with them in lesson, erm and certainly the English teacher was very aware that her syllabus really was going to go out the window because there's no point in following that with that year 8 class because it wasn't going to work, and it was finding different ways of presenting that syllabus..you know, other skills as well within the lesson..

...And actually giving them the confidence, to say well it's ok to take a step back, it's ok to do that because they will understand it..

So then I think that's something that needs to be addressed..a lot of the teachers are really good at doing that at looking a level and going well that the curriculums here but my class is here

Mm ...I'm not going to worry about..

Yeah ..were going to work something out. But it's when the teacher just looks at the curriculum and thinks right that's the learning goals that what we need to achieve and I'm just going to plough on through regardless of whether the kids are actually ..

..because then were spending a lot of time re-teaching what should have been taught the first time in the.. at the appropriate level for that child so there's ..yeah well I suppose there are gaps it how you then

It's easy to presume sometimes that the teachers always know what they're doing, and they need - they do need to be given the confidence as well sometimes, be given a pat on the back as well.. good work..

When you 've got as a TA, a great relationships with the teacher it's easy to do that isn't it (yeah)and you work with each other and praise each other and its lovely .. so ..erm this – it's all been a bit new to me this term

Yeah..

I'm just thinking about just this idea of small changes – what ..what would need to change do you feel?

Well I think I've got to have the confidence you know ..we need to sit down together and really talk about it. But when I have tried to talk about it it ..sort of well . we've had meetings with the head teacher and erm the TAs and the school listener ,and erm to sort of see how we can get it right, and they can't understand why they are losing him by lunchtime ..and in the afternoon he just acts up and I sort of said well he's not got any structure to his morning, and I've told her he needs structure, he needs this that and the other and erm.. she doesn't seem to be sort of listening, and I go back this term and - hoping that things have been happening and just one morning in...(laughter) ..so frustrating

We have our action plans for our students, and then ...the school, the teachers have their own set and it doesn't ever seem to cross - there never seems to be an action plan that's written between their TA and the teachers for that student, so that we know then..like or..by the end of this half term this is where I expect this child to be that's where you expect..and

A joint vision almost...rather than..

Yeah..

And you've both got equal.. instead of just being a TA that is there to just support them write the date you are recognised as somebody that is probablythe person pushing for them..

There is something about differentiation you feel Some teachers use us more than others.. you know but xxx.like xxx

But that's cause there is no structure to his class..no right or wrong

And its been flagged up before..thinking about using us more and integrating us more, and it doesn't always seem to be happening in every lesson at the minute. It's a shame really – like you say having a joint plan would make it clearer for everybody then, what was erm expected of that child..especially..I know we've gone through with the children their IEP targets ..but are they around the type of skills expected by the teachers? Probably...

Particularly in core subjects you can xx .I think it would be hard for secondary there are so many children, so many teachers..changes..

Its time..

Time..

Be almost impossible..

But again it would be seen... the teachers...the levels that the teachers wanted the children to achieve would be based on what they need to achieve, whereas perhaps the levels that we would set would maybe not be enough..

Would it be realistic to say that (he) will you know go up 2 levels in a year? (No) Probably not...But that might be the expectation

Yeah .. mm

And you know if he doesn't, is that the fault of us because we haven't pushed him on? Or is that the fault of the teacher? Or is that just because that's the way he isand does it matter?

Measuring the right things in terms of progress?

Exactly - his is what I mean in terms of the assessment progress..its not really geared to some of the students..(No)

Our targets are to.. to see a student concentrating or listening for a certain period of time and .like with IEPs.. if they can attain those targets then as far as we're concerned yes they've moved forward..

They've achieved...or if they can stay in school..or get to school in the morning ..

The target I've got for my child is to be able to work sociably in a group...and that's not really anything to do with levels...it's not going to get her – well it might get her a higher level cause she can work better -but its more of a social..

It's not so measurable..

No..erm

Although a lot of them can with the right encouragement,..they can progress, a lot of them can progress it's just knowing how to get them there..

And lots of those things are sort of further down the line, before they'd make the progression that you'd see on a formal tick chart, they need to have those other things

They need to have the basics.. yeah..

I guess it must be a bit daunting.. for some of them if they're being told there's a certain level to achieve..if they're not, you know, must be quite daunting if they're feeling that they are struggling a little bit..or they you know they probably constantly in classes where.. .. I've got to reach such and such a level.xxx.

In English it might be you need to write better..or write more, or write more descriptively .. but you've got to break it down this is what you can do, you know, when you write a sentence make sure you've got 3 adjectives in there, it's as simple as that because they can't think more ..(No)

We discussed amongst ourselves about having a ..a..nurture group for year 7s where they come in and you know the lower ability ones were in a separate unit for a certain amount of time maybe the first 6 weeks where all those organisational things and all the basics are really covered by maybe one teacher teaching all the core subjects and then at that point ..you know they're launched out..or not launched out if its deemed that they're not...

Because then the level thing wouldn't make so much difference

But it is something that's being constantly pushed, you know, to do this you have to reach this, by this..

And That comes back to the whole praise thing.. like I was saying that I look for things to praise because the teacher wont, because what they're looking at is this level that they need to achieve well some of them just the fact they haven't.. acted like an absolute idiot (laughter) for an hour is a massive achievement .

Yeah .. mm

.and just to say well done Im really impressed, whereas the teacher would never say that because they may not have got very much work done..but

As far as I'm concerned that's what they're expecting that's what's expected when you're doing that lesson

But for some children it's easier and for some it's not and that's why we're ..you know.

Well thank you all very much I just wondered if for the last 5 mins you just want to, I don't know, make a comment, or anything that it's made think about or made you consider.. or reflect on the process oferm yeah just something that you've reflected on or thought about or just a comment on how it's been coming to the sessions ..

Really interesting..writing down on paper all we actually do in a day..and thinking how do I manage all that? Yeah it's made me realise that it is really important what I do, and it makes a big difference to these children us being there for them and it also makes a big difference to the teachers I think. I mean my teacher's lovely she's always saying you know thank you very much couldn't do it without you, but I also realise how different it must be at secondary school level - really hard when you're going from different teachers classrooms different sorts of lessons.. it must be a far harder job..

Yeah..

But you've got to remember that the students are sometimes ready to move on they want to move they want to be out of primary school

You can see that in year 6 they are chomping at the bit

But yeah it's been really interesting ..to reflect on what we do..and how it helps

I think I felt, although we have focused on the negative side a bit really, you know I think we do enjoy it don't we..(laughter)

Well we've talked about the things we'd like to change

It's really enjoyable..

It's so rewarding...erm and emotional...and funny..

And I'd hate to think that we have painted the school in a particularly bad way (No No) actually I would think that comparing..

The school's fantastic..

Comparing the school with other schools maybe we.. we have got a lot of support..yeah

And you know the majority of the lessons and the teachers are fantastic...

It's just nice to think that although..

(it's just the frustrations)

that you've made a bit of a difference for those students..

It does..it will help them ..I don't think as much of them as being in school.. as much as later on..when they are going out to work...

yeah it's what you do with them

That was probably the hardest thing - trying to define the barrier of the TAs role.. because like you said communication would really help xx but it's an impossible scenario nobody has the time, the focus is just on the task and trying to.. yeah..

Actually ..what crossed my mind..It makes me realise that the children do appreciate you, is when I come here and see the kids that I used to help, and they're all pleased to see you and they..(Laughter) as your'e walking in you know..

It's like at Tescos hi miss at Tescos -..(laughter) yeah ..

It's like when I was out with my daughter, trick or treating I saw two of the kids from my class and they like lifted their masks up and like 'hi miss! (Laughter)

Yeah I mean... I sometimes get them ..kind of ..when they come into the lesson, I'm not in the classroom with them, and I'll say you know how's it gone this week and blah blahand they say oh well when I was in my English lesson and you know that thing that we did, I used that, I remembered that and I actually used it and it really helped - when they say things like that you know...(mm) that it's actually working, that s the sort of assessment isn't it, that's the tick in the box...and you know its actually worked..

Yeah...

When you walk in to the class and they go 'are you with us today miss? (laughter)..

Mmm

Great well thank you all very very much its very much appreciated.. share out the sweets equally...

Preparedness

I suppose in an ideal world the teacher would factor you in to that lesson..the worst things ever is to walk into the lesson and feeling you have to stay on that lesson, I suppose you can go to other students but xxx

2:39 being included by teacher in lesson planning

In an ideal world if you're not needed then actually you've done a good job, if your'e student doesn't need you then the teachers done a good job, you've done a good job..by not..

Deployment

I think in an ideal world the measure of a student's success should not necessarily be what they come out with at the end of year 11, the kind of students that we work with on a daily basis – the measure of their success is whether they've some of them, have managed to get up and get here and if were encouraging them to do that every day then we've been effective, if we're erm..making sure they get to each lesson with their pen then we're being effective.

2:40 alternative views of progress

2:40b alternative measures of T.A Success.

Its having the chance to justify that – we don't get the chance to justify why we are sat in the classroom..

2:41 status - not having contribution recognised

I think The best person to ask is the student they will tell you how it feels, they'll tell you if your, the TA s are effective.. they;; say she really helps me.. without her...

2:42 view of pupil regarding progress.

I think Some teachers.. with some of the students that we have here - the teachers themselves would say if there wasn't a TA in that lesson I don't know what I'd do..because I wouldn't know how to cope with that behaviour or that reaction or that...

2:43 view of teacher - relationship with teacher supporting - behaviour

Yeah - We had a particularly bad wednesday last week and erm and we had 3 TAs in the classroom, and the teacher and it was just horrendous, and each TA was having to deal with a separate issue, as well as the teacher and you think in that scenario, how - how would the teacher have dealt with that – it was end of the day they'd all had too much sugar, xxx it was just horrendous there's no way that one teacher could cope with all that all the

2:43 relationship with teacher

→ supporting - (with beh. management)

We're often in class on Weds Thurs Fri when there are there are the class and even then its hard work because there are such a lotuch a lot ofers in there with so many needs..you could almost do ith oneTith one TA per

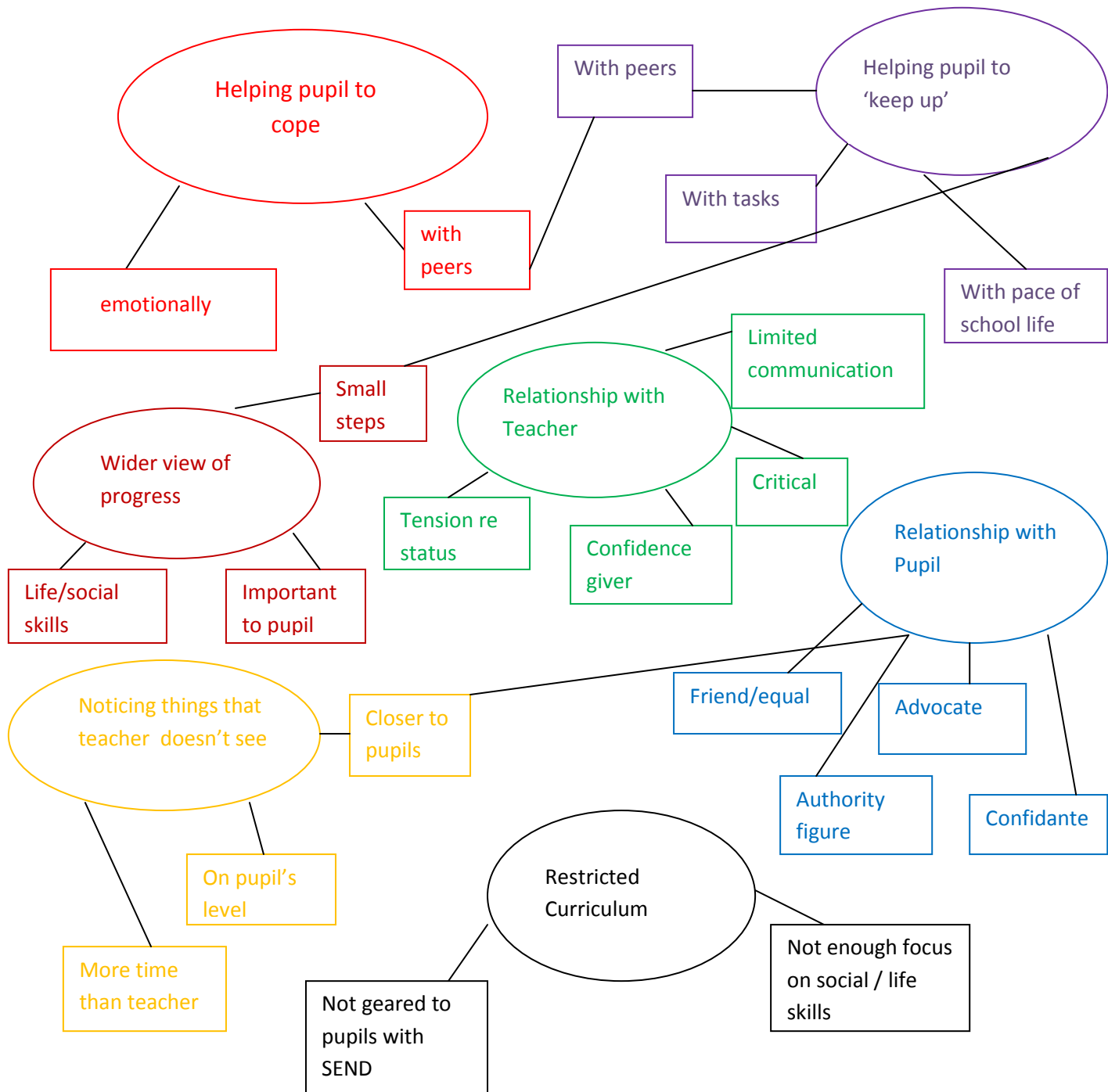
There's no way a teacher on their owntheir own would be able to that level of tension..and behaviour issues..xxsues..xx

2:44 supporting teacher with beh management

Its helpful having an extra adextra adult to help deal with ...

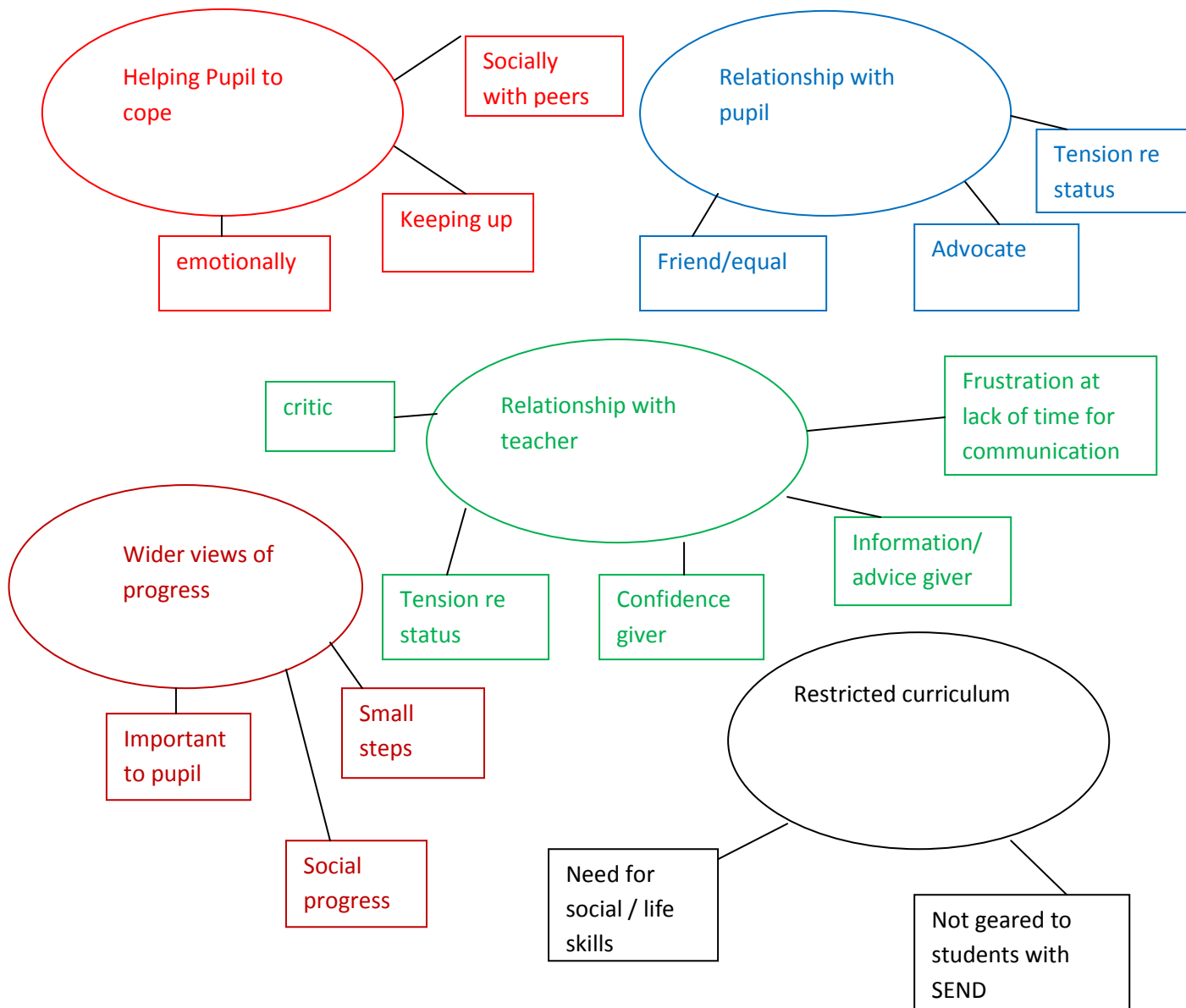
APPENDIX 8A

Initial thematic map showing 7 main themes from inductive analysis



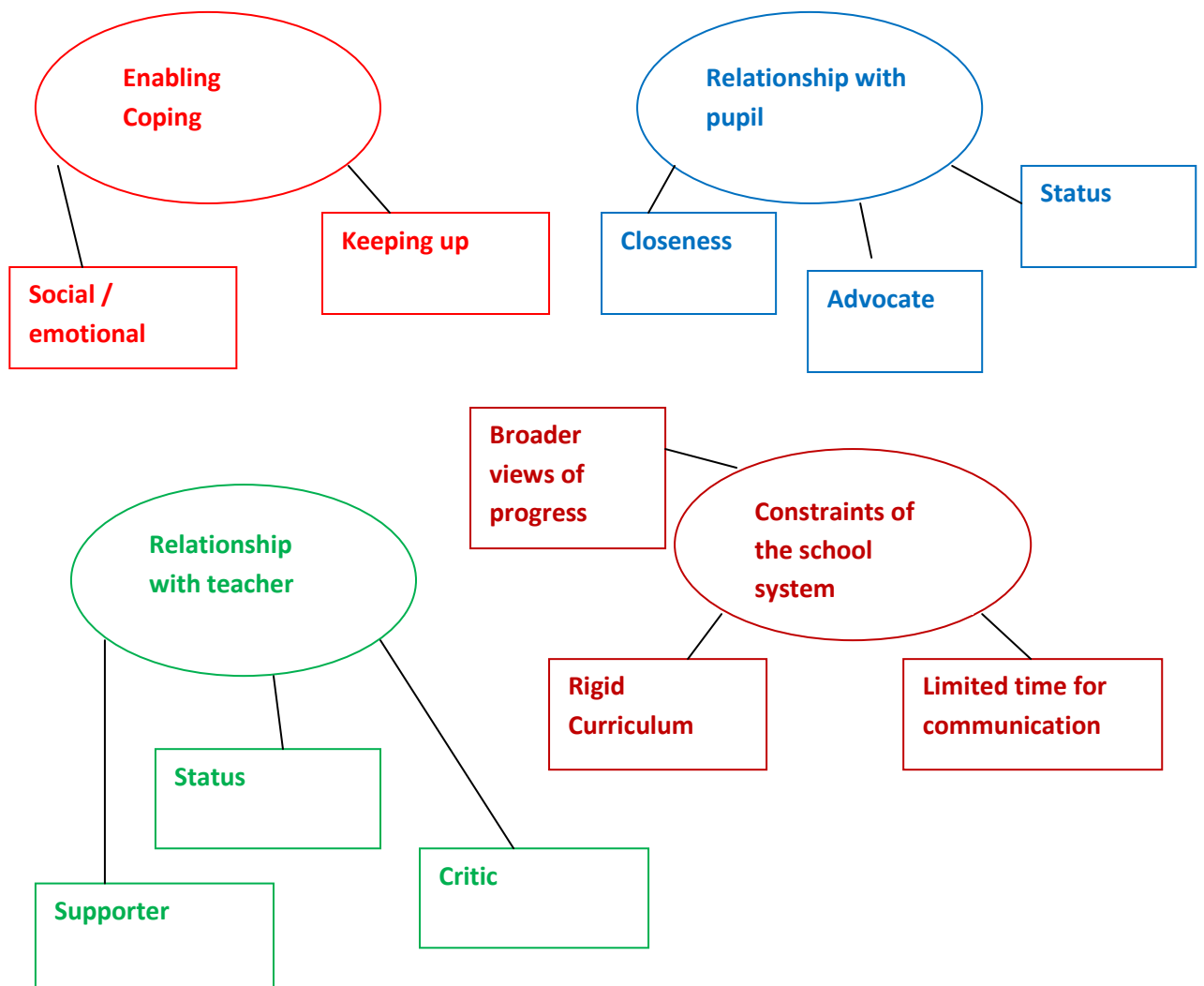
APPENDIX 8B

Developed thematic map showing 5 main themes from inductive analysis

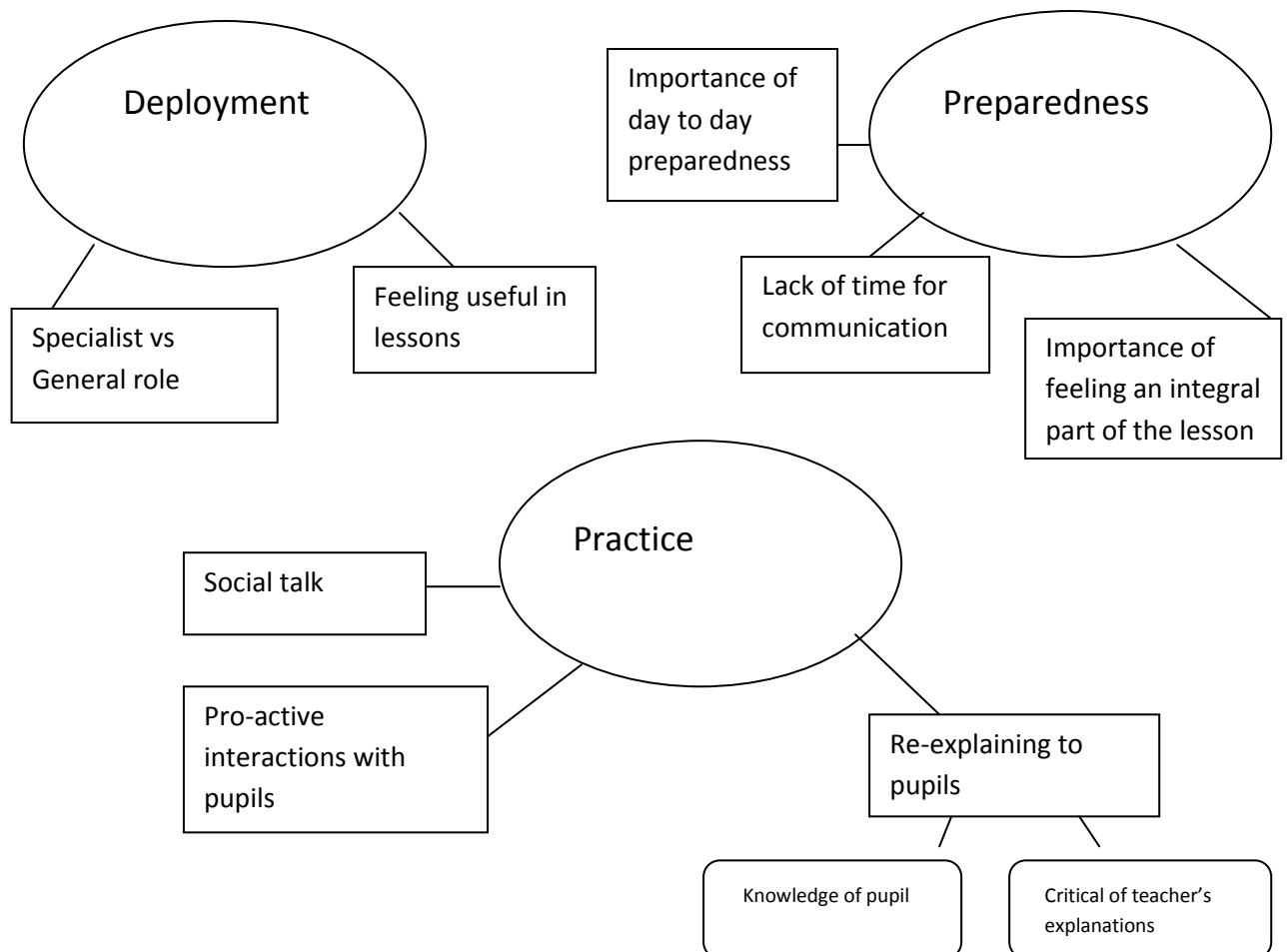


APPENDIX 8C

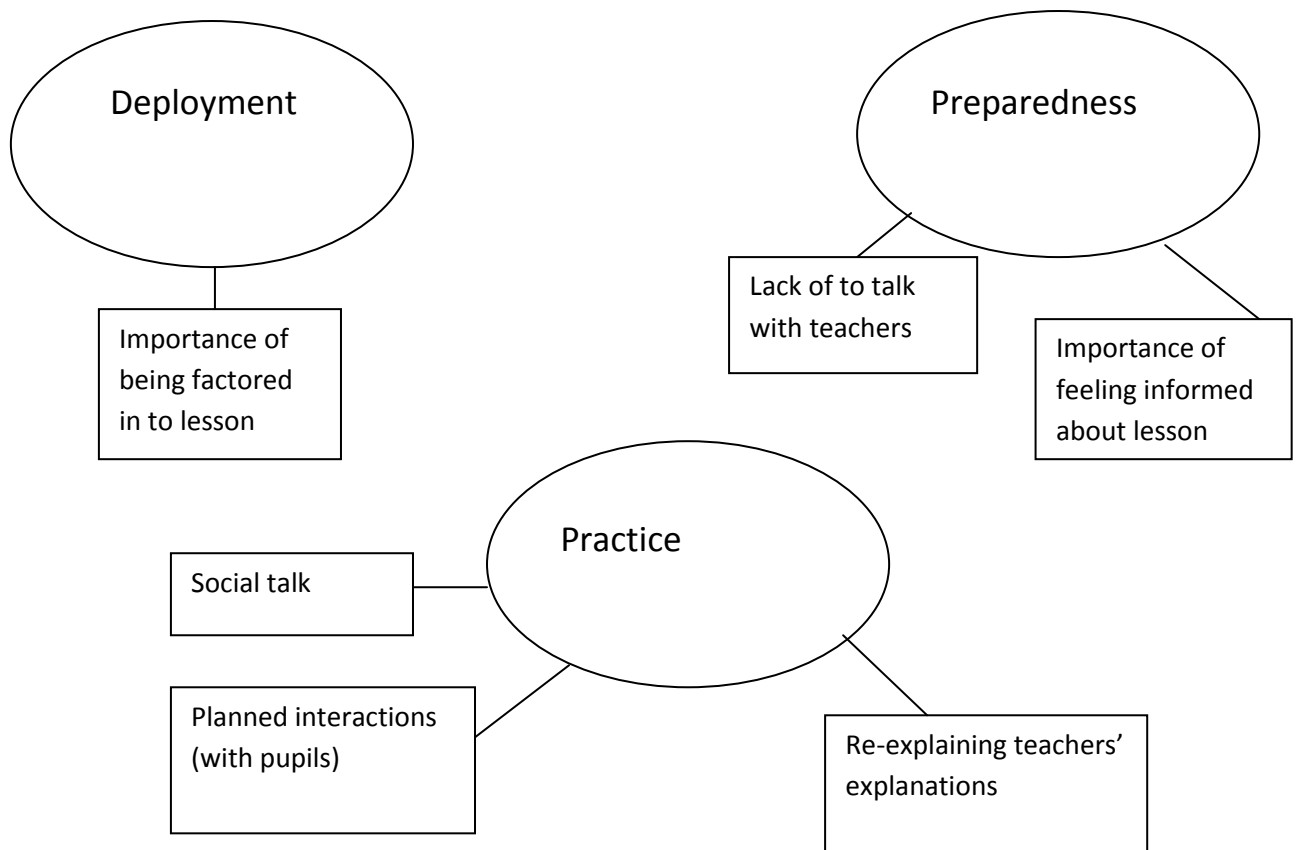
Final Thematic Map showing final 4 main themes and subthemes from inductive analysis.



Initial thematic map showing themes identified for *Deployment*, *Preparedness* and *Practice* from deductive analysis



Final thematic map showing themes identified for *Deployment*, *Preparedness* and *Practice* from deductive analysis



Data extracts Supporting Theme: Enabling Coping

Social emotional coping:

If the TA wasn't there to deal with that one particular student, to be able to take them out of the room, calm them down, talk to them, you know (1.a) *social emotional*

A lot of it is how to cope with the lessons he's in.....we'll discuss any issues he has in the classroom, and how we can resolve them, or how I can talk to the staff (3.aS) *social emotional*

She starts working herself up and gets into a panic, I think if she didn't have a TA with herShe would turn to me and like, immediately I can see in her face that she's panicking and she'll start to say what she's worried about (1.aS) *social emotional*

Once the frustration builds up that's going to be him gone for the rest of the lesson so because you're there with him recognizing that, which has been built up over time of working with him you see the small sign of when he's about to go(1.aP) *social emotional*

She's been able to relay that to me straight away rather than her sitting there stewing and getting more worked up and missing out on what she's supposed to be doing (1.a S) *social emotional*

She is incredibly vulnerable and if, you know she ..if she didn't have someone with her she would be an immediate target (1.aS) *social emotional*

He had huge learning difficulties linked to a medical condition erm and it was borderline whether he could actually cope in this school or not and you know why he was here, - but he did get through to year 11 the last 2 years he followed the full curriculum and he went to college two days a week he studied English he studied Macbeth and why shouldn't he? Why shouldn't he have the chance? (1.b) *social emotional*

Keeping up:

Cause they 100% wouldn't be able to cope in a mainstream school if they didn't have a TA (2.bS) *Keeping up*

When he was like last in class to leave the lesson, made sure everything was packed reasonably quickly so he could walk with the group, rather than pack his bags last and be 100 meters behind the rest of the class, so little things like that I think are really key for stepping into the secondary world (1.aS) *keeping up*

with copying from the board I always allow her to start, but she's so slow she'd get to the second line and that'll be it (2.b S) *keeping up*

Have to help them prioritise their learning in terms of what actually needs to go in, and what they shouldn't be worrying about, instead of worrying about spelling one word over an hour session that they're actually keeping up with the class (1.aP) *Keeping up*

I carry his books for him, get books in and out of his bag.. erm so its yeah he ..simply wouldn't be able to keep up with this sort of life, speedy secondary school life without a TA (1.aS) *Keeping Up*

She wouldn't be able to cope in mainstream secondary school unless she had a TA with her I don't think (1.aS) *Keeping up*

If he lost little bits of equipment – football boots ..and we found those boots because we looked as soon as he realized they were lost – those first step into school first 2 or 3 days are really important , so making sure he had what he needed very much guiding him around (1.aS) *keeping up*

It's just that reassurance and when he's lost out there, just to sort of point him in the right direction.. but after 2 weeks he doesn't need that (1.aS) *Keeping up*

Then he'd be late for lessons and that's almost destroying his ability to socially interact so then I will step in and help out so he can move along at the same time as his classmates (2.bS) *keeping up*

Unless she had someone next to her.. she cannot work independently (2.bS)

keeping up

Quite often I will do the writing for him and he'll be telling me what he wants written and then he feels a sense of achievement 'cause he's kept up with the rest of his group (3.aP) *keeping up*

Data supporting Theme: Relationship with the pupil

Closeness:

You build up a relationship and you learn about, you know, how to calm them down or pinpoint the reasons why they're getting like upset sometimes, nip things in the bud..its important xx its rewarding when you get that bond (1: bS) *closeness*

They trust you and are willing to share that information and then you get a bigger picture of what's going on at home as well, sometimes you know, the teacher has lots of students they don't necessarily have that..(1b) *closeness*

You know how they're going to react in different situations (1:aS) *closeness*

She's started to feel more confident with me and she'll actually open up about a lot of things that are going on in her life at home, (1: S) *closeness*

I said you've had a really fantastic lunchtime and he said 'can I have a cuddle?' (aahh) and I thought that was lovely' (1:bP) *closeness*

You're not their parent....sometimes you take on that role you know, you love them a bit (2:b) *closeness*

I tend to get too emotionally involved...you can't take every child home with you and solve all of their emotional problems you can only be there for them for the 6 hours you're at school with them (2.bP) *closeness*

Advocate:

I see myself in a protecting role, I am there as a sort of buffer between maybe the rest of the group and my student (1.aS) *advocate*

You know, the other students in the class and their understanding of certain, erm, disabilities, you do have to act like a buffer, make sure things aren't said out of turn and that they do truly understand the situation of other people (1.aS) *advocate*

It's that you're fighting for your student you're fighting on behalf of them, I don't want him just to be shuttered out of the room erm..you know because he is a bright..you know he has got it..he may not be the top bright boy but you know he's got something.. (3.bP) *advocate*

When you've been with someone for 2 years and fought their cause you know, you just want to help big time..(3.bP) *advocate*

Instead of just being the TA that is there to support them, write the date, you are recognized as somebody that is probably..the person pushing for them (3.bS) *advocate*

Status:

As they see us more as equal, they come to us a bit more..(2.bS) *status*

Also I think sometimes that they think of us...we're not the same as the teachers..we're sort of more on their level..yeah (1.aS)

status

He turned round and said well you're not a teacher you're more like a friend than a teacher and I thought that's quite a nice compliment , and then thought hmm is that a compliment? (laughter) You know it's like you said, they don't actually class you as a teacher or as a member of staff, you know they kind of see you as more on their side really..(1.aS) *status*

It's when they don't see you as a member of staff, it's a difficult position to be in as a TA because you don't want to be a teacher you want to keep that relationship equal but if they are being naughty they need to know they can't..in your presence they can't just continue (1.a) *status*

You're almost invisible sometimes you see a lot of interesting things..(2.bS)

status

As they see us more as equal they come to us a bit more..(2.bS) *status*

In some lessons we're actually part of the group, we're actually a team member

yes we actually work on a table with so many students and we're actually part of the team so if they have a quiz or something the teacher includes us...we obviously hold back and let the students give their answers ..and ..then..yeah..unless we get a bit competitive! (3.aS) *status*

I give him boundaries, which I don't think he has at home, the teacher, she's you know the nice guy and I'm you know, come on you have to sit and do this..(1.a) *status*

I think students will always try to push more when there are just TAs in the room..they do sillier things (2.b) *status*

But then..if...so maybe if I was stronger..and just went 'Uh No' or there's consequences...then it wouldn't happen as much (2.b) *status*

I think I need to be tougher I think sometimes..especially with the year 11's you know you get a little bit of banter (2.b) *status*

Data extracts supporting relationship with teacher

Critic:

a lot of the time the instruction is in their heads and they don't always fully transfer that to the children (3.a) *critic*

often when a student doesn't understand and asks the teacher, they just keep repeating the instruction xx or say listen more carefully...so they listen..but..its seeing things from a different perspective sometimes...especially dyslexic students – some of them think quite differently .. its knowing.. (3.a) *critic*

36.5 they (the pupil) don't have any choice they've got to be in there doing it but sometimes its delivered in such a dry way (3.a) *critic*

They don't really get a lot of praise from the teachers (3.a) *critic*

they don't have that level of..they don't touch base with the children enough, not individually, not...this...nowhere near enough for them to realize the gap between the curriculum and a child. (3.b) *critic*

The problem I have at the moment is that I think my little boy is more intelligent that the teacher thinks he is, and she's trying to give him lower work or put him out on to the computers (3.bP) *critic*

But it's when the teacher just looks at the curriculum and thinks right that's the learning goals, that's what we need to achieve and I'm just going to plough on through, regardless of where the kids are actually....(3.b) *critic*

we're spending a lot of time re-teaching what should have been taught the first time in the ... at the appropriate level for that child.. (3.b) *critic*

It's easy to presume sometimes that the teachers always know what they're doing (3.b) *critic*

The other two teachers I worked with were really supportive here, of me, it was great and then suddenly to be put in this position for a half term with just sort of feeling totally frustrated (3.b P) *critic*

Status:

The teachers knowing that you know your student, so if you say, you know, I really don't think this is going to work, you know, they respect your opinion and allow you to do what you think is best (1.a) *status*

I could be a bit more proactive in going in and ..talking to..tacking teachers on this..I don't know if it's because I'm its being a TA or what, there is a feeling that they're the teacher, ..I shouldn't really be dictating what, ..they tell me..there is an element of that .. I feel a bit scared sometimes (2.b) *status*

and I think when you are a teaching assistant , you feel it's not your place to sort of question what the teacher does (3b) *status*

I think I've got to have the confidence you know, we need to sit down together and really talk about it (3.b) *status*

..instead of just being a TA that is there to write the date you are recognized as somebody that is probably ..the person pushing for them (3.b) *status*

Supporter:

..he brought in some chocolates because of the work the TAs do xx he's a new teacher xxx he said thank you, because he teaches subject that's quite hard to teach and there's a lot of disruption so without the TAs in the room.. you know...(1.b) *supporter*

I think we could do with a section on supporting staff, supporting teachers because we really do support them as well (2.a) *supporter*

with some of the students we have here – the teachers themselves would say if there wasn't a TA in that lesson I don't know what I'd do..because I wouldn't know how to cope with that behaviour or that reaction or that...(2.b) *supporter*

each TA was having to deal with a separate issue, as well as the teacher and you think in that scenario, how – how would the teacher have dealt with that?

(2.b) *Supporter*

I guess it's like helping the teachers too, because they're not always aware

(3.b) *supporter*

we spent a lot of time talking through the sorts of things they could do with them in lessons, erm.. and certainly the English teacher was very aware that her syllabus really was going to go out of the window.. **(3.b) *supporter***

And actually giving them the confidence to say well it's ok to take a step back

(3. b) *supporter*

they do need to be given the confidence too sometimes, be given a pat on the back as well **(3.b) *supporter***

My teacher is lovely, she's always saying 'thank you very much couldn't do it without you' **(3.bP) *supporter***

Data extracts to support Constraints of school system

Alternative views of progress:

He circulated, he talked to people and that is- that for me was real achievement, seeing him so comfortable in that situation, (1.b S) *alt. views of progress*

Sand so we see progress in lots of different ways, not necessarily just you know a progression from 4.2 to 4.5 and for me, progress is a student that school- refuses and you know and is finding school life so difficult that they can't come to school -to them being comfortable to come to school and being happy in school, (1.b) *alt. views of progress*

another student who came in year 7 who was deemed to be so disruptive that he would never get through school and now he's in year 11, to me that's progress, that's what I think of when I think of progress, but then I guess that's because I don't do literacy interventions I don't do those type of interventions but to me it's just about you know the whole person rather than... (1.bS) *alt. views of progress*

'cause its not just about the work and that, it's about them having ..as a person, more confidence, emotionally, and like you said when you see that, when they're coming out of themselves and, you know, it makes them feel good about themselves – confidence, about what they have and when they're able to do something they didn't think they could do (1.b) *alt views of progress*

And for some of the students that's so much more important than whether they get a grade E in er, English GCSE (1.b.S) *alt views of progress*

I've seen lots of progress but sometimes he'll say 'yeah whatever' – you can see when *he's* really pleased – that 's when you know it's made a difference - when it helps him and he's moved on quite a big stage.. (1.b) *alt views of progress*

he's using writing now as a way of communication which he didn't before – that, to him, he's pleased with that, that's an achievement .. (1.b) *alternative views of progress*

In an ideal world the measure of a student's success should not necessarily be what they come out with at the end of year 11 the kind of students we work with on a daily basis – the measure of their success is whether they've, some of them, have managed to get up and get here and if we're encouraging them to do that every day then we've been effective.. (2.bS) *alt views of progress*

Our targets are to see a student concentrating or listening for a certain period of time, and like with IEPs..if they can attain those targets then as far as we're concerned yes they've moved forward (3.b) *alt views of progress*

They've achieved...or if they can stay in school or get to school in the morning (3.b) *alt views of progress*

The target I'm working on is for my child to be able to work socially in a group..and that's not really anything to do with levels..it's not going to get her – well it might get her a higher level because she can work better but it's more of a social... (3.b) *alt views of progress*

Some of them, just the fact they haven't acted like an absolute idiot for an hour is a massive achievement..(3.b) *alt views of progress*

And to say well done I'm really impressed, whereas the teacher would never say that because they may not have got much work done... (3.b P) *alt views of progress*

Rigid Curriculum:

We're restricted when we go into class because we've got to work to that curriculum (1.a) *rigid curriculum*

There's a lot that seems to be having to be covered isn't there due to the curriculum and it's just so fast it's a large range ...key stage..if you are sat at the bottom ..its a real struggle(1.a) *rigid curriculum*

There's so much to be crammed in because of the curriculum.. like you said there's so much to cram in to one lesson (2.b) *rigid curriculum*

If I could just say we'll do a whole day of life skills that would give her independence but I can't do that because she has to go to English xxx we are stuck with the constraints (2.b) *rigid curriculum*

Again, you've got students in a mainstream school who cannot cope with the curriculum that they're being given (2.b) *rigid curriculum*

The school has targets that have been set, always having to push push push all the time so the school keeps its standards.. (2.b) *rigid curriculum*

It's so difficult sometimes getting students out of lessons that aren't appropriate for them.. they'd be a lot better doing life skills or spending more time on a subject they really do need some help with...I'd be happy to spend time (3.b) *rigid curriculum*

I think we're so rigid with our assessment of students and just because they..he can't write it down , doesn't necessarily mean that he doesn't know it..so alternative ways of assessing especially with, you know, our student. (3.b) *rigid curriculum*

And sometimes its about , you know, seeing what they can do and ..appreciating that, and doing more flexible work rather than having all that pressure (3.b) *rigid curriculum*

They're (teachers) are looking at the file and going right that's what we need to achieve, that's the objective for the lesson, I've got to push on through and get them through that.. (3. b) *rigid curriculum*

Would it be realistic to say that he will you know go up 2 levels in a year? No probably not..but that might be the expectation (3.b) *rigid curriculum*

The assessment process..its not really geared to some students

3.116 b S But it is something that is being constantly pushed you know to do this, you have to reach this by this.. (3.b) *rigid curriculum*

Limited Time for Communication:

I think the problem is time restraints ..you talk about time for planning but when would that happen? (2.b) *Limited Time for Communication*

If you're going to give TAs and teachers more time then the TAs have got to be paid (2.b) *Limited Time for Communication*

communication time cause time is a big issue, you've been given the plan for the week and then you sort of have 5 minutes to read that on Monday morning and then you go in to your work with him (3.bP) *Limited Time for Communication*

of you had a bit more time to communicate with the teacher about what's going on, you'd be..have more confidence that you are teaching it exactly how she wants it (3.bP) *Limited Time for Communication*

even if its like 5 minutes in the lesson ...even if you said when you've got them set up but you know they can do the date or whatever on the board, left them to do that and we had a few minutes..because the amount of help you'd be able to give them in that hour lesson would completely outweigh him losing..the teacher losing 5 minutes (3.b) *Limited Time for Communication*

We almost need like a parents evening - with us and the teachers! (3.bS)
Limited Time for Communication

You never get a chance to stop and talk..well sometimes we do..we'll stay later with the teacher or he'll try and grab us and ask how did that go..but...(3.c)
Limited Time for Communication

communication would really help xx but its an impossible scenario, nobody has the time (3.cS) *Limited Time for Communication*

Data extracts supporting Deployment

Importance of being factored in:

In an ideal world the teacher would factor you in to that lesson...the worst thing ever is to walk into the lesson and feeling you have to stay in that lesson, I suppose you can go to other students..but..(2.b) *importance of being factored in*

Not going to mention the subject, but last week I was in...only way she could do progress reports was to see the students in the classroom doing that xx So I was going round keeping them occupied ..dealing with hands up xx so that was an obvious way of the TA being used in a good way – but is it the right way? (2.b) *importance of being factored in*

Sometimes when you're wondering round, the teacher is catching up with stuff or what's happening next (2.b) *Limited Time for Communication*

Handing things out while the teacher is explaining or, you know, getting resources out getting things ready in time for the task..little things like that...it would take a long time for the teacher to do it all (2.b) *importance of being factored in*

Things like scribing that we mentioned earlier, it could be done differently xx you know – must be electronic..must be other ways of doing it..(2.b) *importance of being factored in*

That's when you come round to do you have a subject TA or do you have a TA for each student? (2.b) *importance of being factored in*

Yes we actually work on a table with so many students and we're actually part of the team , so if they have a quiz or something then the teacher includes us (3.a) *importance of being factored in*

I know I'm there for one person, but I take on a lot of them some of them are quite happy to have that but sometimes...(3.a) *importance of being factored in*

The thing is, the others in the class don't mind, it's quite odd really they get used to you being there and when you're not there they say 'why weren't you with us today?' (3.a) *importance of being factored in*

It's the way the teacher involves you as well, in the class so sometimes, you know, sometimes the teacher will actively say 'oh yes Mrs x is here to help so you can ask her' and then that sort of opens it up for anybody who wants to have help then..they (the pupil) don't feel bad about you going over , because it's been said to the whole class *importance of being factored in*

I've been usually with the same class for..last time it was 4 years..I've been with this class this is my 3rd year with them, so you get to know them so well they do come up to you very happily to ask, you know even the bright ones..if I get a moment when I can leave my boy's side ..I just go round to...check everybody, they know I'm approachable (1.b) *importance of being factored in*

The teachers in RE that we do, he actually started designing his lessons so that he can split the group between the 3 TA s that are in there, and then he does group work and we lead the group work, and then he will go round and check that everything's been covered, and the kids really enjoy it, they get to sit on a group with one of us.. we've done role playing and we've done all sorts of different things yeah its worked really well, surprisingly well actually ...it's a difficult class to teach..So he's really embraced the TAs, and I mean he gives us what needs to be taught in that lesson, what we'll be doing xxx and then he'll go round the groups as well.....yeah (3.a) *importance of being factored in*

We covered Art didn't we – because we've been in all..for all of the art lessons and the teacher was going to be off...she was like we've got cover but because you two actually know what we've been doing, do you mind doing the introduction and a demo?And now I feel much more integrated, I don't know about you, in that art group, a lot more of them are coming up to me and going miss what do you think about this? (3.a) *importance of being factored in*

and its been flagged up before ..thinking about using us more and integrating us more, it doesn't always seem to be happening in every lesson at the minute... (3.b) *importance of being factored in*

We had a differentiation workshop with staff didn't we, although not many came but the ones who came all dealt with the same class..it was a year 8 class

and we spent quite a lot of time talking through the sort of things that they could do with them in that lesson..(3.b) *importance of being factored in*

Data extracts to support Practice

Planned Interactions:

Help them to prioritise their learning in terms of what actually needs to go in and what they shouldn't be worrying about – instead of worrying about spelling one word over an hour session.. (1.a) *planned interactions*

I kept a progress book and was able to sit down with her and actually show her -and to actually show her the work that she'd done (1.a) *planned interactions*

He got 1 out of 10, and we had a maths session after and he just took it so personally he had a real issue he thought he couldn't learn...and we've been going through it week on week – mainly it's just rushing, he's a bright boy..

I watch him quite closely in the lesson to see what areas he's missing, I'll then go back and look at the key stage levels, what he needs to know, what his knowledge base has to be in order for him to meet the next target and that's what I teach him in his 1:1, so it's quite target based but it's driven by what I can see he doesn't understand (1.a) *planned interactions*

She was panicking 'cause she's got a test tomorrow and I showed her how to read a section, highlight some key words and write that down in a notebook, and then test herself a little bit..she found that really effective, rather than just reading and reading and reading it and getting into a flap because she couldn't memorise it *planned interactions*

Rather than..you know, the way the teacher might have explained something, they might not necessarily understand the way they explained it, if that makes sense, so you word it..explain it in a way that they understand (1.a) *Re-explaining teachers' explanations*

Give her more confidence to do the task because it's been explained to her properly (1.a) *Re-explaining teachers' explanations*

Sometimes they don't understand what the teacher is saying, so we have to redo an entire lesson..re-word it (2.a) *Re-explaining teachers' explanations*

But the teacher isn't always able to do that in the class..and finding different ways of presenting the task or the information in a different way that they will understand..and it's knowing your student...what will work *Re-explaining teachers' explanations*

He just couldn't understand the whole idea of a metaphor and I had to break it down..every single bit...until he understood - oh ok actually a cushion is soft and fluffy and sits on a sofa..right..so why is he saying this about ..likening that to a cat? ..well a cat can be soft and fluffy and sits on a sofa..so its really breaking down every little piece..so...its doing the teacher's job but at a much deeper level..(3.a) *Re-explaining teachers' explanations*

Like you say, it just takes a re-wording of the question for them so they understand it (3.a) *Re-explaining teachers' explanations*

He hasn't understood it at all, so it's essential to catch him before he starts

(3.a) *Re-explaining teachers' explanations*

And it was just simply saying to them how many 2s will get you to 18? And then they could do it on their hands it's just literally just rewording what they're asking and like oh that's so simple! **(3.a) *Re-explaining teachers' explanations***

Social Talk:

I'm you know come on you have to sit and do this and by the end of the session you know he's actually done something really good I mean it's hard to get him to sit there and make him do it and I say look you've done the work...**(1.a) *social talk***

..tends to do what she wants rather than listening to the group she was selecting the squares that she wants..to trying to get her to listen to other people's opinions....even if she doesn't agree with them you know to just to try and compromise a little bit, to listen to what they're saying **(1.a) *social talk***

So basically sort of giving him that time to just well have a chat...talk about what's..just sort of 5 minutes and then its bringing him back on task again so that he's had like a bit of a rest **(1.b) *social talk***

Trying to get her to remain focused on the task that she's doing but letting her know she can have like a reward..xx where she can chat and discuss whatever she likes.. **(1.b) *social talk***

So I would try to encourage him to put his hand up a bit higher and when after a couple of days eventually he got picked out to answer a question (1.b) *social talk*

I said you've had a fantastic lunchtime (1.b) *social talk*

Probably difficult for a teacher to go round 25 different children and show an interest in every page, whereas I could spend the time doing that and that helped to build.. building on the relationship with each child, not necessarily the one I'm supporting but with the others in the class (1.b) *social talk*

And then say that's fantastic perhaps you could do one more line for me that would be brilliant – the more you praise him the more you can get out of him (3.a) *social talk*

That's the time we have our little 5 minute chat and then I have to slyly bring him back..come on let's just do a little bit more and then he comes back again but he just needs that time out ..just to have a chat (3.a) *social talk*

In primary she'd be the same and we used like a sand timer to say we've got this amount of time to do work, erm..see how much we can get done, work for that amount of time and then when that's finished we'll have a little chat and then start again..turn it over (3.a) *social talk*

Data extracts to support Preparedness

Lack of time to talk with teachers:

I think the problem is time restraints..you talk about time for planning but when would that happen? (2.b) *Lack of time to talk with teachers*

Any preparation I do is in my own time and it's..I do a lot at home in the evenings *Lack of time to talk with teachers*

Communication time ...Cause time is a big issue If you had a bit more time to communicate with the teacher about what's going on (3.b) *Lack of time to talk with teachers*

You never get a chance to stop and talk..well sometimes we'll stay later with the teacher or he'll try and grab us and ask how did that go.. (3.b) *Lack of time to talk with teachers*

Communication would really help xx but its an impossible scenario nobody has the time...the focus is just on the task and trying to..yeah (3.b) *Lack of time to talk with teachers*

Importance of being informed about lesson:

Sometimes it's a case of pre-teach – you have the plans for the next day and in the afternoon take the child out, so that you can pre-teach to a certain extent the lesson that he's going to be in..so he can stay in the lesson cause he's had a head start on what's coming – he can take part, he can put his hand up..(2.a)

Importance of being informed about lesson

It would be nice to have a bit more information about the lesson..xx know more what's going to happen in the lesson..some teachers still think that..you tend to feel you go into a lesson blind, you know the student, but you go in and you don't know what the actual lesson is.. (2.a) *Importance of being informed about lesson*

I think ..we'd be more involved in lesson planning.. (2.a) *Importance of being informed about lesson*

I felt that extra content about the lesson could have been given a bit more.. (2.a)

Importance of being informed about lesson

The thing is you almost have to be experts in every single subject (2.a)

Importance of being informed about lesson

People say don't you get bored, doing the same things but no, you don't 'cause that is the beauty of knowing the curriculum (2.a) *Importance of being informed about lesson*

If we don't have a plan of what's going on in the lesson we need to listen to the task as well..like you said it doesn't look good...(2.a) *Importance of being informed about lesson*

2a.49 I've gone to a lesson where if I'd known what the teacher was trying to get to at the end of the lesson then I could have helped them so much earlier and you get to the end of the lesson and you go oh that's what you were trying to do! (2.a) *Importance of being informed about lesson*

We should know exactly what's going on in the lesson

He's really embraced the TAs and I mean he gives us what needs to be taught in the lesson, what we'll be doing..(3.a) *Importance of being informed about lesson*

A bit of time explaining 5 minutes at the beginning of the class, spending a bit of time explaining to TAs – 'cause we're such a valuable resource ..that without that..(3.b) *Importance of being informed about lesson*

Sometimes children in another group will be doing slightly different work and they'll put their hand up and you don't want to ignore them, so - and he's up and running - and so you go over to see them....What am I supposed to be doing at this point – well I don't actually know because I haven't had the chance to find that out – so at that point you're not a lot of help to them
Importance of being informed about lesson

If they'd just thought about that in their planning, or they'd let me know in advance things I can do, so maybe make plans..(3.b) *Importance of being informed about lesson*