

Teachers and Teaching Assistants Working  
Together:  
The Perceptions of Teaching Assistants Within  
a National Framework.

By

Maureen Nash

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## Abstract

This qualitative research study explores Teaching Assistants' perceptions of their work within mainstream primary schools, reflected in the substantive research question:

Working within a national framework – what are teaching assistants perceptions of their working lives?

The voices of the TAs themselves are privileged within a field of study where research is mainly undertaken from the viewpoint of the researcher or other stakeholders in schools. This research is set within the context of national frameworks and the discourses surrounding the work of teaching assistants.

Whilst this study seeks to read the world in a post-structural manner, it is set within the everyday life of schools alongside the contingencies and national frameworks surrounding it and a critical methodological approach is used. Interviews providing qualitative data are the chosen method for providing an opportunity for TAs to describe their experiences and voice their perceptions, and the study deploys a thematic analysis of this data.

Three dominant themes emerge, National Frameworks, Interactions with Parents and Children, and School Environment. The study suggests that both commission and omissions of national policy affect the work of a teaching assistant and that the implementation of these policies presents complex relations of professionalism, identity and positioning in schools.

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### List of Abbreviations

DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DFE	Department for Education
DFEE	Department for Education and Employment
DFES	Department for Education and Skills
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching Assistant
INSET	In-Service Training Day
NNEB	National Nursery Examination Board
NUT	National Union of Teachers
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
SDP	School Development Plan
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SSSNB	School Support Staff Negotiating Body
TA	Teaching Assistant
TDA	Training and Development Agency

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## Preface

Remodelling the roles, responsibilities and working practices of all school staff has been central to the government's modernisation agenda for English state schools and the last twenty years have seen a significant change in a fundamental restructuring of the school workforce (Watson et al., 2013). This workforce has been widened to include many different roles working directly supporting teaching and learning including roles of teaching assistants, along with those supporting teaching and learning more indirectly such as those involved in pupil welfare, other pupil support, facilities, administrative, site staff and technicians (Blatchford et al., 2009). Beeson, Kerry and Kerry (2003: 3) provide a definition of these support staff:

The fundamental role of support personnel is to support learning. Anyone in a school who is not a qualified teacher but who supports learning as part or whole of their role is therefore a member of the support staff and of the total learning resource of the school. In practice, such staff can be paid or unpaid, full-time or part-time, professionally qualified or not professionally qualified.

This study has a focus on staff paid to work to directly support the teaching and learning of children in primary schools in England, and who over the years have been given different titles such as 'Classroom Assistants' or 'Non-Teaching Assistants' (Balshaw & Farrell, 2002). I suggest that these titles imply that they are an aide to a specific teacher and that their contribution to teaching children and supporting their learning is negligible. I will refer to this group as Teaching Assistants (TAs) throughout this study, not only because it is the government's preferred term for 'those with a general role and others with specific responsibilities for a child, subject area or age group' (Department for Education & Skills, 2000: 4), but also because the term TA is in common usage.

## **Chapter 1**

### **An Introduction To The Research Question**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

“She treats me like a lesser being”. This comment was made by Jean, a TA in a primary school, taking part in an informal discussion with other TAs during a training session I was facilitating for TAs in 2010. Jean was talking about her relationship with the primary school teacher she worked with in the classroom and some, but not all of the other TAs in the room nodded in seemingly empathetic agreement. My initial reaction was one of concern that a TA could be treated with disrespect within what seemed to be such a hierarchical relationship. I wanted to explore this further, so this comment was a pivotal moment in my decision to carry out a study of teachers and TAs working together in the classroom.

This chapter explores the wider context within which these words were spoken, by providing a concise exploration of both my own professional history and an overview of the development of the TA role through national policy and legislation. These then provide a backdrop that showed how initial discussion with TAs, and reading the work of Stephen Ball suggested that was likely to be a complex story. The chapter ends with a clarification of the aims of this project.

#### **1.2 My Own Personal and Professional History**

I qualified as a teacher in 1975, working in various Lancashire primary schools and first worked with TAs from the mid-1990s. These TAs were parents of children who attended the school where I taught and like them I returned to work following a period of being a full-time mother. I had empathy with these TAs who wanted work that fitted in with school life, providing both greater financial security and personal development. Some of these colleagues had started as volunteers following attendance at courses that I had facilitated in school for parents, with the aim of increasing their involvement with their children’s learning and well-being (Bastiani & Wolfendale, 1996). Through this involvement they were appointed as TAs and as Special Needs Coordinator (SENCo), I was their line manager because they were supporting children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). I became their mentor both officially when they undertook qualifications and through working closely

together to provide intervention programmes, and also unofficially because I became their personal and professional supporter on a day-to-day basis. My interest in the work of TAs was born.

In 2000 I was appointed Teacher Adviser for Parental Involvement in Lancashire. Our Parental Involvement Team developed courses and projects for parents across Lancashire to help them support their children's learning and we found that the parents were also keen to develop their own learning. During this time schools seemed to follow the idea we nicknamed 'grow your own TAs', with anecdotal evidence suggesting that many of the parents who took an interest in our courses became volunteers and then were subsequently appointed as TAs. As a member of this team I was proud that we opened up opportunities of work for parents, just as I had done in my own school.

However, in 2003, the work of our team began to change. A wave of educational restructuring began where 'the common objective is to reconfigure teachers' work and remuneration to create a new division of labour within the pedagogical process' (Stevenson, 2007: 225) through the remodelling agenda linked with Raising Standards and Tackling Workload: A National Agreement (Department for Education and Skills, DfES, 2003). Our Parental Involvement Team was renamed the School Workforce Development Team and was given a remit of training a range of support staff and supporting the re-modelling process primarily through funding from the government's Training and Development Agency (TDA). In hindsight, perhaps we were chosen because of our work with parents, reflecting a view that TAs were employed in schools as an interpretation of the idea promoted in 1993 by the Conservative government of John Major of a 'mums' army' (Curtis, 2003). Over time, I became the lead within the team for developing and delivering non-accredited training for primary TAs across Lancashire and liaising with colleges and universities for signposting to qualifications. In 2010, the Labour government was replaced by a Conservative-led Coalition government with its own set of legislation and policies including the 2011 Education Act which dissolved the TDA's function of TA training. The work of our team was unsustainable without central funding, resulting in no training for TAs being run through our local authority. This led to the vast reduction of the School Workforce Team leading me to take voluntary redundancy, so I am currently working as an Educational Consultant which still involves running courses for TAs, but for a private company rather than a Local Authority.

My interest in the work of TAs in mainstream primary schools has therefore been embedded in my life over a span of more than twenty years and I had also experienced first-hand how national policy can affect the working lives of individuals. There was therefore a personal and professional agenda in researching the working lives of TAs within national frameworks.

### **1.3 Teaching Assistants and National Frameworks**

Through my personal and professional life I had witnessed the rise in the numbers of TAs in schools, which has been well documented (Farrell et al., 2010). In 1997 there were 24,000 full-time equivalent TAs working in mainstream schools (Department for Education & Employment, DfEE, 1997), by 2010 there were 190,400 TAs in schools (Department for Children, Schools and Families, DCSF, 2010) and by 2011 32 per cent of the nursery and primary school workforce was comprised of TAs (Blatchford et al., 2012). This growth has therefore been rapid and relatively recent.

The previous section explained that my role changed as the remodelling agenda and National Agreement (2003) began to be implemented in schools and this section explores an account of earlier policies and legislation that are particularly relevant to the rise in numbers of support staff to provide a context for this study. This will lead up to the National Agreement which will be explored further in Chapter 2, the Literature Review. These historical events can then, 'piece together to help us understand circumstances and policy contexts of the context of the study' (Clough & Nutbrown, 2010). This is a chronological account, but there is no intention of suggesting the development of TAs is a straightforward story. I accept that whilst policy and legislation form part of the picture there are complex narratives surrounding restructuring (Gunter, 2008), but this account provides a useful tool to further understanding of the background to the work of TAs. This section therefore has the aim of exploring the wider political and educational emphases (Burgess, 2008); following Ball (2009) who suggests that many single focus studies which attempt to explore the impact of practice of one policy neglect the general picture.

The work of TAs and their increase in numbers is relatively new. The National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) established the profession of Nursery Nurses in 1945 to support young children under 5 years of age in schools and nurseries. Despite this, it was

documented over 20 years later in the Plowden Report (1967) that only 22% of schools had any assistants to assist teachers in caring for the needs of young children, though it did consider that the role of these extra staff was limited:

There is no reason why they should not prepare materials for art and craft, look after plants and animals, help with displays and exhibitions and record school broadcasts (Plowden, 1967: 329).

The Plowden Report (1967) envisaged that TAs would provide help of a practical, creative or sporting nature – in effect they would provide the teacher with an extra pair of hands. This expectation continued through the 1970s, for example with Kennedy and Duthie (1975) recommending that TAs should not plan activities, organise or manage classrooms and their role should be restricted to encouraging students and helping when they had difficulty. Kolvin et al. (1981) described the TA as a 'domestic helper', but the need for additional support in the classroom particularly began to grow from the 1980s. It has been argued that as TA numbers have increased, so the role has had a rapid transformation:

...from one of classroom helper – assisting the teacher in general classroom organisation – to one that is more specifically directed to supporting the teaching and learning process (Groom, 2006: 199).

Literature suggests that there were two main causes in the increase of TAs, the use of TAs within the policy of inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, plus concerns over teacher workload and teacher retention (Blatchford et al., 2012). The Warnock Report (Department Education & Science, DES, 1978) and the subsequent Education Acts 1981, 1993 and 1996 began and developed national recognition of the role of assistants in the classroom to support pupils with SEN, to assist with meeting the different abilities of individuals and groups (O'Brien & Garner, 2001). The introduction of Local Management of Schools meant that funding went directly to schools, including funding for statemented pupils, which facilitated the employment of TAs to provide Special Educational Needs support (Swann & Loxley, 1998). This supported the idea that TAs should be employed to help statemented pupils and that those children in mainstream schools who did not require a Statement should also have their needs formally recognised, met and regularly reviewed. Between 1991 and 2000 the balance of pupils with a statement between mainstream and

special schools shifted dramatically so in 2000 the proportion of pupils identified as SEN (with or without a statement) was 16.6 per cent and by 2010 this was 21.6 per cent (Blatchford et al., 2012).

In addition to the policy of inclusion, a succession of centrally driven major curriculum reforms was introduced to support the government's agenda of raising standards that would have a major impact on the school workforce. The Education Reform Act 1988 introduced the National Curriculum and the breadth of curriculum activity that teachers had to undertake led to an increased workload and associated stress for teachers, as reported by PriceWaterhouseCooper (2001). Blatchford et al. (2012) report that TAs have been deployed in curriculum strategies, so they were increasingly used to support the curriculum in more direct ways (Watkinson, 2003). TAs were evolving from doing largely ancillary work to providing direct teaching under the guidance of a teacher. The DfES produced the Good Practice Guide (DfES, 2000: 1) which began by saying research and inspection findings, 'confirmed the tremendous contribution that well trained and well managed teaching assistants can make in driving up standards in schools'. Additionally, two sets of training materials for newly appointed TAs in primary and secondary schools (DfES, 2000b, 2001) were published and it was these that our School Workforce Development Team implemented in Lancashire. These comprised of four day training as an induction into the role. The Education Act 2004 set in train the national policy of Every Child Matters: change for children (2003), which suggested there is an important relationship between educational achievement and well-being. This paved the way for the development of extended schools where there would be access to and liaison with external services, such as social services and health care and the possibility of other child care initiatives such as widening before and after school activities (Groom, 2006; Burgess, 2008). Although TAs were not obliged to be involved in these extended activities, many saw this as an opportunity for extending their skills and experience (Groom, 2006) and in many cases has seen an extension of TAs contracted hours.

The National Agreement (2003) greatly increased the expectations from TAs with the core of the Agreement being, 'the increased use of staff who are not qualified teachers to work in a range of teaching and teaching support roles' (Stevenson, 2007: 225). It was introduced in three phases and implemented changes to teachers' conditions of service. In phase one,

introduced in September 2003, administrative and clerical tasks were removed from teachers with the intention of improving their work-life balance. In addition a time allowance was introduced for all teachers with management responsibilities. Phase two, a year later, limited the time any teacher could be asked to cover classes for absent colleagues. Phase three in September 2005, brought in Planning and Preparation and Assessment Time (PPA) for all teaching staff to be taken during the school day. In addition invigilation of exams was removed as a responsibility for teachers and dedicated headship time was introduced.

Stevenson (2007) suggests that pivotal to the agreement were changes that allowed support staff to undertake a range of teaching duties, including taking whole classes, though this was expected to be carried out in special circumstance by Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs), under the direction of a qualified teacher. However, this concern about teaching of whole classes by TAs led to the National Union of Teachers (NUT) not signing this National Agreement. It considered it undermined the years of work by unions to achieve an all-graduate status for the teaching profession because they considered that it would legitimise the employment of unqualified persons to teach whole classes (McAvoy, 2003). This questioning by the NUT was the first doubt, or niggle, in my mind that the work of TAs could be seen as anything else than a good thing. As a member of the NUT I felt I should take their concerns seriously, but my role as Teacher Adviser was to promote the use of TAs in schools. I began to feel confused about what this increased role of the TA would mean to the practice of TAs and teachers in schools.

#### **1.4 Delving Deeper into Policy**

I was beginning to feel confused about the role of TAs, despite having extensive experience and interest in their work. I had also found the comment, 'She makes me feel like a lesser being', very unsettling. I had an itch in my head that I wanted to scratch because I had a dawning realisation that the development of TAs was not as straightforward as simply being a response to a set of legislation that I had thought of as being for the common good of children, teachers and this relatively new group of TAs. During my years of teaching in the classroom and then working as Teacher Adviser both myself and my colleagues accepted policies and changes at face value, embracing the development of TAs. My role as Teacher



Adviser was funded by the government to enact and promote this legislation and policy so looking back over the years of policy change, I was very aware that the government had great influence over the developing role of the TA and that government policy could change. I also found differences between schools and staff in Lancashire in how the policies regarding remodelling and TAs were enacted in practice.

Reading the work of Stephen Ball was particularly useful in making sense of things. Stephen Ball has been at the forefront of the field of educational policy analysis and theory for many years and his work resonated with my initial ideas because he suggests that any theory of education policy must attend to the workings of the state, but should not be limited to this state perspective. Ball (1994) suggests that policy is what is enacted as well as what is intended – control can never be totally secured because it will be open to erosion and undercutting by the action, embodied agency of the people who are its object. In other words, there are concerns, demands, pressures and relationships within practices and it is this key idea that underpins my whole research project. Ball conceptualises policy in two different ways that he calls policy as text and policy as discourse and I suggest this is a helpful notion in providing an insight and understanding of the policies surrounding TAs.

Ball suggests that the text of policies does not normally tell you what to do, but instead they create circumstances giving a range of options or particular goals or outcomes. I had personal experience of this when I was the main contributor to writing Lancashire's Workforce Strategy for Practitioners Working with Parents because whilst it contained ideals, aims and general guidance, it had no clear additional guidance on how these could be achieved. A response to policy therefore needs to be put together, constructed in context and Ball suggests that whilst textual policy can bring change, we should not ignore the way in which changes are different between settings or different to the policy intentions. Policies present a restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations and therefore 'there is a complexity of the relationship between policy intentions, texts, interpretations and reactions' (Ball, 2004: 20). These notions resonate with my research project, as I examine the policy texts surrounding the work of TAs, whilst observing the varied interpretations that emerge as they unravel within schools and classrooms.

Ball also suggests we need to appreciate the way that policies exercise power through a production of truth and knowledge as policy as discourses, and highlights Foucault. 'Discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so, conceal their own invention' (Foucault 1977 cited in Ball, 2012: 2). Ball suggests that discourses are constructed by exclusions and inclusions, by what cannot and what can be said and Wang (2011: 18) suggests they 'stand in antagonistic relationship to other discourses, other possibilities of meaning, other claims, rights and positions'.

Ball suggests that we are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, and the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows. We read and respond to policies in discursive circumstances that we cannot, or perhaps do not, think about. This reflects the trigger for starting my own research project. I felt that I had become immersed in a discourse so deeply that I thought it was the 'truth of the matter', or the only conceivable way to do things. However, I was beginning to question how I was working to support the role of the TA and its context without acknowledging the politics and discourses which framed things in particular ways. Ball suggests that these discourses are fed not just from official government policy, but also from a professional group of consultants, writers and advisers who disseminate policies and legitimate this management through a discourse of collaboration and autonomy. I was one of those advisers, working for the School Workforce Development Team, working within a discourse that we were acting as professionals for the common good (Brown et al., 2006). Anecdotal evidence suggested that colleagues worked within this system without question, for example during the 2010 change in governments, colleagues were surprised when I suggested that our funding and work could change under the Coalition government because remodelling had been a policy of the old Labour government.

For Ball, this is Foucault's 'principle of discontinuity'. Such discontinuity derives, in his view, from the struggle between opposing strategies. In discourses, it is not only that specific words and meanings come to be debunked, but also that the speakers of those words (experts, specialists and professionals) are gradually replaced. With the election of the Coalition government in 2010, new discourses emerged including a discourse around the importance of teachers, rather than support staff. In this way, a new discursive regime is established, and perhaps a new version of 'truth' is being substituted for the old one.

## 1.5 Delving Deeper into Research

Along with academic 'unsettling' I experienced a sense of unease on a day to day level. My initial feeling of concern and unfairness triggered by the opening comment, "She treats me like a lesser being", began to change. Further informal conversation with Jean weeks later, revealed that she was a qualified teacher who had decided to become a TA following early retirement. Also, despite offering negative views on school systems and teachers, many TAs told me they loved their job and that the job was very rewarding. It was apparent that the situation of teachers and TAs working together was more complex than the hierarchy suggested by Jean's comment. I was also concerned that as a Teacher Adviser I had become removed from the day to day lives of the TAs because I was becoming increasingly strategic in decision making about the training and development of the TA role in Lancashire. I had developed an assumption that because of imposed changes to my role as Teacher Adviser that I was part of a large organisation, funded within a structure of government which was far removed from my interests or any individual's interest within it (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I saw myself as a small cog within this machine which not only ruled my own professional life, but everyone within the educational system, including TAs. As a Teacher Adviser I was delivering the messages of government policy and felt part of the government structure, attending meetings to discuss TA training rather than meeting TAs themselves. I had a growing awareness that perhaps I was doing things to and about them rather than with or in consultation with them and ironically was dealing with them in a way that seemed external to them and beyond their control. Decisions about what courses to run were made and imposed on the basis of what we thought they should be and also on what areas interested us rather than through consultation. I wanted to begin to make sense of the growing confusion of my thoughts around the role of TAs so during a short group session I was running on the role of the TA; I asked them to state their perceptions of the rewards and challenges of their role. They discussed this in small groups then fed back their ideas to the whole group. I found that this simple exercise provided an interesting insight into their ideas about their working lives and the results are in Table 1. Nearly all the rewards related to their contribution to the wellbeing and achievement of pupils, for example 'seeing pupils smile/enjoy being at school' and 'seeing young people develop' and also to their own

feelings of happiness and self-worth, for example, ‘making a difference’ and ‘helping others’.

<b>REWARDS</b>	<b>CHALLENGES</b>
Helping others	Lack of understanding of role Teachers/colleagues
Meeting new people	Variations in roles
Making a difference	Behaviour – what is our role?
Working in partnership with family friendships	Not being able to do job
Building trust	Can't have children out of class/curriculum comes 1st
Trust	Support
Good relationships	Supervision
Building good relationships	Guidance
Working in partnership Being there	Not being able to make a difference
Working with families	Time
Integration	Time (lack of)
Breaking down barriers	Not enough hours in the day
Personal development	Managing time – equal time?
Successful transitions	Different targets than SMT
Successful reintegration	Parents
School holidays off	Speaking to the right person in school/agency
Seeing young people develop	Inter-agency working plus many more!!
Finding the moment you connect with that Young Person	Knowing where to go and who to contact
Seeing happy, healthy children	Information (lack of)
Seeing pupils rise above the challenges they face	Resources
Exam results/college places	Support from staff
Working with children & young people	Draining – emotionally, physically
Seeing them change/make progress	Parents – co-operation/lack of support
Seeing children	Teachers
Seeing pupils smile/enjoy being at school	Trust both from children & parents
Seeing pupils developing relationships with other pupils	Grief off parents
Children's achievement	Communication
Making a difference	
Childs achievement	
Satisfactory outcome	

Table 1. Rewards and Challenges of the TA Role.

The challenges all related partly to the systems and structures they were working in, with lack of time reoccurring within responses, but mainly the relationships within those structures between themselves, teachers, parents, other adults and children. These challenges were expressed using words including frustration and 'lack of' (Table 1), yet despite offering negative views on school systems and teachers, the TAs said their job was very rewarding. This exercise added to my realisation that I was interested how policy was enacted within classrooms and also highlighted that in my professional work with TAs I seemed to have provided little opportunity to explore their views on their working lives.

### **1.6 Aims of This Research**

This chapter has documented how I began my research through a personal interest in TAs and how the complexity of the TA situation warranted further exploration, particularly that of Level 2 and Level 3 TAs who support children in the classroom, because these had been the focus of my work in school and as Teacher Adviser. I considered that I was part of the government's structure because my work was funded by the government in order to support their policies, but was uncomfortable that I was going to work every day where seemingly there was no questioning of discourse around the developing work and deployment of TAs. Without question, I had seen my role as improving the professional development of TAs and in doing so empowering a 'downtrodden' section of the school workforce. However, the academic study during Phase A of the Doctor of Education course, along with mixed responses from TAs about their role including the comment 'she treats me like a lesser being', unsettled my thinking. Rather than thinking and working within a top-down perspective I wanted to listen to what TAs had to say about their situation. The commitment to this different perspective was confirmed by my surprise of being asked if I would question the TA's headteachers for their views at a later date to find out if the TAs had been 'right'. I wanted to know what a group of TAs themselves thought about their day to day working life and what they thought made a difference to their role. The title of my thesis therefore reflects the substantive question that has emerged through the discussion in this chapter:

Working within a national framework – what are teaching assistants' perceptions of their working lives?

This question has a wide remit and reflects that my interest lies in the work of TAs as a whole and furthering my own understanding of the world in which I have worked for years. I want to question the rational discourses surrounding TAs on the macro-level of national policies and how these translate to the micro-level of TAs working in classrooms and in order to do so this project has three aims:

1. To explore the implications of national frameworks around the current work of TAs.
2. To examine TAs' perceptions of the roles they have in schools and classrooms.
3. To examine social and institutional factors that impact on the role of TAs in schools and classrooms.

Chapter 2 will provide a review of literature around the work of TAs at a macro-level of frameworks surrounding their role and at a micro-level where these are enacted in practice within schools. This will provide a critical backdrop to this thesis and a deeper exploration of the working life of a TA. Chapter 3 goes on to address the paradigmatic, methodological and ethical considerations present within the text, how the methodology has emerged through aiming to privilege the voices of TAs and an account of how the theories of Foucault resonated with this research. Chapters 4 and 5 provide analysis and interpretation of the data through key themes. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis through drawing together the research, methodology and literature to provide a contribution to literature through examination of the research questions and to offer suggestions for further research and practice.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter summarised how events and histories in my professional life and in the development of the TA role led to my interest in this research project and it also introduced the idea that this study around policy and practice was not a simple story. The chapter had begun to address the aims of this research project by beginning to explore the national frameworks around the work of TAs and by describing an initial step in seeking the TAs' perception of the role they play in schools and classrooms. This chapter seeks to explore the key issues that I suggest have emerged around the work of TAs through the perspectives of literature and research. In order to fulfil my desire to view the big picture of the work of TAs, this review provides a pulling together of main points and arguments that I suggest emerge through a patchwork of existing literature about TAs. In this way it provides a critical backdrop to a wide ranging research project.

The chapter is presented in two sections. Section 1 begins with a focus on literature surrounding the policy of Workforce Remodelling (DfES, 2003a) linked with the National Agreement (DfES, 2003). I then provide a framework of literature around the characteristics of TAs, a large part of the school workforce that has been encouraged to grow through these policies and suggest that an important characteristic is their gender. This therefore has a focus on the TAs themselves which is in line with the ethos of my research project.

Section 2 will discuss how the national policy seems to be put into practice (or not) at a school and individual level and how policy is lived out in the daily lives of TAs. This follows that policy is more than just what is intended, it also depends on what is enacted, 'It will be open to erosion and undercutting by the action embodied agency of those people who are its object' (Ball, 1994: 11).

The focus of research available on TAs has tended to change over time due to the constantly changing and developing role, with early research tending to centre on the role of the TA, then increasingly developing into research on tensions surrounding the work of TAs in schools and more recently there has been an emphasis on the impact of TAs on children's

learning. This will be reflected in this section. Towards the end of the chapter, I will suggest how this literature review further encouraged me to seek the perceptions of the TAs themselves to fulfil the aims of this project and will set the scene for my methodology.

## **2.2 Section 1. Remodelling the School Workforce and the National Agreement**

I use the policies of Remodelling, linked with the National Agreement (DfES, 2003) as a framework to begin this review because my experience of working with TAs as a Teacher Adviser along with suggestions from literature (Gunter, 2007; Tucker, 2009; Hammersley-Fletcher, 2006 and Blatchford et al., 2012) leads me to consider that these were pivotal policies in driving forward the increased use of support staff. I offer an overview of conflicting and opposing views within literature on these policies

### **2.2.1 Conflicting Literature**

Remodelling was presented as an optimistic reform based on the 'need to move from a system of informed prescription to informed professional judgement' (DfES, 2002: 11). It was promoted as being part of an improving education system by, 'freeing teachers to teach and making sure that every child has the support from adults that they need in order to succeed' (DfES, 2003a: 65). The 'historic' National Agreement promised 'joint action, designed to help every school across the country to raise standards and tackle workload issues' (DFES, 2003: 1).

The literature outlines the overarching rationales of workforce reform, whilst at the same time is sceptical about them. Reforms were presented with official purposes around work-life balance, improving standards and the need to efficiently and effectively deploy staffing, (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2006; Gunter, 2007). Arguments were made through these policies that they had the potential to enable teachers and teaching to thrive, putting emphasis on their core purpose of teaching, working in productive networks with other adults to support learning (Butt & Gunter, 2005). The National Agreement purported to be a response to address the issue of workloads, raising standards and providing a mechanism for involving support staff in supporting and delivering the curriculum (Hammersley-Fletcher & Lowe, 2011), and Wilkinson (2005: 428) suggests:



The Workload Agreement can be perceived as an opportunity to mobilize non-qualified teaching staff in pursuit of a more individualized service for children whilst simultaneously restoring a more satisfying equilibrium between work and home life for teachers who, for some time, have been labouring under an excessive workload, much of which has involved routine administrative and clerical work.

This transfer of work could seem irresistible to teachers because it could help them by:

Creating a culture where rest and relaxation at home is okay ...and people with expertise (counselling, finance, ICT) can handle issues rather than relying on the over-worked and under-trained teacher to sort it out (Gunter, 2007: 8).

Remodelling was presented to be concerned with creating possibilities for a reduction in teacher workload that could improve the learning experience for pupils (Hammersley-Fletcher & Qualter, 2010.) Gunter (2007: 1) suggests it 'may be seductive through the calls for hearts and minds transformations'.

Ball (2009) suggests there has been a significant drive towards greater managerial control over teachers' work and greater levels of accountability set for school systems and arguably education has become subject to policy overload. However, whilst remodelling was presented as a break with the past, much of it was rooted in other policies and legislation (Ozga, 2002; Gunter, 2007). There was a succession of other reforms such as curriculum specification, assessment of pupils at seven and eleven, inspection of schools by the Office of Standards for Education (Ofsted) and specific standards for teachers (Burgess, 2008) and Stevenson (2007: 1) comments that:

Following implementation of the 1988 Education Reform Act the teaching profession in England and Wales has been subjected to an almost continual process of reorganisation as market discipline, parental choice, and new forms of accountability have been introduced into the education system.

In other words, the range of new policies already documented in Chapter 1 had increased teacher workload and Stevenson (2007: 236) suggests that:

The shift in focus in teachers' roles links with the wider objectives of government policy, reinforcing the emphasis on raising productivity through meeting higher performance targets in a narrow range of core subjects.

This shift in focus can find teachers not doing less work but, rather, different and more demanding work and Dillow (2010) suggests that TAs were commissioned as part of managerial change as teachers found help was required with the additional administrative tasks. Stripped of elements of the job that provide 'breathing space' (often the nonessential tasks), 'teachers' work is 'increasingly accounted for by the high-pressure, high-intensity elements' (Stevenson, 2007:237). Remodelling could therefore be seen as a way to make these reforms more palatable for teachers and remodelling is described as a bandage, concerned with:

Rescuing other initiatives which had fatigued and alienated teachers...the proffered empowerment results in a more sophisticated form of control, leaving the distribution of power unchanged but producing a work culture more sympathetic to the government's objectives (Hammersley-Fletcher & Adnett, 2009: 181).

Blatchford et al (2012) note that there was little or no research evidence at the time that upheld the view that TAs raised academic standards. The DfES commissioned the Transforming the School Workforce (TSW) Pathfinder Project in 2002 with the aim of discovering ways to increase the proportion of teachers' time on teaching and learning activities, but the National Agreement (2003) was signed and remodelling instigated before the end of the project and findings published (Butt & Gunter, 2005). A more complex story therefore emerges through literature where the purpose of workforce remodelling was perhaps not simply an altruistic attempt to improve the working lives of teachers. Instead, remodelling is seen as breaking habits and introducing fundamental changes in schools (Gunter and Raynor, 2007), concerned with a superficial process through which schools adopt government outcomes at minimal cost rather than fundamental change in order to raise standards (Hammersley-Fletcher & Adnett, 2009). It is also interpreted as forming part of public sector reform, with the aim of introducing a performance culture through adopting private sector practices (Ozga, 2002; Wilson & Bedford, 2008; Ball, 2010).

A climate of accountability has therefore arguably developed where the failures in education are firmly laid at the door of schools and teachers, with school practice based on the demands of inspection where they feel they are constantly being watched (Gunter & Raynor, 2005; Wilkinson, 2005). This sharing and potential reduction in workload and enhanced space for professionalism could be seen as high risk in times of accountability and performativity (Gunter, & Raynor, 2005; Hammersley-Fletcher & Qualter, 2010).

Blatchford et al. (2012) suggest that this modernising agenda is built on a drive to ensure that public services become more efficient, economic, and effective by using market mechanisms. They link this growth of TAs as paraprofessionals to those across other public services such as paralegals and paramedics, in that they not only could reduce workloads, but provide labour at lower cost. In this way, what was being presented as good practice was really about economy, performativity and accountability and Gunter (2007) even questions whether it was a form of tyranny where children as active learners were missing from remodelling, but were just the objects of that reform. Further, Blatchford et al. (2012) note that the increased marketization of education has revealed some conflict in government policy between standards discourse and the inclusive schools discourse in that schools were expected to achieve high standards, but children with SEN may not be capable of achieving these.

These policies are therefore arguably designed to address cultural change and actually have nothing to do with learning processes and pedagogy (Gunter & Raynor, 2007; Hammersley-Fletcher & Strain, 2008). However, literature does provide evidence of profound implications for schools and the work of the TA. As the role of the TA has developed, it has now become common practice, especially in primary schools, to have at least one TA in each classroom and sometimes three or four (Tucker, 2009) and who these TAs are will now be explored.

### **2.2.2 Characteristics of Teaching Assistants**

This section has a focus on who the TAs are and why this employment appeals to them even though the issue of commensurate pay and conditions for TAs has yet to be addressed (Yarker, 2005). Literature suggests that gender is a key issue. The pay is low in relation to teachers and most TAs would not receive a full salary, as only one in five support staff work

full time, or more than 35 hours per week (Blatchford et al., 2009) so the pay received would be pro rata. TAs are still expected to work extra hours such as attending briefings and staff training without being paid and it is suggested that the good will of support staff is indispensable in making the National Agreement work (Blatchford et al., 2009; Ofsted, 2010). This would suggest that by employing large numbers of TAs on different pay and conditions than teachers, the government has found an economically viable solution to the problem of how to increase the ratio of adult to students in the classroom (Yarker, 2005). Following Watson et al. (2013), TAs respond and cope with this low pay and working conditions either by accepting this lesser and subordinate position or by indignantly tolerating their status, because the work overlaps with other areas of their lives. Graves (2013: 10) suggests that:

Working within a school environment which affords hours of work and holidays which accommodate both the work and mother role is highly prized.

This link to gender and motherhood is prevalent throughout literature with Blatchford et al. (2012) reporting that 98 per cent of TAs are women with the majority being of white ethnic origin, aged 36 or over and this is in line with the findings of other surveys (Teeman et al., 2008), demonstrating that these characteristics have remained constant over time. TAs are commonly parents who get involved with schools when their own children start attending them, with many beginning as volunteers, leading to more formal involvement because the job fits into domestic situations reasonably well (Vincent et al., 2005; Ofsted, 2007; Hammersley-Fletcher & Lowe, 2011). Graves (2013) suggests this parent helper role is a gendered one, with predominately mothers volunteering in schools because whilst women's participation in work outside the home has increased in recent decades, men helping in domestic life has not. Localised work helps to facilitate employment for these women and as they live locally the families and TAs have a shared understanding of the background and local issues that may impact on the school as a whole or individual children and families (Watson et al., 2013).

It could be argued that TAs tend to discuss children within a caring discourse (Dunne et al., 2008) and they are seeing their work in somewhat stereotypical ways in that caring is seen as a natural characteristic of women Mackenzie (2011). It could also be argued that the TA

role being linked to motherhood can be an advantage for a TA (Reay, 2003), because the position of mother could also involve discipline and control, involving guiding and training (Reay & Ball, 2000), which according to their job descriptions could be valuable qualities for the role of TA (Appendix 1).

Alternatively, it could be argued that the role of mother could be seen as not being a professional one (Dunne et al., 2008). Aylen (2007: 112) points out that the Plowden Report (1967: para. 1039) noted:

It cannot be taken for granted that a mother's experience with her own children will of itself qualify her for the work'. Being linked to a parent helper could do little to raise the status of TAs, with the skills of a parent being seen as most relevant to the role, rather than qualifications.

Highly qualified people are working as TAs who wish to work in a less pressurised role or want a change of career Ofsted (2004). However, tiers of TAs exist; some with little training, some with induction training only and some with a variety of in-service or initiative related training including foundation and bachelor degrees (Cajkler et al., 2006). Generally therefore TAs are not qualified teachers. Recent statistics show that 41% of TAs have a qualification higher than GCSE level, whilst 59% have qualifications at or below GCSE level and whilst there is no mandatory qualification for TAs, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are the most relevant and accepted qualification (Blatchford et al., 2012). In order to gain these qualifications, women who return to education juggle extensive labour commitments with childcare and studying along with high financial and social costs and that there is a 'lack of sufficient social support to make it possible for these women to succeed without superhuman efforts,' (Reay, 2003: 314). Reay (2003) also found in her study of working class women returning to education they had a strong desire to make a difference to the lives of others and shared a need to care. They claim to be going back to education not primarily for themselves, but for the benefit of others and this links to Table 1, Chapter 1 where the TAs are clear that the main reward and enjoyment from their role was working with children.

Whilst qualifications of TAs link to gender issues within this section, they also lead to considering the situation of support staff working alongside qualified teachers within the

community of a school and within the smaller context of classrooms and the next section examines literature on this day-to-day practice.

## **2.3 Section 2 The Deployment and Practice of TAs**

It is suggested that whilst remodelling reflected a desire to strategically reconfigure classroom roles, much less thought seems to have been given to how that work unfolds in practice (Tucker 2009; Butt & Lance, 2009) and literature surrounding this practice is now explored.

### **2.3.1 Introduction - A Changing Role**

This section provides an introduction into how the role of the TA and the teacher can be seen as becoming blurred through the increased deployment and more complex practice of TAs. The Good Practice Guide (2000) offers guidance to schools from the DfES on the management and deployment of TAs by recommending that their roles encompass four dimensions: support for pupils, support for teachers, support for the curriculum and support for the whole school as they work as part of a team. Support is a key word here and it stipulates that:

The TA provides support to the teacher and through this to pupils and the teaching of the curriculum. The TA works under the direction of the teacher, whether in the whole class or on their own with a small group of pupils or an individual (Good Practice Guide, 2000: 24).

This notion of support was presented a year later by Estelle Morris, then Secretary of State for Education (2001 cited in Stevenson, 2007: 231) who suggested:

We must make real changes to ensure that teachers can devote themselves to what they do best—teaching. And that they can make the most of their talents and skills and are not diverted from this by non-essential tasks.

I suggest that this phrase, *non-essential tasks*, is a key phrase underpinning discussion around TAs. Where a definition of non-essential tasks is accepted, the use of support staff is welcomed and can be difficult to argue against (Gunter, 2008; Stevenson, 2007). These tasks could include TAs providing indirect support such as recording information, producing

materials and managing resources (Tucker, 2009) and some of these are specifically stated in the National Agreement (2003).

However, some *non-essential* tasks could be considered to be central to the core task of teaching, so by using non-qualified staff to work in teaching and teaching support roles there could be tensions (Gunter, 2008; Stevenson, 2007; Blatchford et al., 2012). Pastoral care is an example of support that could cause a blurring of roles and Gunter (2008) questions whether it is possible to separate the design and delivery of learning in ways that allow a TA to assist a lesson and a teacher teach, or whether it is possible to separate pastoral care so student services deal with behavioural issues rather than a teacher. In other words, the teacher could become increasingly detached from a holistic educational process (Stevenson, 2007).

Responsibilities for many tasks, which used to be the sole remit of the teacher, have shifted, with many teaching assistants taking on these tasks, including planning, assessment, and even teaching. In other words, no longer are TAs just doing menial tasks such as washing paint pots (Poole, 2006), but there has been a shifting of the working patterns of TAs towards the adoption of more pedagogical roles (Butt & Lance, 2009; Groom, 2006; Blatchford et al., 2009). Expansion and changes in TA roles demonstrate some blurring of the boundaries between teachers and TAs and a lack of clarity about the TA role (Cijkler et al., 2006; Blatchford et al., 2012):

Today, TAs are thought of as assistants who teach, and not merely as assistants to the teacher...they should be involved in the broadest range of activity in the classroom...and...fulfil a wide range of tasks that parallel or shadow those of the teacher (Vincett et al., 2005: 32).

Hammersley-Fletcher & Strain (2008: 6) comment that TAs are expected to cover a wide-ranging role:

TAs now have a multiplicity of roles and levels of responsibility, including a part in managing other TAs, developing initiatives in the classroom, and taking responsibility for elements of children's learning at a whole class level.

Graves (2013: 96) agrees and considers that they have to change and adapt so much that their roles have a 'chameleon' quality. A TA and a teacher using a Times Educational Supplement on-line forum (2010) describe this well:

"The rules on being a TA in my school can change like the weather: One day you are the teacher when there is staff shortage (and no, we don't get extra pay) next you will be expected to be whatever the school wants you to be (TA)."

"If TAs can't be doing displays and admin (photocopying etc.) who is supposed to be doing it?! Certainly not the teachers; displays & photocopying are among the 25 tasks that teachers should no longer be doing... (Teacher)."

Literature around this current role of a TA and the joys and tensions this brings to schools will now be explored through the four dimensions of the TA role (Good Practice Guide, 2000; Balshaw, 2010; Blatchford et al., 2012); support for the pupil, teacher, curriculum and school. Curriculum support is discussed within the dimensions of support for children and teachers to avoid repetition and there is a discrete section on implications of the impact of the work of TAs in schools.

### **2.3.2 Teaching Assistants Working With Children**

Within their changing role, TAs are deployed directly working with children in a number of ways, including being classroom based, being assigned to individual children, being assigned to small groups, providing direct support for children both in a pastoral role and in a direct teaching role (Blatchford et al., 2009; Tucker, 2009).

Pupils have different types of contact with teachers & TAs in that with teachers they are one of the crowd, whilst with TAs they tend to be the focus of attention with more active and sustained interactions (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). These interactions could be seen in a positive light, so the presence of a TA could therefore be reassuring for both the teacher and the pupil (Ainscow, 2000), and Groom (2006) argues that the more pupils feel they are being listened to, the greater the likelihood is that they will be actively engaged in learning and that TAs have the capacity to do this. Alborz et al. (2009) report positively that team teaching styles involving TAs can promote learning support as a routine activity and part of



an inclusive environment in which all children are supported, but the use of TAs in this way has also produced within literature some sources of tension.

The interactions teachers have with their pupils have been recognised as playing an important role in pupils' learning (Jones, 2007; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Ofsted (2010: 18) reported that children valued and benefitted from interactions with TAs:

Those who were making good progress were able to explain how the learning support assistants broke down the work into manageable chunks of information or explained things in a way that they were able to understand so that they could take part in the lesson.

Whitehorn (2010) reports that TAs interact with children in supportive ways including changing the pace of tasks for the supported pupils, deconstructing concepts or instructions, rephrasing the teachers' talk and personalising the context. Children also seek validation from TAs particularly because the TAs often support individuals or small groups on a more personal level rather than whole classes. However, Whitehorn (2010: 69) also reports that:

Whilst this practice was often successful in engaging pupils constructively, there were also examples of TAs removing the responsibility for the task from the pupil by scribing and spoon feeding.

Blatchford et al. (2012) suggest that in general teachers use some strategies that foster pupil independence and encourage pupils to think for themselves, whilst TAs use closed questions to support and encourage pupils to complete written tasks. Also, when pupils struggle through error or failure to find the answer, TAs readily supply the answer or correct immediately, so this could stifle the learning process and pupil independence (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Unqualified TAs can spend more time with pupils than qualified teachers do (Giangreco et al., 2005; Butt & Lowe, 2011) and TA support could therefore be an alternative, rather than additional to teaching by a teacher:

The amount of contact with teachers tended to decline when support staff were present. Pupils with more classroom support have less interaction with the teacher (Blatchford et al., 2009: 681).

This is considered important particularly because the vast majority of support provided by TAs, both in and out of the classroom, is for low attaining pupils and those with SEN (Blatchford et al., 2009; Teeman et al., 2009). This reflects the significant rise in the numbers of pupils with SEN being educated in mainstream schools where, 'the rise in the numbers of teaching assistants working in mainstream schools mirrors schools' and LEAs' growing commitment towards inclusion,' (Balshaw & Farrell, 2002: 4). Ofsted (2004) found schools with a high proportion of SEN frequently employed considerable numbers of TAs, but Giangreco et al. (2005) suggest that TA support is not always given to pupils in such a way that they are more included in the school. Instead, there is potential tension between the impact of TA support of individual learning and the impact on participation with peers. Additionally, there is an increasing trend of using TAs to withdraw groups from classrooms using intervention programmes (Ofsted, 2004), with the practice of withdrawal from mainstream classrooms causing less time in mainstream curriculum coverage (Farrell et al., 2010; Blatchford et al., 2012). Providing individual support could shield children from learning challenges and integration, acting as a 'cocoon' (Tucker, 2009: 293), creating a barrier between the pupil and the rest of the class therefore having an adverse effect on the pupil's ability to work independently. This interaction could encourage dependency and separation from their teachers, the curriculum and their peers and there is concern that pupils can be too dependent on support staff (Giangreco et al., 2005).

There has been debate as to the impact of TAs in working with individual and groups of children with Ofsted (2007) concluding that support from TAs did not ensure adequate progress for pupils and Blatchford et al. (2009) suggesting that pupils who had more support from TAs made less progress than those who had less support. This will be further explored in the later section in this review entitled Impact of TAs.

### **2.3.3 Teaching Assistants Working With Teachers**

Gunter (2008: 256) suggests that since the start of remodelling agenda there has been a change in labelling, no longer with talk of a school staff with subsets of teaching and non-teaching staff:

I first saw an example of this type of relabeling on the motorway, with signs saying 'workforce in the road', as a warning, I think, not to drive into them. The school

‘workforce’ are being restructured and recaptured into one group of school workers where there is no differentiation for teachers or their status.

This restructuring could lead to TAs seeing their role as becoming equal with teachers, ‘...there seems to be a growing sense of the supporters of learning (TAs) seeing their role as co-educators with teachers’ (Cajkler et al., 2006: 41). There is the suggestion that TAs have taken on a direct teaching role, with support staff regularly covering for teacher absence in over 80 per cent of primary, secondary and special schools (Hutchings et al., 2009: 10) and all of the two hundred TAs in the study by Hammersley-Fletcher & Lowe (2011) having some degree of whole class responsibility, albeit for short periods of time.

Wilkinson (2005: 422) argues that when ‘subordinates’ take over a lot of work from the ‘superordinate professional’, professional jurisdictions can become fuzzy and even vulnerable and Gunter and Rayner (2007) point out that employing nonqualified staff working closely with qualified teachers in any type of direct teaching role, even with individuals and groups, poses some fundamental questions about the nature of pedagogy. Stevenson (2007) suggests that teachers see an all-graduate and professionally qualified teaching force being undermined by this difference in qualifications, in that some teaching activities could be undertaken by less qualified non-teachers. Moreover, pastoral work, caring for the whole child which teachers view as their role, could become fragmented from the teacher role by being seen as the activity of the TA. This fragmentation of the teaching role has been introduced earlier in the chapter through literature around TAs working with children.

This links to the concept of teacher identity and professionalism and Watson et al. (2013) suggest that the discourses of professionalism are deeply entrenched in schools. There are many formal theories on what constitutes a profession and how the concept of being a professional is defined. For example Friedland (1994) considers that educational status, along with having common institutional and ideological traits define the concept of professionalism. Wilkinson (2005) also suggests that having knowledge is the main basis for a profession, and Abbott (1988, cited in Wilkinson, 2005) considers that professions are different occupational groups who are competing for control of a particular sphere of specialised work and in order to do this they need to demonstrate they have some form of

exclusive higher knowledge. He suggests the nature of a professional group's knowledge base is a crucial determinant of roles within the workplace especially in relation to other groups of workers, because only those in possession of such knowledge can realistically exercise control over others engaged in that work. I suggest this is very relevant to the deployment of TAs in schools because teachers are expected to work closely with less qualified TAs who could be seen as taking on a teaching role.

Yarker (2005: 174) also suggests that teaching is both a technical and interactive role:

Its ground is deeper than competencies. The business of negotiating with human minds, hearts and spirits, which is what teaching is, cannot be done on an instrumental basis.

He also suggests that, 'Qualified Teacher Status indicates a recognition, acceptance and commitment to the ethical claims of the role, to its moral and social dimensions' (Yarker, 2005: 174). This links to Stronach et al. (2002: 109) who read professionalism through 'economy of performance' and 'ecologies of practice'. They suggest that an economy of performance is an expression of performances of quality, effectiveness and outcomes which can be assessed and made public. These can have consequences for school staff for example with allocation of resources and reputation of staff and schools. An ecology of practice refers to beliefs and practices that develop when learning and carrying out their roles in schools. Whilst I acknowledge that in the confines of this review I could present an over-simplification of their views, I find it a helpful frame to use in relation to the work of teachers and TAs. An economy of performance, where professionalism is defined by qualifications, competencies and measured outcomes through for example pupil assessment, can be described as 'outside-in' professionalism (Stronach et al., 2002: 115) externally imposed. This relates to the, 'over-determined and over-regulated situation of schoolteachers' work' (Ball, 1993: 1), which Chapter 1 includes as Ofsted inspections, SATs and league tables, as well as curriculum reforms in 2013. However, an 'inside-out' view of professionalism relates to a self-motivated 'vocational commitment' (Stronach et al., 2002: 128).

Jaques and Hyland (2000: 184) consider that teachers are more than simply 'deliverers' of learning, but there is an emotional investment:

Teaching provides opportunities for highly professional behaviour in many areas and frequently attracts people who are conscientious, hardworking and committed to caring for and improving the lives of those with whom they work...there is little doubt that many want to be teachers no matter what the pay, no matter what the rewards.

Day et al. (2006: 603) also propose that teachers' identities are formed through more than just knowledge, 'because the overwhelming evidence is that teaching demands significant personal investment'. In relation to teacher professionalism, they therefore consider that teachers:

Need support for their commitment, energy and skill over their careers if they are to grapple with the immense emotional, intellectual and social demands as they work towards building the internal and external relationships demanded by ongoing government reforms and social movements.

This suggests that there is much more to teaching than the stance taken by the National Agreement which talks of 'the extra range, experience and complexity of understanding' (2003: 12) which goes with Qualified Teacher Status. In this way, whilst teachers may be fearful that their changing relationships with TAs might be a threat to their professional integrity (Muijs, 2003) and this could run very deep, into not just a professional status, but their personal identity with which it is inextricably linked. Teachers who have a strong sense of responsibility for their pupils have difficulty in sharing that responsibility with others (Hammersley-Fletcher & Qualter, 2010) and teachers who have come into teaching to teach could therefore see remodelling as an erosion of their role (Stevenson, 2007). In other words, they consider themselves to be the one person, the professional, who can deliver learning themselves. However, Hammersley-Fletcher & Qualter (2010) offer an alternative view of professionalism in teachers. They propose instead, that there could be teacher engagement in working with support staff, linked to both a desire for increased quality of the learning experience and having additional time. This would provide an expanded view of professionalism for teachers involving managing the learning experience by using all the resources available, including staff.

### **2.3.4 Support for the School**

This section is brief as much of the TA role is covered within the rest of this chapter, but some suggests that TAs can support the whole school in many ways. In extended provision after school activities, breakfast clubs and after-school clubs are usually staffed by members of the wider workforce, including TAs (Ofsted, 2010). The TAs receive additional pay for this, but of course they are cheaper than teachers and a considered advantage of the involvement of teaching assistants in running these clubs is that it provides continuity for the pupils and also for the parents.

TAs also see themselves as a go-between, involving liaison between home and school. Cable (2003) illustrates this in her exploration of how bilingual support assistants effectively bridge communication between home and school and Ofsted (2008) reports how TAs can engage with parents who might otherwise be reluctant to communicate with school. Tucker (2009) notes that TAs know many of the children with whom they work as well as the local community and that TAs describe themselves as being a type of interpersonal glue between the teachers who live often outside the school locality and the families who usually live near their primary school. This rationale is echoed in Alborz et al. (2009) who describe TAs as intermediaries between home and school and Griangreco, Suter and Doyle (2010) use the term connectors. In this way, the work of the TA is seen as permeating the life of the whole school.

### **2.3.5 The Impact of Teaching Assistants and Support for Teaching Assistants**

This section suggests there are different views on whether TAs provide effective support for children, ranging from early positive reports to negative. For some years there has been an explicit recognition of the value of the TA role (Farrell et al., 2010; Butt & Lance, 2005), reinforcing The Good Practice Guide (2000: forward) referral to Her Majesty's Inspection (HMI) reports that have 'confirmed the tremendous contribution that well trained & well managed TAs can make in driving up standards in schools'. There is evidence that trained and supported interventions from TAs could be just as effective as support from teachers (Farrell et al., 2010; Butt & Lowe, 2012) and there are some positive reports within the standards agenda (Lee, 2002; Butt & Lance, 2005). TAs have been seen as the most important factor in enabling pupils with special educational needs to be maintained in

mainstream classes (Groom, 2006) and Blatchford et al. (2009) advise that some head teachers felt strongly that TAs were essential to inclusion and differentiation, due to interactions between pupils and TAs being more informal and personalised, so aiding engagement.

However, as the 21<sup>st</sup> century progressed, there has been an increased focus on whether TAs make a difference in schools, so arguably the notions of accountability and performativity (Ball, 2003) are having an impact not just on teachers, but on TAs. Chris McAnea, representing more than 200,000 support staff through the public sector union UNISON, is quoted as saying that the Government and schools had been more worried about 'getting bodies in schools' than making sure they were effective', (Times Educational Supplement TES September 4<sup>th</sup> 2009: 1). There was some indication emerging that there may be no automatic link between the increase in adult-pupil ratio and children's attainment (Muijs, 2003). Ofsted (2007: 8) found that that schools had little firm evidence to show whether standards were rising as a result of workforce reform and that most schools emphasised tackling workload, rather than raising standards when implementing the National Agreement because they:

... interpreted the aims of reducing teachers' workloads, improving work/life balance and extending the roles of support staff as outcomes in themselves, rather than setting them within the context of improving the quality of education and raising standards.

Blatchford et al. (2009) suggested that teachers considered that TAs increased the attention of pupils, provided more effective support for learning, increased teacher effectiveness and improve learning outcomes – but these were not reflected in end of year assessments. Despite these benefits of having TAs in schools, their report included this unforgiving line: 'The more support pupils received over the year, the less progress they made' (Blatchford et al., 2009: 8). This was taken out of context in the press with negative remarks such as an article headlined, 'No Substitute for a Good Teacher' which contained phrases including, 'This is pretty damning' and 'The weakest are, in effect, being taught by the weakest' (TES, 2009: 1).

Finally, in considering impact, it is questionable whether the impact of TAs can be measured by attainment alone. Brown & Devicci (2013: 384) advise that a more holistic assessment could be made of the use of TAs within schools and their value and also:

It is also worth considering the intangible qualities TAs contribute to school communities, including the development of relationships between schools and families, and the day-to-day smooth-running of schools.

These 'intangible qualities', by their nature, could be hard to measure, even though in 2010, OFSTED were recommending that schools should clarify each member of staff's responsibilities for improving teaching and learning and ensure effective monitoring of the specific contributions made by TAs. However, Rubie-Davies et al. (2010: 446) advocate that whilst TAs are not teachers, we should not expect the same from them, but they could, 'have a pedagogical contribution to make alongside and perhaps complimentary to teachers'.

However, Blatchford et al. (2012) further explain why TAs could not be contributing to schools to their full capacity and why in the strong words of the TES (2009: 1), 'None of it is the fault of the TAs'. They suggest that whole school organisations need a clear strategy in order for them to support the work of TAs and other research agrees that the impact that TAs can have on raising pupils' achievement could be located in the specific organisational dynamics of each school (Balshaw, 2010). Brown & Devicci (2013: 384) consider that any assumption of a direct causality between the TA and impact on pupils is problematic because of 'the communal nature of schools and the variety of people involved in teaching and supporting children and young people', so suggest that schools need to address how their organisation and management can create both barriers and opportunities for TAs to train and apply the knowledge they have acquired.

There is general agreement about negative aspects within whole school support for TAs. There is a lack of time to discuss preparation and feedback with teachers (Ofsted, 2010; Rubie-Davies et al, 2010). TAs may only receive planning and discussion time during break or lunch times or after school (Blatchford et al., 2009; OFSTED, 2010) and this is made more difficult because most TAs are employed part-time so much depends on their good-will, resulting in TAs working in reactive ways in lessons, rather than taking a proactive approach



and finding out about the lesson content (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). TAs need knowledge and understanding to support learning, but many schools provided no induction or appraisal formats (Groom, 2006). A key issue also emerging through the literature is a lack of teacher training in working with TAs. Many research projects end with the recommendation that more needs to be done to prepare teachers to manage other adults including TAs in their classrooms (Wilson & Bedford, 2008; Blatchford et al., 2009; Farrell et al., 2010). Ofsted (2007) stated that the reform agenda would be undermined unless teachers have the necessary skills and adaptability to direct effectively the work of TAs, yet by 2010 Rubie et al. commented that still three quarters of teachers in their study had no relevant training.

Groom (2006) suggests that building an effective team of TAs requires an experienced line manager who can organise support across the whole school, and Hammersley-Fletcher & Qualter (2010: 916) suggest that this whole school well thought-out approach would encourage all staff including teachers to reconsider approaches to teaching and learning; 'Where implantation was thoughtful and developmental, staff confidence was maintained and thus their sense of professional identity maintained'.

Hammersley-Fletcher & Qualter (2010) offer a way to view TAs by identifying a teaching assistant continuum ranging from a constrained TA to an enabled TA. Constrained TAs respond negatively about extra responsibility, poor pay, less time with individual children and increased pressure. Enabled TAs feel included and valued as part of the school team as they are encouraged to develop an area of expertise, enjoy their responsibility and feel they are adding value to the curriculum. In other words, support through whole school organisation may help to facilitate the enablement of TAs, 'Where schools have begun to look at the TA role in a much more rounded way, the management of their time and skills has become more sophisticated' (Balshaw, 2010: 337). Following this view, Watson et al. (2013) suggest that being a TA could be recognised as a respected position which is viewed as an important role to be fulfilling. They suggest that the perception that TAs provide either support for pupils or assistance for teachers suggests a deficiency model for TAs who are expected to work in the shadow of a teacher and perform the same roles but to a lesser standard or ability, without overall responsibility. In other words, the TA is placed in the role of a less competent adult, as opposed to a competent other, suggesting that the TA has to be supervised or controlled, yet at the same time she/he is expected to facilitate complex

working relationships with teachers and pupil. Some argue that a sense of teamwork in schools would be necessary for this to happen, though this is not always in place and I suggest Balshaw (2010: 338) sums this up well, though on an optimistic note:

This means high levels of preparedness, creative deployment and effective practice by teachers and TAs. Some schools and their leaders know how to do some of these kinds of things. They may not have found all the answers, but the point is - they are looking for them!

## **2.4 Towards Methodology**

This literature review has provided an overview of issues surrounding the work of TAs through the lens of other writers and researchers and has therefore contributed to fulfilling my aim of further exploring frameworks around the work of TAs. It has been what I can only describe as 'an eye-opener', or better still 'mind-opener' around my view of the world of TAs, encouraging me to consider that my research project is not only worthy of further study, but the situation of TAs is a complex one.

The literature has contributed to my thinking by outlining the views of others on what TAs perceive as the factors affecting their role, not only through exploring what affects the work of TAs, but also how TAs themselves have affected discourse in education. I had expected to read literature largely about a downtrodden section of the workforce following the comment by Jean at the start of the Introduction chapter, 'She treats me like a lesser being', but instead it has highlighted that the world of the TA is far from the simple story that I had first envisaged and has caused me to question how TAs are positioned within schools. This chapter has particularly highlighted that there is a lack of research on the views of TAs themselves as an appropriate starting point (Groom, 2006; Wilson & Bedford, 2008). A number of researchers have written as objective observers and much of the research around TAs has been carried out in this way (Ofsted 2007; Burgess 2008). The views of TAs have been included in literature and research (Blatchford et al., 2009) and O'Brien & Garner (2001) provided accounts of the working lives of TAs in a different way, through providing an opportunity for TAs to tell their own stories, unfettered by analysis by the authors. More recently Dillow (2010) used a similar narrative technique of story teller to examine the lived experience of TAs, using combined methods of ethnography and

autoethnography to carry out her study. Her aim was to provide an inside-outside, 'that enables the reader to build up experiential knowledge of this pivotal role' (Dillow, 2010: 15). O'Brien & Garner (2001) and Dillow (2010) both presented their research findings as stories, each one about TAs working in primary schools, in order to provide insights into what they do, who they are and how it feels to do their job. Despite these works, literature suggests that most past accounts of the work of TAs from a theoretical or managerial standpoint has been done by those who are far from the day to day experiences of teaching assistants in the classroom and there seems insufficient attention given to the views of the TAs themselves. Even by 2010, Dillow (2010: 18) reflected that, 'the TA voice remains small'. In this way, the literature review has suggested that the aims of the project are valid and worth pursuing:

- 1 To explore the implications of national frameworks around the current work of TAs.
- 2 To examine TAs' perceptions of the roles they have in schools and classrooms.
- 3 To examine social and institutional factors that impact on the role of TAs in schools and classrooms.

This review has therefore provided not just a critical backdrop to this research project, but has identified areas in the working lives of TAs of which I seek further understanding within my research title, *Teachers and Teaching Assistants Working Together: The Perceptions of Teaching Assistants within National Frameworks*. These therefore become sub-questions within my research:

1. In what ways do TAs perceive their work is driven by national frameworks?
2. How do TAs perceive national frameworks are enacted in policy and practice of schools and classrooms?
3. How do TAs consider they are positioned within schools and classrooms?

Finally, it has reinforced that in addition to my own personal reasons provided in the Chapter 1, I can make a contribution to literature on TAs through providing a space for the perceptions of TAs themselves to be heard. A number of research projects have suggested that TAs should be the starting point of research (Flutter & Ruddock, 2004; Bedford & Wilson, 2008; Dillow, 2010; Mackenzie, 2011). Flutter & Ruddock (2004: 2) suggest that

whilst 'expert witnesses' can contribute, they 'cannot offer perspectives based on first-hand experience', and Apple ([1979] 1990 in Flutter & Ruddock, 2004) suggests, 'that to understand schools one must go beyond what theorists think is going on'.

They suggest that future research should listen to and try to understand the views of TAs and the lack of such existing literature leads me to agree that, 'Much greater attention needs to be given to the views of TAs themselves as an appropriate starting point for research' (Butt & Lance, 2009: 230). This review has therefore supported the basis of my methodology and my theoretical viewpoint will be explored within the following Methodology chapter.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores the methodology used to underpin this research and the methods used to facilitate its implementation. Although the methodology is reported in this chapter, it is evident throughout the thesis and 'irradiates the whole of the research' (Clough & Nutbrown, 2010: 35).

The methodology has emerged through aiming to privilege the voices of TAs in the research process along with the growing realisation of the implications of this. The chapter begins with a discussion on the notion of 'perceptions' and how this underpins the whole research project and therefore the methodology. A discussion of the methodological approach follows and then account of how the theories of Foucault resonated with this research and also how whilst this project is about women, it is not essentially a piece of feminist research. Ethical considerations are introduced followed by a discussion of how theory, along with the practicalities of beginning research through a pilot, shaped the methods used in collecting and analysing data. Finally the chapter explores my own learning journey and the impact of this how this both made a difference to the methodology and methods used and how the shaping of these made a difference to my own self as a researcher.

#### **3.2 Perceptions**

I begin this chapter by reiterating that the perceptions of TAs lie at the heart of my thesis and that the core of the research question focuses on the views of the TA themselves. The Oxford Dictionary defines the word perceptions with three meanings: the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses; the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted and also intuitive understanding and insight. Whilst this is a very basic explanation of the word, even this definition highlights that different people may view the same thing in different ways.

I acknowledge that TAs are situated within current discourses in schools as outlined in Chapter 2, so these stories belong not only to these individuals, but 'to particular

organisational discourses which are merely voiced here', Silverman (2013: 131). However Flutter and Ruddock (2004: 6) suggest that it is worthwhile having insight into perceptions:

Peoples' conceptions of the world are profoundly significant, both to themselves and to others, because it is these perceived realities that give shape and meaning to peoples' lives.

Flutter and Ruddock (2004) also suggest if these perceptions are to be articulated and shared, these are comprehended through interactions rather than by inference and assumption. In order to facilitate these interactions, a vehicle or space for voices to be expressed, listened to and valued is therefore required. In this way, individuals can change from being passive objects of research to one of active participation through expressing their views; agreeing or disagreeing with policies, procedures and impositions from their organisation. This challenges a positivist view that power is a commodity which is given, provided and controlled by structures outside the individual (Dick & Ellis, 2006). Clough & Nutbrown (2010) suggest that there has been a growing interest in the representation of the voices of research participants, especially of those participants who are often not heard and Chapter 2 suggests these would include TAs. They also consider that (2010: 83), 'the research act of listening to voice must always involve the (broadly defined) processes of both mediation and translation' and this indicates that listening should be carried out within an ethical framework which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Phase A of the Doctor of Education opened my mind to new ways of thinking and the practice of research has enabled me to appreciate that there are alternative versions of reality and truth (Denscombe, 2002). I want to unpeel the layers around the work of TAs not to discover a 'truth' but rather to further my own understanding through academic engagement.

### **3.3 Perceptions of Myself as a Researcher**

The decision to research perceptions from within the classroom leads me to consider my own perceptions of myself as a researcher. Chapter 1 demonstrates that I am an individual, a person with a history, personality and experience and whilst the world has an impact on

me, the world also shapes itself around me (Brown, 2007). I interact with the world, I am part of it and I make sense of it by looking at this world in many different ways:

The researcher asserts both that what she knows cannot be separated from who she is and that her warrants for making knowledge claims are subjectively situated and historically contextual (Bloom, 1998: 148).

This echoes my own perceptions of personal change as my thoughts and values have been disrupted through a reflexive process and I have considered myself and professional life in a continual process of change and reflection. My identity as a researcher is changing from one rooted in a chronology of events (Chapter 1) to one where interactions take centre stage. Jones (2007: 5) suggests that individuals assume different identities at different times:

Identity becomes a moveable feast: formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. Identity is, historically not biologically defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around coherent self. Within us are contradictory identities pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about.

Day et al. (2006: 10), also suggest that 'identity is being informed, formed and reformed as individuals develop over time and through interaction with others', with formation of identity being an on-going process, where the self is not standing still, but is ever changing. Both these writers work within a poststructuralist paradigm and I have found these concepts of self and identity resonate with my project. Jones (2007) suggests that there are some general assumptions shared in post-structural practices; that the concept of self is always in process, that the author's meaning is secondary to that of the reader and that a variety of perspectives can be used to create a multi-faceted interpretation of a text.

With this in mind I have begun to consider my own identity as a researcher, but I also need to consider the sense of identity of teachers and TAs themselves. Day et al. (2006) suggest that engagement with questions of identity of teachers (and I suggest TAs because of their increasingly integral role in schools) is essential, 'particularly in centralist reform contexts

which threaten to destabilise long-held practices and beliefs'. These authors also suggest that in the management and implementation of reform agendas, there is no evidence that these identities are acknowledged or valued. How TAs see themselves and how they perceive others about them is part of this study and using perceptions from TAs and also from myself as a researcher are integral to this research. The ethical implications for gathering data are presented later in this chapter, but they now lead to my methodological position.

### **3.4 A Methodological Position**

Post structuralism is appropriate to this study because it offers the opportunity to explore power dynamics and relationships inherent in this research which sets out to consider a set of views and relationships, not to change them, but to gain a greater understanding of them. A post structuralist perspective acknowledges an epistemology and ontology that require reflexivity about how research is conducted and how interpretations are made (MacDonald et al., 2002). Bryman (2012) suggests this perspective acknowledges ontology, a theory of the nature of social entities, that the world is not inert and external to individuals, but is a product of social interaction. It acknowledges an epistemology, 'a stance on what should pass as acceptable knowledge' (Bryman, 2012: 711) which suggests 'researchers and research subjects are sense makers and knowers' (Scott & Usher, 2011: 31). Jones (2005: 9) argues that post-structuralism is difficult to define or summarise, but suggests that it challenges, 'assumptions that are concerned with language, meaning and subjectivity'. In other words:

Human behaviour, where the immense complexity of human nature and the elusive and intangible quality of social phenomena contrast strikingly with the order and regularity of the natural world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:12).

Guba & Lincoln (1994) argue that this behaviour is nowhere more apparent than in the context of the classroom and school and I consider that post structuralism offers an insight to a different way of thinking and opens my mind to question a 'naïve objectivism' (Scott & Usher, 2011: 99) where data can be collected to provide a view of the world in an unproblematic way.



However, whilst I seek to read the world in a post-structural manner, I also operate with people in schools in everyday life and this research also seeks to explore national frameworks that surround the work of TAs. This indicates that pragmatically I still desire a toe-hold in this real, a world where myself and colleagues including TAs carry out our lives on a day to day basis.

In this way, I am, 'adopting research strategies as they are appropriate to our work' (Clough & Nutbrown, 2010: 20). Other researchers have a similar approach, acknowledging that both positivist and post structural approaches have problematic features and even that, 'there is reason to suppose that educational researchers might be rather bored by these debates' (Scott & Usher, 2011: 11). MacDonald et al. (2002: 149) suggest that, 'researchers are often tempted by theoretical perspectives that are popular today, but need to be wary of theoretical fads'. Apple (1999 cited in MacDonald et al., 2002: 150) warns researchers about the 'trendy arcane over theorisation' in much work and goes on to suggest, 'a little trespassing may be a good thing here'. Stronach et al. (2007) suggest that an obsession with a prescriptive methodological specification can lead to a methodological approach of painting by numbers. Stephen Ball (2004) is also unwilling to wholly embrace the stance of a single paradigm in his methodological approach:

I am not unwilling to admit my ambivalence about certain versions of post-structuralism, to own up to a modernist commitment to the idea of 'the real'...but I am also clear that modernist sociology cannot ignore either the epistemological challenge or analytical insights presented by post-structuralism. The complexity and scope of policy analysis from an interest in the workings of the state to an interest in contexts and practice precludes the possibility of successful single theory explanations (Ball, 2004: 4).

Additionally, a distinctive feature of his work has been his examination of educational policy in the light of Foucault. He acknowledges that Foucault refused to align himself with any of the major traditions of western social thought and Ball (2010: 1) cites an original interview with Foucault (1982 cited in Martin et al., 1988: 9) when in response to a question about his 'intellectual identity', he replies:

I don't feel it's necessary to know exactly who I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think you would have the courage to write it?

### **3.5 Introducing Foucault**

I wanted to have further academic engagement within understanding the work of TAs. Literature and my choice of methodology had opened a different way of thinking about the world of TAs and the work of Foucault resonated with these thoughts:

As for what motivated me, it is quite simple: it was curiosity – the only kind of curiosity that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy; not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. There are times in life when the question of knowing whether one can think differently from the way one thinks and perceive differently from the way one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all (Foucault, 1985: 8-9).

I am cautious about using Foucault in a simplistic way because of the diverse nature of his work and this research is not intended as a full scale discussion on all the work of Foucault. However, his ideas have helped me to be sceptical and open up my thinking to challenge my preconceived ideas of the working lives of TAs and school, following Mills (2003) who suggests that Foucault's ideas are as a way of approaching a subject rather than using them as a set of principles or rules. Foucault therefore appeals as being helpful to my methodology, both because of the testament of Ball and others and his ideas resonate with my curiosity and desire to delve more deeply into the situation of TAs.

I suggest that certain elements of Foucault's work are useful to draw on when analysing text or events, supported by Oksala (2007: 1) who says that 'Foucault conceived of his books as a toolbox that readers could rummage through to find a tool they needed to act and think with,' and Kendall and Wickham (2000) who reassuringly suggest that students should not feel embarrassed about bumping into obstacles in seeking to use Foucault's methods.

It is my experience of working with TAs that encouraged a study of their situation from a theoretical viewpoint with my autobiography as a key trigger. Foucault suggests his own experiences were the base of his theoretical work:

Whenever I have tried to carry out a piece of theoretical work, it has been on the basis of my own experiences, always in relation to processes I saw taking place around me. It is because I thought I could recognise in the things I saw, in the institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, cracks, silent shocks, malfunctionings...that I undertook a particular piece of work, a few fragments of autobiography (Foucault cited in Eribon 1991: 28-29).

Another helpful tool from Foucault's toolbox is his questioning of the inevitability of our current practices by tracing their history. Oksala (2007: 10) suggests that Foucault considered that many things that we hold as self-evident have instead emerged fairly recently and as a result of contingent events and circumstances. In this way, Oksala (2007) notes that history was meaningful according to Foucault (1983 cited in Oksala, 2007: 8) because it served to show how, 'that – which - is has not always been' and how 'the things that seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history'. For Foucault history was not about the past, but instead represents not only how we have become what we are, but also how we could have become something else. For example, Oksala (2007) states that Foucault attempts to show how sexuality is assumed to be a natural fact, but instead it is formed in the course of human history and culture. He was not claiming that there were no men and no women, but that scientific representations of how these categories created sexual identities formed a discourse of what was a 'normal' man or woman.

Deacon (2006: 176), in referring these thoughts to education, suggests a Foucauldian account of the 'successive historical metamorphoses of the school' goes beyond a simple historical chronological account of educational legislation but instead there was a whole series of complex relations between other events. In this thesis therefore, the simple chronology of legislation and policy surrounding TAs provided in Chapter 1 may not be interpreted as the cause of the current situation, but rather as many contingency factors working together. For example the post-war surge in women returning to work after having

children, alongside the increasing inclusion agenda discussed in Chapter 2 with children requiring individual adult support, could be seen as two contingencies relating to the growth in TA numbers. Kendall & Wickham (2000) suggest that such growth and change should not be analogous to a tree with growth from roots through a central trunk, but to a rhizome – a collection of root like tentacles which grow in unpredictable ways, even growing back into each other. This analogy challenges my view of the linear cause and effect of historical events that I was so keen to make sense of at the start of this study and suggests a much more complex view.

Another of Foucault's tools is the concept of episteme. Introduced in *The Order of Things; an archaeology of the human sciences* (1974 translation) he suggests that epistemes are a complex network of ideas that determine what society considers to be rational at any one time. The more dominant a discourse is within a group or society the more natural it can seem. For TAs, Chapter 2 demonstrates that discourse around their role in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century supported it to be a 'good thing,' but more recently that this is beginning to be challenged, so perhaps a new episteme is growing. This challenges any concept of 'truth', with Sarup (1984, cited in Ball, 2010) proposing that Foucault suggests that we think about and experience the world through the discourse available to us. Additionally, discourse and power are seen to fuel one another, so discourse can therefore be associated with power and the ability to exert that power. Chapter 2 suggests there is discourse that teachers are specialist and professional making it difficult for parents or even TAs to challenge their authority and judgement. This demonstrates knowledge as an integral part of power struggles and Foucault suggests that subjects of research are often in less powerful positions. Foucault confirms the omnipresence of power and the fact that power is not something that is acquired or seized and Foucault wants to analyse the mechanisms or techniques of power, the 'micro-relations' of power.' (Larrain, 1994: 92). The exercise of power through institutions with the aim of controlling a body of people and rendering them governable in Foucauldian terms is the application of governmentality. Oksala (2007: 83) summarises governmentality as rather than there being sovereign power, we live in:

A society in which a complex managerial and administrative apparatus governs a population with policies and strategies.

In this way there is not a solidity and permanence to state institutions, but it is composed, for example, of elected Members of Parliament, a civil service and different departments. A state could be considered not just to comprise of government, but also agencies such as the police and legal system. Power is exercised through these agencies, but:

The state, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations (Foucault, 1980 cited in Mills, 2003: 49).

The state is therefore considered to be part of a set of power relations permeating throughout society and the relations of power within schools and the wider educational system are particularly relevant to this study. This apparatus of the state has determined the work of TAs, yet their positioning within their work on schools is a question explored through the thesis.

Mills (2003) also suggested that researchers should be sceptical of the value of Foucault. In other words, whilst I have enjoyed being challenged by the works of Foucault, I need to remember not to assume he is telling the 'truth' of the situation.

### **3.6 Feminist Research**

Lather (1991) suggests that post structuralism opens up the possibility of less fixed and determined ways of looking at things and in feminism she suggests that it moves from positioning ourselves as masters of truth towards creating a space where those directly involved can act and speak on their own behalf. A consideration of feminist research is relevant to this study because it undoubtedly concerns women. The entire sample consists of women, I am a female researcher and some data does question the role of women in the workplace. I acknowledge that feminist research has been at the forefront of challenging the silencing of women's voices in society (Burns & Walker in Somekh & Lewin Eds., 2005) and that I aim to provide a space for listening to the voice of my sample of women. However, Lather (1991) suggests that to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the centre of the enquiry, with the ideological goal of ending women's unequal social position. Reay & Ball (2011) argue that it is extremely difficult to disentangle those female qualities which develop out of women's relative powerlessness in society and those that remain regardless of how much power they acquire. Additionally

they suggest that a market culture has brought about a shift in schools where subordinates are increasingly viewed as a means to management ends. I suggest this link to management or economic ends of policy makers is the underlying issue that I have chosen as the focus of this thesis rather than gender-linked styles of management and power. The main focus of this thesis is the work of these TAs set within policies, rather than a focus on them being women. Following Burns & Walker in Somekh & Lewin Eds. (2005), I acknowledge that research data which did not start out with a specific feminist focus can generate data that can be analysed further using a gendered lens. The methodology therefore does not have feminism at its centre, but future research may benefit from the findings of this research.

### **3.7 Introduction to Ethics Within this Research**

Ethics is closely linked to the idea of morality and ethics links the duties and responsibilities of a researcher with the broader systems of moral principles and rules of conduct, dealing with what *ought* to be done or not done (Denscombe, 2003). There seems to be no shortage of guidelines when it comes to ethics, with different authors providing different codes or approaches to a sound ethical approach. Foucault suggests that the ethical approach should be defined:

Ethics is the process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve his moral goal (Foucault, 1985:28).

Ethical guidance of BERA (2011) and guidance from my own university, the Manchester Metropolitan Academic Ethical Framework (2011) will be used to underpin this research. Using these is not just a way of ensuring that university research meets necessary ethical standards, but they ensure that, 'research is carried out morally and with high regard for the rights and dignities of participants' (Clough & Nutbrown, 2010: 173). To do the right thing by all involved and attempting to gather and portray the research data in as transparent a way as possible is in my view an ethical stance for research.

Moreover, as an educational practitioner I would expect that I would always endeavour to operate ethically as this is part of the high standards that I would expect from myself and

others. I am therefore drawn to Atkins & Wallace (2012: 30) who suggest that taking an ethical approach to educational research demands a similar moral approach to being an educator which demands, 'certain standards of behaviour and is founded on principles of care and respect for individuals'. They suggest that the similarities between the two can be seen in the five principles underpinning educational research identified in national guidelines by BERA (2011:4):

All educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for: the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom.

Atkins & Wallace (2012) suggest that an ethical framework needs to be reflexive rather than mechanistic and that ethics can be constructed applied and practised throughout the research process. Ethics are therefore not just theoretical, but they are tested at the point of application. Having a specific section devoted to the exploration of the ethical implications could therefore be limiting so rather than a discrete section; the application will be threaded throughout this chapter.

### **3.8 A Choice of Method**

The thesis has documented how the views of TAs, with more in depth consideration, should lead the process of my research and I found the approach of Kvale (1996) on interviewing resonated with my priority of listening to the perceptions of TAs themselves:

If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them? In an interview conversation, the researcher listens to what people themselves tell about their lived world, hears them express their views and opinions in their own words, learns about their views on their work situation and family life, their dreams and hopes (Kvale, 1996: 1).

The application of qualitative methods with Kvale's common sense approach to interviews seems to be most appropriate for the generation of data and I chose a qualitative enquiry. In this way, the research problem suggested an appropriate method rather than by the researcher's ontology and epistemological position as Somekh in Somekh & Lewin Eds. (2004: 2) suggests:

Researchers have developed elaborate methodological fortresses in which particular understandings of knowledge, truth, values and being give firm foundations of research design and provide defensive bulwarks against external criticism (including criticism from other academics).

In this way a paradigm did not provide security in what Foucault (1972: 131) called a 'regime of truth' or a set of values and beliefs that sets out what can and cannot be said. Instead I followed the suggestion that qualitative and quantitative methods are each appropriate to different kinds of research problems, so it is the research issue, rather than epistemology that determines what type is used, as Bryman (1988: 125) suggests:

The tendency to associate particular methods with particular epistemological positions is little more than a convention (which took root in the 1960's), but which has little to recommend it, either as a description of the research process or as a prescriptive view of how research ought to be done.

Denscombe (2002: 24) also adopts the position that in the absence of a universally accepted vision of what social reality is like or how we can know about it, good social research depends on adopting an approach that is suitable for the topic being investigated:

What is suitable, itself, depends on what it is practical to accomplish and what kind of data are required. It is a matter of what is needed – and what works best to achieve this. It is a matter of 'horses for courses' – selecting methods and analyses that produce the kind of findings that work best, while acknowledging that all approaches have their limitations and that there is no perfect approach.

In carrying out qualitative research we are part of what Silverman (2013: 4) calls an 'interview society' where the mass media want to depict our lives through our inner most feelings and that the media culture of the Western world is that 'lived experience must be investigated' (Silverman, 2013: 4). However interviews are a frequently used method for collecting qualitative data in educational research (Nutbrown & Clough, 2010; Atkins & Wallace, 2012). They provide an opportunity for dialogue in an individual face to face way to probe and clarify what is being said.



Kvale (1996) sets out several types of interview along a series of continua from structured interviews to completely non-directed interviews and these differ on the degree of structure in the interview, which itself reflects the purpose of the interview. I decided to use a semi-structured interview described as, 'an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena.' (Kvale, 1996: 5-6). This offered opportunities to ask quite general questions to encourage frank and open responses which I can probe further within a loose structure, to allow for significant amounts of potentially rich data. In this way I expected this method to encourage participants to provide insight into their thoughts and judgements (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

### **3.9 Data Collection**

This section offers explanation and discussion of the sample, how interviews were conducted and issues arising from this method.

#### **3.9.1 Sample**

The sample comprised of eight TAs, in line with previous qualitative studies on the TA's role which have used similar small numbers and in most cases, less than 20 participants (O'Brien and Garner, 2001). These eight were chosen for both purpose and convenience. They were 'a priori purposive sample' (Bryman, 2012: 418) in that I knew the criteria for their choice at the beginning of the study. More detailed information about the sample is provided in Biographies (Chapter 4: 4.2), but they were all Level 2 or Level 3 TAs working in mainstream primary classrooms in a general support role and these were representative of the TAs who I had most contact with both as a teacher and as Teacher Adviser. The sample was representative of the demographics of TAs nationally as documented in Chapter 2 in that they were female, aged between 29 and 55 from a mixed educational background. A male participant was not sought, not as an oversight, but reflecting that, 'I was working with female participants in a field where 98.9 per cent of workers are women' (Dillow, 2010: 30). It was also a convenience sample in that whilst I had specific criteria for their choice, they all lived in North Lancashire so were easily accessible for interview and I was easily accessible to them. Within this area, six mainstream primary schools were represented in order to provide data from a variety of TA experiences. A sample of eight TAs was used because I

considered that this achieved 'data saturation' (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007, in Bryman, 2012: 425) in that in on-going reading of transcripts the codes had been generated and required little revision so an in-depth analysis could be then be undertaken.

### **3.9.2 Interviews – a pilot interview and a moment of reflection**

A practice (pilot) interview with a TA raised ethical questions and the intention to carry out ethical research became tested at this point of application. BERA (2011: 5) clearly states that, 'Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, with dignity and within an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice', and the pilot interview ensured that this was considered before fully embarking on the research interviews.

Whilst the TA gave her consent, I realised it had not been 'informed' (BERA, 2011: 5). I explained this interview was to help me improve questions and to become more comfortable with the interviewing process and to develop my research interviews. However in conversation at the end of the pilot, the TA had not realised that this was part of doctoral research, or how the research would be used and to whom it would be reported. An explanation of the context was therefore improved before the actual interviews to meet ethical guidelines of informed consent and in light of this I noted the need to emphasise that consent could be withdrawn at any time.

In an attempt to support the TA I held the interview in my home, which in my view seemed a comfortable environment and we chatted informally first in order to help the TA be more relaxed as a visitor and to, 'take all necessary steps to reduce the sense of intrusion and to put them at their ease' (BERA, 2011: 7) and because to interview successfully, 'the trick is to formulate questions and provide an atmosphere conducive to open and undistorted communication between the interview and the respondent,' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004: 144). Initially I considered this worked well, but during the research interviews I realised that using my home brought ethical dilemmas. Whilst I thought it comfortable and being out of the workplace could cause less disruption to, 'their normal working and workloads' (BERA 2011: 7), safeguarding myself and the TA could be compromised by being alone. Also it was an unfamiliar environment for the TAs, so could have led to an imbalance of power, with the TA feeling at a disadvantage. However, I had previously met all the interviewees in their workplaces and had started to build relationships there in order to support informality

during interviews. Moreover, I considered that I had to continue in order that all the interviews were carried out in similar conditions and whilst this may seem to be an unsatisfactory resolution the intent to do the right thing by all involved and attempting to portray the research data in as transparent a way as possible is in my view an ethical stance for research located firmly within ethical guidelines.

During the pilot interview I framed a small series of open ended questions, turned on the recorder and started the interview speaking clearly. I assured the TA that any personal information or views would remain confidential and their identity would remain anonymous (Denscombe, 2003). This continued throughout the whole research project with pseudonyms being used and their schools not identified. Any notes using the actual names of interviewees were destroyed.

I expected to primarily be a listener who would record the verbal data and be able to reproduce this as data to be analysed. However as the interview progressed I realised that it became a conversation, interpreting and exchanging information. This was not just a neutral exchange of asking questions and getting answers, but rather led to a contextually bound and mutually created story (Scheurich, 1995; Fontana and Frey, 2008).

I found Kvale (1996) helpful to illustrate theoretical understandings of this interview process using two contrasting metaphors of an interviewer – as a miner or a traveller. In the pilot I expected to use the miner approach, with knowledge being understood as a buried metal unearthed by a miner through digging nuggets of data or meanings out of a subject's experiences, unpolluted by any leading questions. The knowledge nuggets would remain constant on the conveyor belt from the oral stage to written storage, valued because of their degree of purity. Instead, my experience was within the traveller metaphor with the interviewer seen as a traveller on a journey leading to a tale being told upon returning home with meanings being unfolded through the traveller's interpretations. Kvale (1996) suggests this may not just lead to new knowledge but it might begin a process of reflection that leads the interviewer to new ways of self-understanding, as well as challenging values and customs in the traveller's home country. In a broad sense, the traveller metaphor refers to a post-structural understanding using interpretation rather than extracting facts from participants. It acknowledges that the researcher will have a conversational approach to

the research and therefore be part of the process, providing a personal interpretation of the world of TAs, rather than being an objective observer. Kvale (1983:174) suggests that the interview is a 'construction site of knowledge' and describes its purpose as to 'gather descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena'.

### **3.9.3 Conducting the Interviews**

I am drawn again to the work of Foucault, as he suggests that power is functioning at the micro-level all the time, so it follows that it is an element in an interview situation. Sheurich (1997: 71) suggests that, 'Interviewees carve out a space of their own, so that they can often control some or part of the interview', whilst Kvale (1996: 6) suggests, 'the researcher defines and controls the situation'. Power can be opposed and resisted so whilst one person could have the capacity to influence another person, they do not necessarily submit to this exercise of power. In other words, the interviewee can resist giving any knowledge, views or perceptions they choose so from a Foucauldian view, 'in order for there to be a relation where power is exercised, there has to be someone who resists' (Mills, 2003: 40).

This interaction and interpretation leads to reflection that if TAs bring different interpretations and insights to the interview then it followed that I would too. The personal qualities of the researcher have the capacity to 'filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe and misconstrue' the research project (Peshkin, 1988: 17) and once identified can enable them to write 'unshackled from orientations that they did not realise were intervening in their research process'. I recognise that I am a person with a history, personality and experience interacting with the world so I need to be mindful of not just the perceptions of TAs, but also my own perspective, subjectivity and position. Reflexive thought raised my awareness that I could not separate myself from the research and that my values and histories could not be ignored in the process, along with those of the TAs:

Values are so deeply embedded that they cannot be simply taken off like a jacket and hung in a corner until it is convenient to put them on again. They cannot be changed at our convenience (Denscombe, 2003:166).

I am reminded of Stronach et al. (2007), who explained an account from one student, a director of a college researching her own institution, who felt she was part of the 'power' that the 'truth' of her enquiry tried to interrogate and how another student suggested there was an ongoing reframing of her research self as 'unsettled hybrid' between a researcher and a manager (Stronach et al., 2007: 182). These resonate with my research because I want to research work within the classroom, but feel an outsider but an insider. As a Teacher Adviser and currently as a consultant I only meet any TAs on short training courses rather than being involved in any close working relationships with TAs, so am outside their everyday working lives. However, I feel an insider because I empathise with their identities and histories. I have worked with TAs as a teacher in the past, valuing the benefits that I consider they brought in supporting both the children and myself and I listen to the successes and concerns that TAs voice in training sessions. I also acknowledge that I am a woman wanting to research the working lives of TAs, a group who are largely women. I therefore consider myself to have a supportive, yet critical relationship with TAs with empathy for their situation.

This research therefore results in an account of an individual practitioner examining specific issues and how these were addressed during the research process. For others reading the research, it provides an account of what might be seen – a traveller's guide rather than a map or encyclopaedia entry. This moment of reflection challenges any idea that I might 'generate coherent meaning to present a grand narrative' (Somekh, 2004).

However this small study has value. Geertz (1973: 4) suggests that cutting a culture down to size is, 'actually ensuring its continued importance rather than undermining it' and this supports my aim of adding richness of understanding of the work of TAs through a different perspective, that of the TAs themselves. Geertz (1973: 25) suggests that studies build on other studies, 'not in the sense that they take up where others leave off, but in the sense that, better informed and better conceptualised, they plunge more deeply into the same things'. In this way this thesis has value and a wider application by running side by side with other research, building on and adding to other studies.

Similarly, Sarap (1984 cited in Ball, 2010) notes that Foucault stresses the importance of local, specific struggles that do not form a global systematic theory which holds everything

in place. Whilst he doesn't try to universalise what he says, it still has importance and this resonates with my research, recognising that this research project is local and specific.

I have strived to remain ethical throughout the procedure and attempt to portray the data and its collection in as a transparent way as possible and this links to the trustworthiness of the research findings.

### **3.9.4 Trustworthiness**

Graneheim & Lundman (2004) suggest that trustworthiness refers to the credibility, dependability and transferability of qualitative research and that these three elements are intertwined and interrelated. To this end I carried out the research within strong ethical guidelines, supporting transparency of the processes throughout the study. I chose a sample representing the group of TA roles on which I wanted to focus, Level 2 and 3 TAs providing general support, with a range of ages and experience in order to provide a richer variety of aspects and ideas. Interviews are identified as the most appropriate method of data collection and whilst there are individual variations as could be expected, there were many correlations within the data. Graneheim & Lundman (2004) also suggest that credibility involves whether any data has been systematically excluded or irrelevant data included, so transcriptions are available as Appendices and quotes are used throughout the discussion and analysis of data. The research is dependable in that the interviews were carried out over a short period of time and transcribed within a few days in order to minimise any retrospective errors in the process. Davidson (2009) suggests that transcription trustworthiness is central to qualitative approaches as transcripts are used for analysis, evidence of that analysis and the researcher's analytic claims. I therefore ensured that the audio recording was high quality by using a new recorder, I transcribed the interview data myself in order to facilitate immersion in the data and transcriptions were shared with interviewees for their consent as an accurate representation of the interview.

In a study of postgraduate students, Lapadat and Lindsay (1998, In Davidson, 2009) found that the students took the transcription process for granted, with transcripts being understood not as constructions but as providing "objective" accounts of recorded data. I have provided an explicit acknowledgement of the interpretive nature of the research

process and I note that this includes transcription. The next section explores the analysis of these transcriptions.

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

The analysis of the interview data used a manual method. Whilst electronic methods of coding data are being increasingly used by researchers (Basit, 2003), Dey (2003: 267) suggests that computers can be a useful tool in an analytical toolbox and that they can offer efficient and effective aspects of analysis, but that they did not eliminate the need to think:

The current generation of software provides a set of procedures which can replace or facilitate the mechanical tasks involved in analysing data, but not the creative and conceptual tasks that this requires.

Basit (2003) suggests that the choice of manual or electronic coding is dependent on the size of the project, the funds and time available and the inclination and expertise of the researcher. This project is relatively small and as a part-time researcher time was short, so rather than spend hours getting acquainted with a computer software package, I preferred to spend that time familiarising myself with the data content on a more intimate level using manual analysis.

In using a sample of eight interviewees I assumed I would avoid major difficulties that could be experienced with qualitative data in that:

One of the main difficulties with qualitative research is that it rapidly generates a large, cumbersome data-base because of its reliance on prose (Bryman 2013: 565).

However the interview data seemed like a 'thicket of prose' (Bryman, 2013: 565). I began by reading through my data in order to prepare the ground for analysis as explained in the words of a gardening metaphor, 'By digging over the ground, we loosen the soil and make it possible for the seeds of our analysis to put down roots and grow'. (Dey, 2003: 83) This helped me to have a holistic approach (Dey, 2003) in attempt to grasp basic themes or issues in the data by absorbing them as a whole. I attempted to use a number of tactics for generating meaning from interview data exemplified by Miles & Huberman (1994) such as noting codes, clustering, making comparisons and attempting a visualisation of findings in

diagrams. Initially I began to look at broad categories in the data and was presented with an initial 'jumble' of categories (Fig.1). In summary, therefore, I had begun with a global read of transcripts, then decided on broad categories and endeavoured to fit the data into these categories. I found myself selecting nuggets of knowledge and information described by Kvale (1996) as the approach of a 'miner', trying to uncover and purify meanings from the data. I was not complying with my preferred approach outlined earlier in this chapter of Kvale's 'traveller' approach, where I would co-create the meanings and through interpretation construct stories.

Whilst Granheim and Lundman (2004: 106) presume that, 'there is always some degree of interpretation when approaching a text', I had used my own knowledge, interests and experience to pre-select categories, rather than use the text of transcripts as a starting point for data analysis. I had collected the data and in performing the analysis found that my interpretation was influenced by my personal history, in danger of suggesting meaning that was not there.

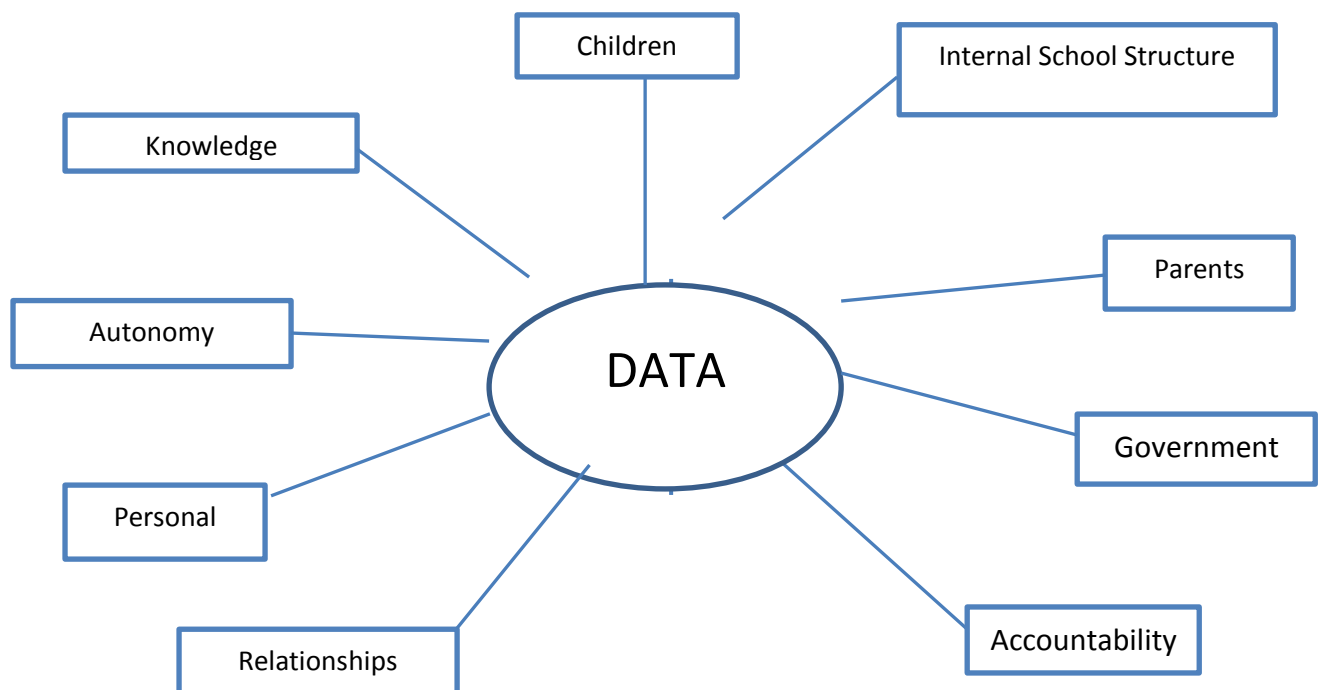


Fig.1 Initial Data Analysis

I wanted the product of my analysis and interpretation to start from what the TAs had said in interviews – in other words, the analysis would begin with the data, so I could, 'let the



text talk' (Granheim and Lundman 2004: 111). To do so, I needed to begin the analysis again using an interpretative tool to provide this stage with methodological rigour, rather than using an intuitive approach.

I was therefore drawn to using thematic networks as a base for analysis, following the approach of Attride-Stirling (2001, p385) who aimed provide 'a robust and highly sensitive tool for the systemization and presentation of qualitative data'. Analysis is presented as thematic networks which are presented as a web-like network that summarise the main themes in the data. The procedure used in going from transcript to interpretation was to extract:

The lowest order premises evident in the text (Basic Themes)...grouped them together to summarise more abstract principles (Organising Themes)...then super-ordinate themes...(Global themes) (Attride-Stirling 2001: 38)

Codes based on recurrent themes in the transcripts were arranged into 26 Basic themes, which were clustered together to make 7 Organising themes then into 3 Global themes which 'encapsulate the main point in the text' (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 393). The global themes that emerged were; National Frameworks, Interactions with Adults and Children and School Environment. The thematic networks have no hierarchy and are shown in Figures 2, 3 and 4. This representation of the networks suggests a simple process and outcome and belies the great deal of interpretative work in refining the data. The use of thematic networks has drawn the key themes from the data that the TAs considered most important when articulating their perceptions of issues around their role and the networks were used as a tool for breaking up the text. The data analysis and interpretation in the next chapter are therefore not approached as answers under the headings of interview questions, but rather as key themes that emerged throughout the interview transcripts. In concluding this methodology chapter I consider that I have clearly explained each step of the process because, 'The value of qualitative research lies in its exploratory and explanatory power, prospects that are unavoidable without methodological rigour at all stages of the research process' (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 403).

### 3.11 Reflections on the Research Process

Through consideration of methodology my thoughts and values have been disrupted through a reflexive process. This reflexive process has stimulated a process of change in my way of looking at me and others.

Although I have found reflexive thought to be pivotal in the direction of my research, Lynch (2000: 47) argues that reflexivity is not an epistemological, moral or political virtue. Instead, he wants to avoid, 'the academic pretensions that can arise from equating reflexivity with a particular academic orientation or political perspective', so in other words:

A self-consciously reflexive pronouncement will not necessarily strike others as profound or revealing. It may just as easily seem pretentious, silly or evasive (Lynch, 2000: 47).

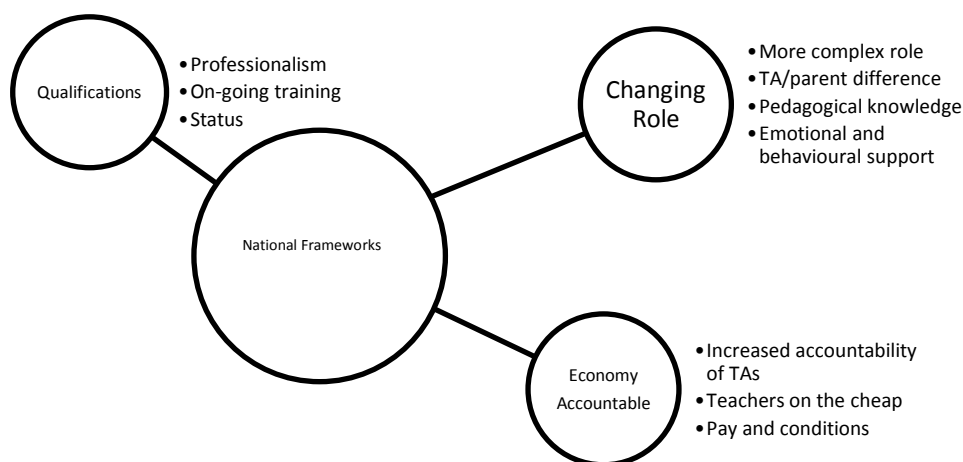


Figure 2: Global Theme 1 – National Frameworks

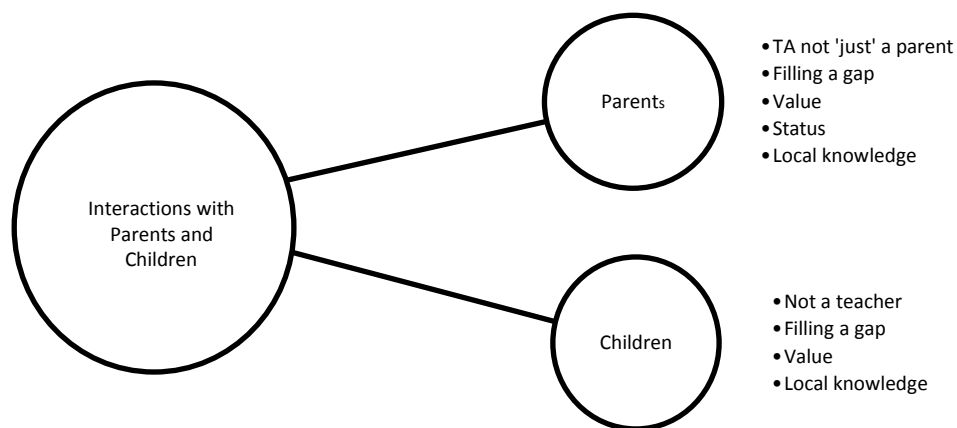


Figure 3: Global Theme 2 – Interactions with Parents and Children

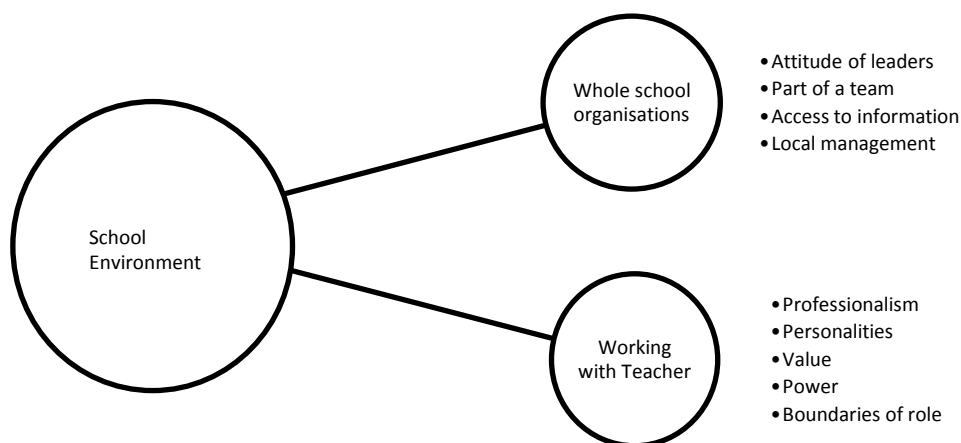


Figure 4: Global Theme 3 - School Organisation

However, I have found that it is through reflexive thought that I am able to see through the fog of the jumble of thoughts and actions within my research so far and the process of writing has been the catalyst. Brown & Jones (2001) argue for the centrality of the writing process and they suggest that it is through writing that the researcher asserts and thus creates themselves. I look back at my writing and can see how the research process has developed and unfolded and how writing it down has focused my thoughts. Brown & Jones (2001) emphasise writing as an important marker of time in monitoring change, with pieces

of writing heightening awareness of significant moments of practice as they arrive. This resonates with my experience in that writing has provided a space for reflexive thought and raised my awareness that my research has become interpretive and subjective. I therefore share their view that moments in time are characterised through pieces of writing and that practitioner research produces a construction of self in relation to the professional/social context being faced.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that seeking a paradigmatic stance and methodological approach has been a reflexive process. It has highlighted that I am re-thinking who I am as a researcher and I have an awareness that this is changing and developing:

Our assertions about the world and the roles that these assertions imply for us, constantly re-define who we are...The stories we tell do not pin down life for inspection, but rather stimulate this life for further growth (Brown & England, 2005: 456).

I have laid out reasons for undertaking interviews and in so doing I have illustrated the strengths of this procedure and my thinking in relation to ethics. The methodology centres on the aim of this research in privileging the voices of TAs and the methodology and resulting methods are most appropriate to facilitate this, albeit with an acknowledgement of possible ethical and procedural tensions. This chapter has provided a detailed, transparent account and explanation of how and why data was collected and the following two chapters will explore and explain the themes that have emerged from this data, through a presentation of data and discussion.

## Chapter4

### Data and Discussion – Teaching Assistants and National Frameworks

#### **4.1 Introduction to Data and Discussion**

The Methodology chapter documents how the use of thematic networks has drawn key themes from interviews and how this follows Attride-Stirling (2001: 385) who considers this technique to be ‘a robust and highly sensitive tool for the systemization and presentation of qualitative data’. I shall now examine the data provided by the participant group of TAs, using the three global themes that emerged through its initial analysis: National Frameworks, Interactions with Adults and Children and School Environment.

These stories and meanings will be presented in two chapters. Whilst the contents of both chapters interweave, Chapter 4 provides data and discussion on the biographies of the eight TAs interviewed and then explores how the TAs feel that their role has been affected at national level through National Frameworks. In this way, Chapter 4 will begin to unpeel the layers of the perceptions of the TAs on a wide level and these layers will be examined further in Chapter 5, which looks at how this policy and practice is enacted in schools. It examines how the TAs perceive their current role at a day-to-day micro level.

The use of key-theme headings will support the reader by providing a ‘sensitive, insightful and rich exploration of a text’s overt structures and underlying patterns’, (Attride-Stirling, 2001 - page). This analysis and interpretation will include both the manifest content of the data which is visible and obvious and the latent content which involves an interpretation of the deeper underlying meaning of the text (Granhelm & Lundman, 2004). In this way, it will privilege the words of the TAs themselves in order to lead on to my interpretation of the data. I will therefore comply with my preferred approach outlined in Chapter 3 of Kvale’s ‘traveller approach’, where his metaphor sees the interviewer as a traveller on a journey asking questions and unfolding stories and meanings through his/her interpretations.

In this way both chapters have the perceptions of TAs at their centre, albeit through my interpretation.

In presenting how the national frameworks are perceived to impact the work of TAs, along with the histories of the TAs themselves, Chapter 4 provides a base from which to consider the complexity and contradictions in their role.

## **4.2 Biographies**

The biographies show that the TAs have been appointed from a variety of backgrounds, employment and educational attainment, but they also have similarities such as they are all female parents, and aged over 30. Their characteristics are detailed below:

Avril (39) attended the school as a child and has strong family connections with the school with her father being a governor and her mother employed as support staff. She lives near the school, a Catholic primary with approximately 200 pupils, and her family is very involved in the church and parish connected to the school. She began as a parent helper when her own children started the school and previously worked in retail. She became a TA as a result of an accredited course I ran in school for volunteers who were parents within the school called Parents as Educators, which had the aim of helping parents support their child's learning. Avril has been a TA for 15 years firstly at Level 2, then at Level 3 and gradually increasing her hours to full-time as her children moved on to high school, then employment. Much of her work has been class based, but she is increasingly working as a Learning Mentor working with children who need additional support throughout the school.

Linda (52) also began as a parent helper when her children started the school and was the first TA (then called a non-teaching assistant) to be appointed by the school in 1993. She began her qualifications with Parents as Educators, then over the years has gained many relevant qualifications including Specialist Teaching Assistant (STA) and Foundation and Honours degrees in education, all done in her own time whilst being a working mum. Her children are now in their twenties, but she has continued to work at the same school, living within walking distance of her work, so having extensive local knowledge. She has supported across all primary key stages and presently works full time alongside Avril as a Learning Mentor. In addition Linda has her own business sewing wedding dresses and 'special occasion' clothes.

Harriet (48) joined the school as a qualified Nursery Nurse in order to support a child with Special Educational Needs, following years of experience working with young children in nurseries. She was disappointed when her title changed to TA through a re-structuring of TA roles in Lancashire to Levels 1, 2 and 3 (see Appendix 1). Harriet feels her qualification and title is devalued because other TAs have not had formal training, whilst she had achieved a recognised qualification relevant to working with children. She began work as a TA at the primary school that her son attended when the family relocated to the area. More recently Harriet has worked part-time in different mainstream primary schools, most lately a community primary school with approximately 400 pupils, providing general in-class support as her children moved on to high school and further education.

Kate (53) is a mother of grown-up children providing classroom support in Foundation Stage. Her previous employment includes working as a bank cashier, an estate agent and finance officer. She began work with no relevant qualifications as a Level 2 TA five years ago in order to support her aspiration of being a teacher. She has very recently gained her BA Honours in Education, following years of part-time study whilst working almost full-time. She has recently moved schools and is working as a Level 2 TA. Due to re-location she does not live in the school's neighbourhood.

Sarah (38) has been a Level 2 TA for 5 years providing part-time classroom support for a child with Special Educational Needs. This follows varied office based employment and she had gained NVQ Level 2 in Supporting Teaching and Learning (STL) using parent volunteering as her work placement before starting employment as a TA. She is mother of a school age child who attends the school, a Catholic primary with approximately 300 pupils, and lives in the school's locality.

Mary (32) and Laura (36) were interviewed together on their request as they are friends and felt nervous about being interviewed. Mary has been a parent volunteer who works as a Midday Supervisor plus working as a supply Level 2 TA when required, but has no relevant qualifications. She has previously worked as an administrative assistant, but wants employment to fit in with her children's schooling. Laura recently gained her NVQ Level 2 STL using volunteering at her own child's school as the required school placement. She has pursued the career change of being a TA after working as manager of a high street fashion

retail store. These work together at a community primary school with approximately 250 pupils.

Nicole (30) was appointed with no vocational qualification but then gained an NVQ in Supporting Teaching and Learning whilst both working and caring for her own two pre-school children. She wanted a job that would fit in with school hours, because of her increasing need to be more financially independent within the family. Nicole works as a part-time Level 2 TA providing both intervention programmes and general in-class support and was on maternity leave at the time of interview after working 3 years as a TA. Her children attend a different school and she lives outside the school's locality.

These biographies offer an insight into the range of backgrounds and experience that the TAs bring to their classrooms which can be quite different to those of teachers. Apart from Harriet all the TAs have worked outside the education system before deciding to work in school and have therefore worked in different roles, with a range of different people and in a range of work places. This is in contrast to my situation as a teacher who apart from holiday jobs has only experience of being a pupil in school, attending university, and then returning to school as a teacher. The youngest participant is 30 years old, whilst the oldest is in her 50's, demonstrating that they bring to the role years of different experiences of life. The TAs therefore perceive that they have more extensive experience of working life outside the school community than teachers do, so providing them with confidence. Linda and Avril have worked in the same school for over fifteen years and Sarah for over five, so they could be expected to know school systems and routines well. In this way, the teacher may be faced with a TA who feels extremely confident in her role and is happy to challenge and also teachers may be working with an adult who could be perceived as older and wiser than them. This can be perceived by the TAs as intimidating for teachers, yet at the same time Sarah accepts that she does not challenge the position of the teacher, but does want recognition of her experience:

It can be security of the teacher if they've moved into a different class and they are unsure of things and we have been there before. We know our place, but we have experience to offer. (S: 8)



Sarah suggests she is not questioning her role with the phrase, 'We know our place', but the biographies and TAs perception of attitudes towards them begin to open up discussion on power relations between the two groups, and these concepts of power and positioning are explored in the Chapter 5.

The common factor of parenthood within the biographies offers further insight to the role of the TA through opening up issues of gender. The TAs are all mothers: four have been parent helpers at their schools of employment, Harriet was a parent at the school though not a volunteer, Andrea was a parent helper when her children were younger and Nicole is a parent of pre-school children. Apart from Harriet, all these women have changed their occupation to work as a TA, though she continued her original occupation in her own child's school. Employment of the role as a TA has provided an opportunity for these women to manage being a mother with paid employment, with little disruption to child care due to working within school hours and terms and these TAs appear to value the job because it helps them to retain their identity and role as a parent. Nicole specifically mentions how being a TA offers her an opportunity to work whilst caring for her children: 'To be honest it fitted round my kids' (N: 36) and whilst Kate's children are grown up, she recognises that working as a TA is convenient for parents, 'Maybe they've [TAs] taken on the role because it fits in with their lifestyle. There is only one I know in my school who isn't a mum' (K: 28) and 'I feel that it fits in with their lifestyle, they get all the holidays and also they are near their children' (K: 29).

In being near their children, TAs may consider that it enhances their parental role and anecdotally TAs have told me that working in school has furthered their understanding of their own child's learning and development, so developing their own child's learning.

The data shows that it is women who have been involved as volunteers and/or TAs with schools that their own child has attended, therefore suggesting that this type of involvement is a gendered one. This further suggests that these women still perceive themselves as being primary carers for their family and that work as a TA could be seen as a compromise between a desire to care for their children and an economic or social necessity to have paid employment. These TAs who are the main carers of their own children have an opportunity for employment that was not readily available twenty years ago, but on the

other hand, the gender bias suggests these women still have to compromise their career aspirations by accepting low paid, part time employment whilst their male partners, if they have one, do not. The biographies indicate that apart from Kate and Laura none of the TAs had highly paid careers before working in schools, but the level reached in some of their qualifications suggest they have the potential for doing so. I suggest that they have undertaken relatively low paid part time employment as a lifestyle choice convenient for family life and working within the local community, rather than wholly as a career choice. Even Kate who began as a TA when her children had grown up, remained working as a TA to further her ambition of becoming a teacher, rather than because of an aspiration of having a career as a TA. It is evident from the biographies that even when families have grown up and qualifications have been gained the TAs have remained in their roles, suggesting that they enjoy their employment. The implications of these links to parenthood within the context of classrooms particularly motherhood, will also be further explored in Chapter 5.

The biographies of the TAs have therefore provided an overview of who these TAs are and how these backgrounds have provided a social and cultural context for analysis of the data. The next section of Chapter 4 begins to explore the data through the first global theme that emerged through data analysis, National Frameworks. The remaining two global themes, Interaction with Children and Parents and School Organisation will examine how these National Frameworks are enacted in practice in Chapter 5.

### **4.3 Global Theme 1 - National Frameworks**

I use the term National Frameworks to include an amalgam of history, policies and legislation that have contributed to shaping the working life of TAs, as offered in my Chapters 1 and 2. The data particularly suggest three frameworks, Changing Role, Economy/Accountability and Qualifications and I would argue that these are national issues because they have not been wholly determined at a local level, as documented in earlier chapters. My own awareness and questioning of these frameworks has been raised through conducting this research project, but the TAs talked about these frameworks in a very general, unquestioning and practical manner; for example when Sarah was asked to provide an explanation of complex relations between teachers and TAs she talked in a matter of fact

way with an acceptance that this is how their life is: 'Well that's what life's like isn't it? That's just what happens, its school life in general' (S: 7). However within this acceptance the TAs are clear that nationally determined issues affect their working lives.

#### **4.3.1 Changing Role**

The TAs ideas on how their role has changed over the years are at the core of their conversations. Avril, Linda and Harriet have been TAs for many years and they consider themselves to be in a changed role from the one they had 15 or 20 years ago, changing from a parent helper to a perceived more complex pedagogical role. They have experienced these changes at first hand and in interviews talk on a practical level about their original role, changes that have occurred leading to their current role:

In the old days, it was seen as mums coming into school to help and it would only be a bit of reading or sitting with a child in the corner, but the role's developed more now. . . Lots of TAs do preparation, they have an input into class planning, they are given areas of responsibility, and they have been encouraged for self-development (H: 25).

Well over the years, the role of a TA has changed massively. Back in the day it used to be the role of putting up displays, general dogsbody supporting the teacher in their role, giving them more time and space with the children and we were given more menial jobs which helped them work with children. Over the years, it led more into working directly with children, perhaps in groups or individuals, but still massively led by the teacher. Time went on again and you were given a bit more responsibility and not to the point of planning, per se, but using your own imagination somewhat. I suppose your skills helped with that as well, to the point now where TAs often do classroom cover... Looking back over 20 years, the role has changed so much and you do wonder who does the roles that we originally did, because we've moved on so much. (L: 1)

Harriet and Linda provide a concise summary of how changes that have affected their role as it developed over the years and through these offer a base for the exploration and

interpretation of data on this increasingly pedagogical role. This changing role is perceived as moving away from and different to the parent helper role.

Looking to the past Harriet talks of 'the old days' when it was seen as 'mums coming in to help', suggesting that the role was initially seen as an extension of the parent helper role and this links to their biographies. Whilst all of the TAs are parents, most beginning involvement with the school as volunteers, when they talk about themselves as a TA Harriet and Linda distance themselves from this role. They use arguably derogatory remarks when explaining the work of parent volunteers as 'only a bit of reading' or 'menial jobs' and they talk of parent helpers as a 'dogsbody'. Now that she is a TA, Avril suggests that she does see herself as different to a parent:

I started off as a parent helper. I was a nobody who has come in and is now valued in the school (A: 18).

Avril perceives a sense of superiority because as a TA she is 'valued', implying that she has more value as a paid member of staff than as a volunteer helper and she is an official member of the school team. These comments suggest a notion of a hierarchy within the school community, with parents viewed as 'a nobody' at the bottom with and TAs more valued in their role, which will be further discussed in Chapter 5. However, the comments also open up a contradiction in the role of a TA in that although they are all parents themselves, they are keen to distance themselves from a parent helper role.

In dismissing the contribution of parents to children's learning in contrast to their own as a TA, these TAs are clear how they have become much more linked in facilitating teaching and learning in the classroom over the years and no longer do they work as a 'general dogsbody.' Linda wonders who now does the jobs she used to do which suggests a lack of volunteers in her school which could reflect the growth of paid work in schools for support staff, encouraged through workforce remodelling. This perception of the TA role being increasingly distant from a parent helper is linked to their increasingly pedagogical role explained through the data. Harriet and Linda say their work as a TA now includes preparation, input into planning and working more directly with children, so recognising that over the years they have moved to a much more pedagogical role. Both TAs use the word 'responsibility' in contrast to a 'helper' in describing their current role and all the TAs

interviewed provide examples of how they currently support learning together in their classrooms with teachers. In Foundation Stage Kate prepares creative activities, takes small groups, supports outdoor play and reads stories, whilst in Key Stages 1 and 2 TAs talk of supporting the teacher by taking small groups, supporting positive behaviour management, providing intervention and taking the whole class. Avril provides a description of this role:

In our school, the role is to support the children's learning, not just educationally, but emotionally & socially. To support the teacher in delivering objectives, so you are supporting the teacher with their learning (A: 1).

She then adds more detail:

They have their 1-1 role where a pupil that's been identified as maybe having a specific difficulty the TA will support that child, whether it's literacy, numeracy to make sure the objectives are broken down into smaller pieces, discussed more. If it was a whole class TA, making sure that everybody is listening, so you are sort of behaviour management, poking & prodding where necessary, making children focussed (A: 2).

Avril confidently articulates the learning needs of children and uses vocabulary around learning, demonstrating an awareness of both the educational needs of the school the role she plays in meeting these. She is involved in the core subject lessons of literacy and numeracy and through the term 'objectives' is clear that the lesson has been planned with a clear learning purpose and whilst it has been planned by the teacher she can contribute through providing additional explanation and resources on an individual basis.

This leads to another issue within the changing role because Avril introduces the notion that support for learning can include more than academic work, because it can include emotional and behavioural support to help children learn. How this current role is enacted in the classroom and issues arising from it are the subject of the next chapter Policy into Practice, but the data show that the TAs have a clear awareness of their increasingly important role in supporting children's learning and they perceive their role as supporting the whole child.

To summarise perceptions in data on the changing role, the TAs suggest they have an increasingly important pedagogical role with a clear awareness of how they support both teaching and learning and well-being. The TAs perceive this is a more integrated role than the previous role held by most participants, that of a parent helper. They point out that whilst they have responsibility for this support it is the teachers who take the lead in planning and teaching and the sense of a hierarchy begins to be introduced between parents, TAs and teachers. Finally I suggest that these points demonstrate that whilst the TAs describe their role as more complex than a 'helper', it is still perceived differently to that of both a parent and a teacher and this introduces two contradictions in their role:

- The participants are parents but perceive themselves as much more than a parent helper in the role of TA.
- They use the language of education and suggest that whilst they have a pedagogical role, they are 'supporting'. In this way although they are not a teacher, much of the role they describe could be regarded as teaching.

This acknowledgement that TAs are not qualified teachers leads to the next section within National Frameworks, Qualifications and Training.

#### **4.3.2 Qualifications and Training**

There is no national mandatory qualification or training for TAs as explained in Chapter 2, in contrast to a nationally recognised qualification for teachers that is at degree level for teachers. The data suggests that TAs are aware that they are the have-nots, rather than the haves of a teaching qualification and that this affects their work in schools. This section introduces the value that TAs put on qualifications and begins to open up the importance placed upon them in the data. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Only Sarah and Harriet held a relevant qualification before being appointed as TAs, so seemingly the others were appointed for their personal skills and qualities including being a parent, with most of them being known to the school. Anecdotally, when working as Teacher Adviser around 2004 our team approved of qualifications not being essential because having to hold a qualification could be a barrier for existing parent helpers to gain employment. However, as the TAs say their role has become increasingly complex and skilled over the years, and as

their biographies demonstrate they are likely to have been carrying out their work with little or no relevant training on appointment.

All the TAs are working towards or had gained different qualifications including degrees, with most aiming for NVQs in Supporting Teaching and Learning, which were promoted through government policy as being relevant for TAs. All the TAs in this study apart from Harriet gained their qualifications including degrees whilst working, usually whilst managing their own children, arguably because this choice of career came later in life. Nicole illustrates the amount of dedication and effort involved in finding the time and energy for study:

I started going to college when my children were under the age of four. I did two days placement in a primary school and I did one day a week at the college. I had to put a portfolio together and it involved daily write ups about what I did with the children as well as the essays and things (N: 17).

The TAs may consider this effort worthwhile, seeing qualification as necessary to support their employability in the current economic climate, 'Jobs are on the line, we are fighting for our jobs' (S: 12). However, whilst the TAs do not discuss the actual content or academic level of NVQs, their value by others could be in doubt. One head teacher informally told me he only appoints graduates as TAs, because he considered that even if they only stay for a year they pick up everything more quickly and provide more effective support. This indicates that the content and academic level of TA vocational qualifications may not be valued as highly by head teachers as more academic qualifications in an educational setting. This head teacher considered a TA with higher academic ability more able to support children than a TA who is proven only to work with less academic engagement. However, Harriet suggests reasons why it was worth the effort of gaining qualifications, not just to keep or gain a job:

It's nice to see it taking on a more professional role, one where people can actually gain qualifications in, rather than being just an extra pair of hands, which is how it used to be (H: 23).

Harriet seems to perceive that qualifications are an indication of status, in this case a means of distancing a TA from a parent. However, this status becomes important to the TAs because they suggest it is a qualification that defines a tangible difference between a teacher and TA with comments including, 'They have qualifications so are better than us' (L2: 15) and 'The teacher is qualified and you take on the role of a TA knowing that you haven't qualified' (K: 17).

Harriet links qualifications with professionalism, using the term 'more professional role' and others in the sample suggest that having a teaching qualification is the factor which defines being the 'professional' in school, views demonstrated by the following comments:

I think the teachers are professional because she's gone through a degree but the TA might not have done. It's qualifications (K: 28).

Some TAs are well qualified but perhaps have taken different routes and don't have that qualification as a professional, a teacher (S: 5).

These suggest that they do not perceive their own qualifications as making them 'a professional' and that only the teacher holds this status, inextricably linked to the teaching qualification. In other words, it is the piece of paper, the actual qualification that makes the professional. Harriet is the only TA in the sample to make a career choice into childcare straight from school, anecdotally mentioning that she preferred not to be called a TA because she is a qualified Nursery Nurse. However even she comments that being TA is 'becoming more professional' (H: 23) rather than 'is professional', despite her insistence upon recognising her own qualification.

The TAs do not question the qualified and professional status of teachers. They accept that TAs are neither and do not question that there is a hierarchy. In other words these TAs link qualifications with power, a power held by teachers, not 'unqualified' TAs.

Sarah's comment, 'Teachers see themselves as more qualified than TAs,' suggests that teachers are aware of this hierarchy and she perceives that this can cause resentment:



I think the teachers study for qualifications for so long and they've worked hard it can seem that TAs just walk into jobs or they do it through an easier route and still get respect for it (S: 5).

Despite both accepting that they are not qualified teachers and identifying a teaching qualification as defining the professional in the classroom, the TAs consider that there is more to being a good teacher than qualifications, with Kate suggesting that other staff could be teachers, or even better teachers:

I've seen teachers who I personally feel aren't very good teachers and I've seen TAs who would be fantastic teachers if they had that qualification (K: 28).

I suggest this indicates that some consider that TAs could be capable teachers themselves with the actual teaching qualification being the major difference between being a TA and being a professional teacher. The data highlights that in addition to no mandatory qualifications, there is no national mandatory on-going training for TAs. The TAs indicate that there is no consistency between schools for appraisals or induction. When asked whether they have appraisal, most TAs in this study said that they haven't. Their responses include, 'Supposed to' (A: 11) and 'It's never been mentioned for a couple of years really' (L: 14).

Only Nicole has a regular appraisal, but she is disappointed with the outcomes:

I got the job as a Level 2 when I was a Level 3 (i.e. Nicole had gained an NVQ Level 3). It was only my third appraisal that my boss actually noticed that I had the qualification which I was a bit miffed about (N: 21).

They are really good cos you talk about what you do and what you'd like to do but I don't feel that my wishes or anything I've asked for has come true (N: 27).

This suggests that school was purely meeting its own requirements rather than providing a meaningful opportunity for discussion and development for the TA. Also, whilst Kate is the only TA to have a school induction, she has mixed feelings about its usefulness:

We have a folder to tell you about your role. No-one has actually gone through it with me; they just give it to you to read. So before I started I was given this package

about my role. They also gave me a package of how to work in literacy and numeracy as a TA (a written pack). No-one has actually gone through it with me (K: 18).

In summary, this section introduces evidence that the TAs accept and acknowledge there is a difference between the qualifications held by teachers and their own. The data show that the participants perceive a teaching qualification to provide professional status, which as TAs they do not have. The TAs value their own qualifications in providing additional knowledge to that of a parent helper and employability, and this adds to the notion of a hierarchy between parents, TAs and teachers. Additionally this section suggests that there were omissions from national policy of having no national mandatory qualifications, induction, training or appraisal. Keeping in mind the emphasis that TAs put on the teaching qualification as defining a professional, the lack of their own mandatory training could also be seen as maintaining a TA as a non-professional, a less competent other. How these tensions around professionalism, knowledge, role and hierarchy are enacted in practice will be further explored in Chapter 5.

#### **4.3.3 Economy and Accountability**

The data suggest there is a further omission from government policy that affects the work of TAs that of national guidance on TA pay and conditions. Chapter 2 notes that there is no national pay scale for TAs and that pay is relatively low compared to teachers. A colleague working for Lancashire Authority told head teachers, 'There is a difference in the role of a TA and that of a teacher – about £20,000 a year' (Hicks, 2010). The TAs do not talk about their pay in monetary terms and it would appear that they do not particularly challenge their pay scale possibly linked to their acceptance that they are not qualified teachers. However, the TAs in the sample are aware that being paid hourly affects their role. Whilst head teachers and teachers who are salaried may expect to work additional hours, they can forget that TAs are paid just for the hours that they work and any additional hours worked rely on their goodwill, for example:

I always stay that last half hour anyway and then one day I left early and I'd been there a year and they didn't realise that I really finished earlier and they asked me where I was going (S: 11).

I remember being guilty of this with the first TA our school employed in the 1990's, being shocked that she would not stay to help on Sports Day afternoon because she was only paid for mornings. The TAs do not talk about any regulatory body on pay and conditions, but I suggest this is because there is no such national body, with plans for a School Support Staff Negotiating Body being abandoned by the current Conservative-led Coalition government (Education Act 2011). The effect of this on TAs in schools will be explored in Chapter 5.

The TAs demonstrate awareness of the differential in pay between themselves and teachers in the data when talking about taking whole classes. They express concern that their relatively low pay could encourage their use as an economical alternative to a qualified teacher, even though none of the sample are used in this way. When talking about gaining Higher Level Teaching Assistant status which could carry an expectation that the TA would teach whole classes without the teacher present (National Agreement, 2003) Linda responds:

That personally to me wasn't the way I wanted to go. I just saw it as teaching on the cheap. I didn't feel that was valued. I just thought that was just another government initiative to get teaching on the cheap (L: 4).

Nicole gives her opinion:

These groups were run by a HLTA, but I think it should have been a supply teacher doing the job not a TA.... Because they don't have to pay (N: 28).

Harriet agrees and uses very powerful language in articulating her views:

Certain schools abuse the rule by using the TAs as teachers and teachers feel threatened – this was always about saving money (H: 30).

The word 'abuse' is very strong and I consider that it expresses clear disapproval of using TAs as teachers. Abuse also suggests that power is being exerted from a perceived strong position over a perceived weaker party in a detrimental way. All three TAs infer that saving money is the thrust behind this policy, rather than a professional development of the TAs themselves or improved outcomes for children. The word 'threatened' is also a strong term to use when talking about how teachers feel about TAs being used as teachers, and this

provides an introduction as to how TAs perceive this affects a teachers view of them and this is explored more fully in Chapter 5. It also adds to the data suggesting that TAs have an increasingly pedagogical role and that in a similar way to teachers having increased workload (National Agreement, 2003), TAs have an increased workload.

However, the data suggests that in response to National Strategies and policies, the TAs are taking individuals and groups of children for additional support and intervention programmes both within and outside the classroom:

I think that they (TAs) are very overstretched in our school, so in one way I think they are extremely valued. They will be asked to do extra intervention, or booster programmes so in that way, yes, but as a TA you do look on it that you are pulled from pillar to post to try to cover too many lessons. It doesn't seem to be much fun (A: 10).

Avril is describing how TAs are used in a more pedagogical role in working on intervention programmes and providing additional support to raise attainment, considering that whilst this increasing workload adds value and recognition to her role, this workload results in less 'fun'. This increased workload and accountability mirrors that of teachers and even though none of the sample take whole classes, Avril suggests expectations of TAs are high and in linking her work to attainment infers that TAs are accountable as to whether targets have been achieved. Additionally Linda remarks that there is accountability through external inspections:

We have so many more responsibilities and you are spoken to by Ofsted in our own right, rather than Mrs So & So's helper – mums who help in school – which it used to be (L: 2).

In summary of this section on economy and accountability, it supports the view that TAs are now not only expected to have a pedagogical role but that they are considered to be accountable for this both within the school and nationally through Ofsted in a similar way to teachers. Moreover, this indicates not only how the role of the TA has changed and moved away from being a parent helper but also opens up debate as to whether or to what extent TAs are actually teaching or not.

#### **4.5 Summary of Chapter**

Chapter 4 has presented data relating to the TAs perceptions around issues arising from national frameworks that have affected their role. It has suggested that increased numbers of TAs have been commissioned in increasingly pedagogical roles. The role has moved away from that of a parent helper in the eyes of TAs, and they describe their role as supporting children's learning, social and emotional development and that they consider themselves increasingly accountable. However omissions from national policy have meant low pay and no mandatory training for TAs, and the TAs have found difficulty in accessing qualifications and continuing professional development once in post. The theme introduces an emerging sense of power relations between parents, TAs and teachers, along with contradictions within the TA role of being a parent yet distant from a parent, and working in roles that the TAs describe as teaching activities though they are not a teacher. How these frameworks and issues are perceived to affect the role of the TA in practice is explored in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5

### Data Discussion - Policy into Practice

#### **5.1 Global Theme 2 - Interactions with Parents and Children**

This chapter seeks to discuss the practice of the TAs within the school through the analysis and interpretation of the two remaining Global Themes. The Interactions with Children and Parents theme explores the micro-level of interactions with these two groups, how this affects the TA role and the impact of TAs on these groups. The School Organisation theme explores their interactions with teachers and their role with respect to the whole school organisation. This chapter therefore interprets how the TAs perceptions of frameworks outlined in Chapter 4 are enacted in practice.

##### **5.1.1 Interactions with Parents**

The previous chapter pointed out that that the TAs are all parents and many had begun as volunteers, yet in their current position they wanted to distance themselves from this role. However, this section argues that the TAs identify with the parents in general and consider that being a parent has advantages for themselves, the school and other parents. The data suggest that other parents also recognise that the TAs are local parents themselves and this helps to forge a connection between them, and that living within the school catchment area facilitates knowing each other well on a local, personal level, 'The TAs are nearly all local people, therefore other parents know them, maybe not on a social level, but on a 'knowing level' (M: 2). This can contrast with parent's connections with teachers:

We are fortunate in having the church and I go to church, but most teachers don't go to church in our parish, so I form relationships there (L2: 4).

The participants therefore suggest that TAs and parents both have an enhanced insight into the lives of each other, so providing a sense of familiarity. On the other hand, the TAs perceive that parents view teachers in a very different way, as Mary suggests:

... we are more approachable than a classroom teacher because they are not necessarily local with children in the school. We are more approachable and they trust us a bit more (M: 2).

A gap is therefore identified between parents and teachers with a suggestion that TAs can fill this gap due to their local knowledge and familiarity. This infers that the roles of teacher and parent are seen as quite separate by other parents, whilst at the same time a TA and parent are seen as very much linked. Moreover, Laura and Mary suggest that in the eyes of parents a teacher becomes a non-parent or 'other':

They see you as a parent yourself, but don't see the teacher as a parent; they see a teacher as a teacher (L2: 3).

Some parents don't want to approach the class teacher – is that crossing the line, it's difficult to know if you are crossing the line. They see you and will approach you and again, teachers don't like this and maybe feel a bit jealous there (M: 2).

Mary talks of 'crossing the line' as if the work of teachers is seen by parents as somewhat sacrosanct and that parents are unwilling to directly question or cross into this work. This suggests that the participants talk of parents as having little power, and are nervous about approaching teachers who they see as wanting to remain behind 'a line'. This could also be interpreted as the TAs being unsure of their role in relation to parents and whether they themselves are crossing a line into the work of a teacher by being a different point of contact. In my own experience as a teacher, most of my peers expected parents to contact them directly and have dialogue directly, because they were the teacher with lead responsibility for the children in their class.

However, the TAs talk of a polarisation between the two groups, whilst perceiving themselves with a foot in both camps. The participants suggest that TAs are valued as a means of approaching teachers and this supports the concept that there is a gap between teachers and parents that the TAs perceive themselves as filling. The data suggest that this breaking down of the perceived barrier of unapproachable teachers is facilitated through informal communications between parents and TAs, for example at church. Parents, children and TAs can see and talk to each other without the parents entering the school building, which some may find difficult due to work commitments or lacking confidence in talking to those they consider to be professionals. Informal conversation can provide an opening, a way into giving reassurance and confidence to parents to approach other members of staff. The concept of TAs supporting the involvement of parents in their child's

school and education is too wide to cover in this study, but the data does indicate that TAs have their part to play and both parents and TAs would welcome this.

I also suggest that the TAs perceive that teachers may not be aware that they are seen as unapproachable, though whether this stems from the lack of confidence in parents approaching school or whether this gap is fostered by teachers either intentionally or unintentionally is outside the boundaries of this thesis, but data indicates that the TAs have awareness of its existence whilst TAs consider teachers may not. Linked to this, Avril describes a parent as 'a nobody', arguably inferring that such a description could be part of school culture:

I started off as a parent helper, I was a nobody who had come in and is now valued in the school and a teacher, old school, would say you are crossing the line, you stay out of my business really (A: 18).

In this way, the notion that TAs are in-between rather than at the bottom of the hierarchy and filling a gap seems to increase their feeling of self-worth. The TAs value their position of no longer being 'a nobody' (A: 18), no longer doing 'menial tasks' that parent helpers do (L: 1) and enjoy their status in the eyes of others, 'It's also a bit more status because people are more aware of having TAs in school' (H: 25). It could be argued that the TAs could therefore want to enforce their role by blocking communication between parents and teachers to maintain and increase these feelings of self-worth and to reinforce that they are in a different, perhaps higher position than parents through their link to the teacher and school organisation. In this way, whilst the participants value their role as a parent they consider that they are perceived as being more than a parent by both themselves and others.

The interviews contain only positive comments about TAs interactions with parents, suggesting they feel confident in working with parents, providing them with increased self-esteem and the following section will discuss how TAs similarly have confidence in their interactions with children.

### **5.1.2 Interactions with Children**

Laura suggests that children in a similar way to their parents find it easy to interact with TAs because they are local people who, for example, they see at church every week and as



discussed in the previous section this local knowledge is in contrast to that held by some teachers:

I get to see the children every week and they get to know you better and look forward to having you - a friendly face (L2: 4).

This regular contact, along with living in the local community facilitates informal interaction and familiarity and because some of the TA's own children attended their school they may know each other informally through their child's friendships. The TAs also suggest that children see the role of a parent and a TA being linked through the kind of approaches that they use, 'Some teachers are firm, whereas the TA can be mumsy and more approachable' (M: 1). In using the word 'mumsy', Mary could be somewhat stereotypical by seeing this softer approach as a natural characteristic of women and linking the TA role to being a parent, a concept that throughout the data the participants generally seek to avoid when talking about their role in the classroom. Mary seems to link a caring approach with the characteristics of being a mother and this is contrasted to the perceived approach of a teacher. However throughout the data the TAs link informal interaction as being an integral part of their own role in teaching activities. They talk of how being approachable with the children facilitates their role of supporting teaching, learning and pastoral needs within the classroom, 'We have a different relationship with the kids. We have more time', (N: 16). Additionally, the data suggest that TAs are physically closer to the pupils than teachers, because they are offering more individual interactions and discussions to support individual learning needs, both in general class support and for children with SEN:

Well to help the children access the curriculum. If they don't understand what the teacher is delivering to them I'm a sort of in-between. They can sort of say, 'What are they saying?' Or 'I don't understand'. I might be able to break it down for them (N: 10).

They have their 1-1 role where a pupil that's been identified as maybe having a specific difficulty the TA will support that child, whether it's literacy, numeracy to make sure the objectives are broken down into smaller pieces, discussed more (A: 2).

Within the context of these close interactions, the data suggest that TAs also facilitate the provision of pastoral care, guidance and support for pupils in schools. Avril's perception of her role in school is that, 'In our school, the role is to support the children's learning, not just educationally, but emotionally & socially' (A: 1) and the interviews are littered with numerous comments on their pastoral role. These focus on the perception that the TA is more approachable than a teacher: 'Often children are quite willing to come to a TA rather than the teacher' (L: 24) and 'She comes to me because she knows I'm a different person to the teacher personality wise and that she feels she can talk to me' (K: 6). The data suggest that the TAs perceive that the children see teachers and TAs in a different way and that in a similar way to teachers and parents, there is a gap between teachers and children that the TAs perceive they fill. The participants suggest this gap is filled because of their approachability and pastoral support, as explained by Nicole:

...I think they are more confident in the classroom because they've got someone there they can ask without feeling uncomfortable (N: 32).

Kate also provides an example:

For the child, it's another adult in the classroom that the child can trust. If for instance the child needs the toilet they get to understand that I would take them or be there just to assist them and also they get the trust of another adult in the classroom, so if there is an issue .. Well I have one where there is a little girl where in my view she is a bit wary of the teacher, but she comes to me because she knows I'm a different person to the teacher personality wise and that she feels she can talk to me (K: 6).

The TAs suggest therefore that children can feel 'uncomfortable' or 'wary' of approaching teachers, so inferring that children see a hierarchy of support with TAs as closer and more approachable than teachers. The TAs perceive themselves as in-between and in this sense they are maintaining and preserving their 'different relationship' (N: 16), but whether this is intentional or not is unclear. Harriet explains that having an additional adult other than a teacher in the room has benefits for both teachers and children:

Well its 2 pairs of eyes & ears & 2 pairs of hands so that's useful... Also if a child's struggling yourself or the teacher can go and deal with that need. It's great for differentiation. If the teacher is working with the more able group you have time for the lower group and the middle because they can get left out (H: 16).

However, she also shows an awareness that this close interaction could be detrimental for the child, but she knows a balance has to be struck:

The advantages – some may say that they grow dependant, but really it's getting that balance right so they are encouraged to be independent rather than dependant (H: 20).

Harriet is suggesting that this close interaction could encourage dependency on the TA and separation from the teachers, so maintaining or even widening the gap between teachers and children. I would suggest that this maintains a feeling of value that they receive from the pupils and provides a sense of identity which is different to that of a teacher. This is in a similar way to the value TAs perceive to have from close relationships with parents. However, Nicola offers a summary of why she feels this role is so important for children,

Again, think they are more confident in the classroom because they've got someone there they can ask without feeling uncomfortable. They know exactly what they are doing instead of saying so they get their work done otherwise they might just sit there. If you weren't there they just wouldn't get it done (N: 32).

### **5.1.3 Summary of Interactions with Parents and Children**

The data suggest that at this personal level, the TAs talk about their daily interactions with parents and children in a very positive way, with a perception that they have agency and a sense of status with these two groups. This is in contrast to Jean's comment in the first sentence of Chapter 1 when she talked of being 'a lesser being'. The data suggest similar threads running through their interactions with both children and parents. Local knowledge and living in the local community is seen as a strength for TAs in forming relationships with both groups. The TAs are familiar within the locality and this provides a shared experience of community, which could be considered as contributing to an empathetic relationship. The data suggest that TAs have knowledge of families and community issues that teachers do

not because teachers are not local. The participants describe how parents and children view TAs as being in a different role to that of the teacher whilst still supporting learning and the word 'in-between' is used within the data. They describe themselves as 'approachable' (M: 1; M: 2) with both parents and children, and suggest that this enhances children's learning and emotional needs and also breaks down perceived barriers in parental engagement with school. The data suggest the participants consider that teachers may not be aware of these gaps and therefore that such an intermediary role is necessary. However, the TAs indicate that they do have a role, an identity that is valued by children and parents as well as by themselves. The sense of hierarchy that the data allude to in Chapter 4 now emerges as less clear cut and more complex, with participants suggesting that in some contexts children and parents value TAs more than teachers. The contradiction between being a parent and non-parent is also evident, along with the contradiction that whilst the TAs are not teachers, the TAs perceive themselves as valued in a role that traditionally has been done by teachers.

## **5.2 Global Theme 3 - School Environment**

The third and final global theme, School Environment, explores how teachers and the school organisation work with TAs on a day to day basis and therefore how national frameworks are enacted in practice on a day-to-day basis.

### **5.2.1 Working With Teachers**

The first section explores the working lives of TAs and teachers who physically work closely together in the classroom. Whilst it could be argued that any working environment shared by adults could bring collegiality or tension or a mixture of the two, a closed classroom can be particularly challenging. The effect of personality is explored first, followed by how the two roles work together reflecting both negative and positive perceptions of TAs. The chapter ends with how they perceive that the whole school organisation affects their role.

#### **5.2.1.1 Personalities**

The TAs pragmatically accept and acknowledge that their own and their teacher's personality has an effect on their role and working relationship. It could be argued that personality has an influence over many working relationships, but I suggest that this is

particularly important for two or more adults working for much of the day in a confined classroom with a large group of children. The TAs biographies show that they have worked with different teachers apart from Sarah and Mary who work with one class teacher providing general class support. The teachers and TAs are therefore expected to adapt to working closely with different staff and I would argue that common sense would suggest that these may not always run smoothly. All the TAs consider that the relationship with the teacher is the most important factor affecting their role and state this explicitly, for example, 'It all depends on the relationship between the TA and the teacher' (L2: 1) and 'The relationship is the key -- communication' (S: 1). Laura suggests the relationship needs to be more than a working relationship, and that it should extend to a social relationship:

If you are not the same type of person and you wouldn't dream of socialising with them it must affect your working relationship (L2: 9).

I suggest this is a narrow approach by Laura, because other TAs talk of having good working relationships with no mention of friendship, such as: 'Trust and expectations I think. I need to know what they expect at the end of each session and having that good relations is very important' (A: 15) and 'the disadvantages could possibly be a personality clash... They might not get on. I think you have to try to find a balance and though it's not discussed you find a plateau for your role' (K: 11). Nevertheless the TAs consider that happy, informal interactions are important and have advantages by acting as role models for children and that friendly banter between them makes the relationship 'work':

It's getting on with them [teachers] – asking what they've done at the weekend – the staff that I haven't had that with, the banter, it doesn't work. Surely that has an impact on the children, because it's modelling good behaviour by two adults having a conversation (L2: 13).

Laura finds herself very motivated when she gets on well with the teacher, ultimately resulting in more work output, higher job satisfaction and career progression:

...in a positive relationship, you don't mind taking things home. You could see it that they [teachers] are putting more and more work on you but in a positive

relationship, you don't mind... I loved it I thrived on it. I wanted to prove myself by doing a good job. That's when my career took off (L2: 18).

The TAs are therefore aware of the importance of these positive interactions and suggest that these support the classroom becoming more conducive to learning for children. The TAs acknowledge that they have some agency within this relationship, as Sarah explains:

An experienced TA knows how to get round barriers and you just play a waiting game – you have to be subtle and hope the relationship happens (S: 10).

### **5.2.1.2 Drawing a Line**

However, whilst teachers and TAs both have their part to play in positive interaction, earlier data and discussion suggests that this is not an equal relationship in that the TAs accept that the teacher is the lead adult in the room. This relates back to the previous Qualifications section which suggests that TAs perceive teachers to be the professional because they are a qualified teacher, whilst the TA is not. Previous data indicates that TAs accept that they play a supporting role and the teaching qualification is accepted as a tangible difference between them. Linda talks about her developing role as 'still massively led by the teacher', despite having increasing responsibility:

Time went on again and you were given a bit more responsibility and not to the point of planning, per se, but using your own imagination somewhat. I suppose your skills helped with that as well, to the point now where TAs often do classroom cover (L: 1).

Avril also provides a description:

In our school, the role is to support the children's learning, not just educationally, but emotionally & socially. To support the teacher in delivering objectives, so you are supporting the teacher with their learning (A: 1).

Avril uses the word support three times in these two short sentences and her description has a focus on this as supplementary to the teacher, through terms such as 'discussed more', 'extra input' and 'extra resources'. The words support and supplementary suggest

the work of TAs is additional to the teacher, rather than alternative. In this way, the data again suggests an acceptance of the TA role, rather than challenging the status of a teacher.

All the TAs identify that this difference between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' of a teaching qualification has implications for their working relationships with teachers and Avril particularly links this difference in qualifications with creating tension:

A TA has come in and hasn't got the same qualifications. I started off as a parent helper. I was a nobody who has come in and is now valued in the school and a teacher, old school, would say you are crossing the line; you stay out of my business. They may feel threatened (A: 18).

I would argue that Avril is suggesting that teachers feel threatened because there is a less qualified adult in the room who even though they may not perceive themselves to be 'a professional', could be seen as becoming 'more professional' (H: 23). Avril expresses a concept of a 'line' by suggesting that there is a boundary that the teacher was unwilling to let others cross, with a sense of such defensiveness that the teacher felt threatened. This comment implies that the classroom is seen as the teacher's domain where the TA can feel an unwelcome interloper and Laura adds to this view using stronger vocabulary:

Some are scared of letting us win aren't they? They want to have the classroom to themselves as their classroom. It's ownership - the control - if they let you in you may judge them or correct mistakes and if anything goes wrong having an extra adult might be added pressure from their point of view (L2: 16).

This suggests that the TAs perceive that teachers may feel judged by TAs, particularly if anything goes wrong, and linking back to previous data demonstrating that TAs can be older and seen as more experienced, this could be understandable. However, I would argue that it also could indicate a lack of knowledge about the TAs role. I note that in my own teaching experience working in front of an observer such as during a formal observation was embarrassing and stressful, but working with a close colleague was a pleasure, because they would step in, support and help. I consider that in Laura's situation the teacher does not view the TA as a colleague taking a full part in supporting the lesson, but instead that the TA

was a critical, judgemental observer. Nicole also suggests that some teachers are not sure of her role:

I find it annoying when they tell you what to do, who to sit with and a lot of teachers will say oh will you just copy this for them and I have to say I'm not here for that I'm here to help the children who need encouragement and help (N: 13).

This perceived both lack of understanding of the TA role and perceived defensiveness of the teacher leads to a sense that a line is being drawn between teachers and the TAs. Within the context of the classroom where TAs work with teachers, the phrase 'drawing (or crossing) the line' is used frequently in the data about both supporting learning and a pastoral role. In this way, the debate concerns two linked areas within a pedagogical role and these will be explored in turn.

### **5.2.1.3 A Pedagogical Debate**

The TAs perceive that teachers want to draw 'a line' between their own work and that of TAs when building relationships with children in a pastoral role. Chapter 4 has already explored how TAs consider that they are more approachable than teachers with a perceived gap between teachers and children that they can fill. Both Linda and Laura use the word 'jealous' to describe how teachers feel about the perceived closer pastoral relationships that TAs have with children; Linda links this to 'control' and extends her own perceptions on this by saying:

Often children are quite willing to come to a TA rather than the teacher and I think that can make the teacher feel jealous. And I think it's about control... They obviously have ultimate control and if they think that is being threatened it can affect their relationship. Its control and they don't like us crossing the line and don't like it when the children are open with us. I think that if one child needs help and they have 30 children to look after, they are losing control of this one child and they don't like it when we have that freedom (L: 24).

Linda is suggesting that teachers feel they are losing control over the children by seeing TAs 'crossing the line' and Laura adds weight to this view when she summarises the main issues in creating partnerships with teachers, 'Power and control – whether the teacher feels



threatened or not, or jealous of your relationship with the children. They want to keep their status' (L2: 16). Laura uses the words 'power', control' and 'status within two sentences, within a context of the teacher being at risk of losing these because their professionalism and power is being brought into question by the TAs closeness with the children. The TAs are suggesting that teachers feel threatened and even though Nicola prefers not to use such strong vocabulary, she is aware that relationships with children can cause tensions:

I know you are supposed to help the teacher but I think a lot of them feel like ...well not threatened, but if the kids are coming to you all the time and not them I don't think they like it (N: 14).

Earlier in this chapter, the TAs arguably perceived that pastoral care is an area of activity teachers do not have time for or are expected to hand over to TAs if they are to concentrate on teaching and learning. This is demonstrated by Avril and Linda working increasingly as Learning Mentors, providing pastoral care whilst working and being paid only as Level 3 TAs. If this care becomes increasingly the responsibility of low paid, less qualified staff, it could imply a de-professionalisation of pastoral care and at the same time could link closely with the development of the whole child not seen as the main role of the teacher.

This would indicate a crossing and blurring of boundaries between roles of a teacher and TA and I suggest that TAs perceiving teachers as 'jealous' or even 'don't like it' indicates that their teachers consider that the TAs moving into their role, undermining their position as educator of the whole child.

Teachers being perceived as wanting to 'draw a line' also becomes apparent through the data when TAs talk of their role in directly supporting children's learning. TAs were introduced partly as a response to teacher workload, as indicated in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, but the data suggests the workload of TAs themselves has increased in the amount and complexity of tasks, as Linda explains:

Looking back over 20 years, the role has changed so much and you do wonder who does the roles that we originally did, because we've moved on so much (L: 1).

Although they accept that they are not teachers, the TAs clearly perceive that they perform many roles which Harriet concisely describes:

... Lots of TAs do preparation, they have an input into class planning, they are given areas of responsibility including planning, preparation and more responsibility (H: 25).

Planning, preparation and responsibility could clearly be assumed to be the role of a teacher so there does seem to be a blurring of roles, though I would argue that in practice, if job descriptions (Appendix 2) are being adhered to, a TA would do these under varying degrees of direction from the teacher according to whether they are Level 1, 2 or 3 TAs. Linda is clear that she expects and accepts this direction:

Over the years, it led more into working directly with children, perhaps in groups or individuals, but still massively led by the teacher (L: 1).

However, the repeated use of 'drawing the line' during interviews demonstrates that the TAs perceive that there is a boundary between their work and that of teachers but what that boundary means is unclear. I suggest that these boundaries are very much linked to how the role of the TA was envisaged in relation to the 'essential' and 'non-essential' roles of teachers in the Good Practice Guide (2000) discussed in Chapter 2. The data suggests that a line between what is essential and nonessential is a fine one with debate as to what constitutes 'teaching' and how adults who are not qualified teachers should be involved in the teaching process.

The data suggest the TAs accept the teacher is the lead and are therefore expecting them to direct the learning and share relevant pedagogical ideas. They want to know teacher expectations, particularly through planning to provide learning objectives and the TA role in delivering these. The 'threat' that the TAs perceive teachers have by their presence and the 'drawing of a line' is talked about mostly in the data through the willingness or not of teachers to share their perceived expertise. The TAs suggest they want two types of clear guidelines about what the teacher expects from both the TA and children - general information about their role and also expectations about lessons.

This desire for clear general expectations is evident with replies including, 'Clear guidelines from the beginning when you are working with a member of staff to make sure you fully understand what they want to achieve by the end of that lesson,' (A: 4), and 'Making sure

you are all singing from the same hymn sheet so you know what's acceptable and what's not' (L: 12). TAs are accepting current discourses of accountability and prescription around teaching and learning by hoping for clear learning outcomes, planned content and assessment that lesson plans could contain. They are demonstrating acceptance that lessons should be planned, organised and taught within a prescriptive framework, with clarity on what will be achieved. The TAs infer that accountability of teachers and TAs for children's progress is evident with pupil achievement measured and assessed at the end of each lesson, on an everyday basis. The TAs are keen to know what is expected of them and this suggests that they consider themselves accountable for their contribution to these outcomes with their performance scrutinised. Whether a plan can contain any more than the content of the lesson, the delivery, rather than how it will be taught is not a focus for this thesis, but without having this basic prior knowledge, the TAs are listening alongside the class and learning what is expected in the same way as the children:

If you don't know what the plans are, you are just chasing along behind, you are not really part of it because when the children are listening to it, you are listening at the same time. You have no pre-knowledge of what the expectations are (L: 22).

I would argue that working in these classrooms the TAs are being treated like the children, as passive listeners who are being asked to carry out learning activities, rather than adult partners who along with the teacher can make a proactive contribution to helping children learn. TAs may feel engaged in a deeper level of partnership if they were involved and in wanting more information, I would argue they demonstrate confidence that they could support the children competently. Laura notes that this would help both the working relations of the adults and learning of the children:

With the teacher and TA it can be an us and them and that must have an impact on children's learning because plans aren't discussed or implemented in the same way (L2: 1).

Avril is also aware of how this would benefit the children:

Well I'm just trying to think for me, reading the plans so knowing what the outcome needs to be, so would've sat with children who needed that extra input and explain it a little more clearly using extra resources, so children might get whiteboards (A: 3).

Linda suggests the implication of being able to prepare for lessons is important for how others will see her:

Yes you have to have something ready – not just jump in and look as though it's amateur. I'm sure that with classroom organisation, if you knew where things were, you could do that and feel comfortable doing that (L: 6).

The amateur/professional binary is obvious here and I would argue is used in a similar context to qualifications because she does not want to appear to be without knowledge of what is happening. Whilst Linda does not view herself as professional, she does not want to appear amateur either and I suggest this also links back to distancing herself from a parent helper. Being amateur is being linked to being unprepared, not knowing what the children are being expected to do, which could be appropriate if you were doing 'menial jobs' (L: 1). Analysis of the data suggests that whilst the TAs perceive knowing teacher's expectations and curriculum plans is crucial to their role, whether or not this happens varies from case to case and Avril acknowledges that some teachers are unwilling to share information with them, 'I've worked with certain members of staff that don't come up with plans, or don't like handing their plans over to TA' (A: 5).

In the context of this data, it could be argued that the teachers may want to 'draw a line' between what they perceive a teacher needs to know and what a TA needs. Whether information from plans provides full information on how to teach a lesson is open to question, as the data suggests that teaching is more than being able to deliver learning objectives as a technology of teaching. However, the TAs perceive that having access to any knowledge regarding teaching and learning is variable in schools on a day to day basis and this causes a divide between teachers and TAs and lessens the contributions that TAs can make to children's learning.

#### 5.2.1.4 A Different View – Working Together

The previous section arguably paints a rather negative picture of TAs working with teachers, but some express a more positive view in contrast to this somewhat gloomy picture. Instead of a perceived atmosphere of distrust and threat, some TAs talk of the two roles working successfully together for mutual benefit. Harriet explains, 'You are meeting lots of needs. You are sharing the pressure' (H: 29) and examples are offered within the data of how the working relationship between a teacher and TA works well. This concept of working together successfully is highlighted by Kate, albeit in two different ways when she says:

We have one teacher where her and her TA work very well together. Her personality is 'let's all get on together' but she is still the teacher, she has the responsibility. I've seen another teacher and TA who work differently – they are quite business like and they have their own territories that they get involved in (K: 16).

Kate's first example is a teacher who takes the lead but is keen to work together with the TA, with an acceptance that whilst they work as a team, there is an agreed leader. She suggests that the TA accepts this because it is the teacher who has the responsibility and in the light of the National Frameworks, I would argue this includes responsibility for accountability. This acceptance that it is the teacher who should lead has been referred to in other contexts within this discussion, including this acceptance that a teacher has a nationally recognised qualification that the TA does not have. This example of successful working infers that not only the teacher and TA recognise and accept a hierarchy, but there is a willingness of both to work as a team. In other words, they have mutually agreed roles. Kate's second example offers a different example of a teacher and TA working in mutually agreed roles, with a teacher and TA working alongside each other in their own areas or 'territories'. The words 'own territories' suggests even though a line is drawn, each knows their own role and can work alongside each other in their own areas of work. Both are considered successful by Kate and that they are just different ways with one not being better than the other. However, both rely on an understanding that both not only do both have their own role to play, but they both know what each other's role is. Laura offers another example of successfully managing the class together when she explains:

We don't play good cop bad cop but sometimes it can look like that to the children (L2: 2).

I would argue that the whole scenario of good cop, bad cop, suggests that these adults are working as a team in a pre-arranged understanding of their roles, with each playing their own part. The TA says that they don't play this game themselves, but acknowledges that children could be aware that whilst there are two different characters or identities in the room with two different roles they are working as a team. It is therefore likely that the children will understand this relationship as a positive one.

These examples demonstrate that a teacher and TA can work out their own way of working together and infer that knowledge of each other's role and mutual respect would underpin this. This study suggests the sample TAs are experienced and competent and value the role they play in supporting children, parents and teachers. Throughout the data, the TAs offer a clear view of what their role is, but I would argue that the more negative aspects of teachers and TAs working together can occur when teachers do not value the TA role in the same way, or have a notion that TAs threaten their professionalism. I suggest the question remains how teachers are supposed to know how the two roles fit together, because national frameworks offer no training for teachers in working with other adults in the classroom. With the lack of national guidance, it would seem that the nature of staff working relationships could be directed through the organisation of the whole school and this is explored in the next section.

### **5.2.2 Whole School Organisation**

With a lack of national guidance on working with TAs, it is at school leadership and management level that the data suggest affects working arrangements within the school. The senior leadership and management could therefore be seen as pivotal in the way TAs are deployed. Schools can decide at a school level how many TAs they can employ with their hours and level of responsibility, whilst having to work within the parameters of funding and Special Educational Needs provision, along with the pressures of accountability through results and OFSTED, as indicated earlier in the thesis. In this environment, it would seem not just desirable but imperative for school accountability that the school budget is being administered effectively with the maximum impact on children's learning. The

previous chapter highlights how school organisations are held to account through national systems of economy and accountability, but the data suggest that the TAs have only limited awareness of details of these frameworks. Instead, the TAs consider that the attitudes and organisation from senior leaders and the head teacher affect their role on a day to day basis. According to the perceptions of the TAs some schools make good provision for the deployment of their TAs, but some do not and the data suggests how the TAs perceive school organisation impacts on their practice in a number of ways. This section demonstrates that the attitude of senior leaders is therefore crucial to them being valued and part of the school. Harriet perceives that being included as part of the whole staff team makes a difference to her role:

Probably being included as a member of staff within the school, first of all and being made to feel valued... also to be part of the group in staff meetings, what goes on in the school, so you feel a team member (H: 6).

To be included for a start. To be asked my opinion on different things is really important and also to feel you can approach people if you have a problem and also to feel your viewpoint counts (H: 8).

Linda suggests that their attitude to TAs being valued as part of the school team particularly relates to whether it is seen as linked to the role of a parent helper. She also adds to the view that as a parent helper she would not feel valued, reflecting that she considers this to be the attitude of senior leaders:

I think senior management have to value TAs roles or else you are just a mum helper there, because you feel yourself not valued (L: 11).

This suggests that the attitudes of senior leaders towards support for TAs depends on an understanding of their current role and whether they value this enough to include TAs as part of the school team. The data suggests this affects the work of TAs on a very practical level.

Earlier in the chapter the data suggests that TAs want to have knowledge of lesson plans and offers an explanation that TAs have difficulty accessing this because of negative teacher attitude. However, school structures dictate the amount of sharing time available for

teachers and TAs, which offers a different reason why teachers find it difficult to share planning information. Apart from lunchtimes (which anecdotally are not always paid), break times or snatched moments, most TAs find there is little or no time allocated within the structure of the school for TAs to gather information and Sarah offers a good summary of restraints:

If teachers and TAs had time to build up a proper relationship with regular meetings and time to talk without having to grab two minutes while the children are getting the books sorted out and you can speak to them about how the teacher wants them to behave and it is clear to both parties (S: 5).

In contrast, Kate and Harriet are allocated time within the school day for sharing information with teachers. The timetable of Andrea's school allows time for her to talk to the class teacher weekly 'about how it's gone and the next stage' (K: 19), when children were being taught by another teacher. Harriet explains that she snatches time to talk with her teacher:

Sometimes it's done first thing in the morning or I have a copy of the lesson plans and just a conversation – it doesn't have to be a formal meeting, just a chat, even if it's over lunch or after school... we used teacher training days, but I was lucky, I was given time to prepare things. Once the group had settled down I was able to do other things, so it did fit around what was going on (H: 14).

Harriet still is expected to use her own unpaid time at lunchtime or after school and also that she considers herself 'lucky' to be given preparation time, suggesting that this is not usual practice in other schools.

Previous data and discussion have indicated that there is no mandatory appraisal or induction for TAs and the head teacher is also seen as the gate keeper to continuing professional development. In a similar way to Harriet Linda uses the word 'lucky' when she described her access to 'quite a lot of training' (L: 15). Avril argues that 'I have a very good relationship with the head and she trusts me to know what my training needs are so I go to her and 9 times out of 10 it's a yes' (A: 12). This suggests that preparation time and



professional development is not offered as a matter of course by schools, but seems to be offered on an ad hoc basis, rather than through school's structure and strategic planning.

I would therefore argue that despite national frameworks affecting schools as a whole, there is a difference how they are enacted at school level through whole school organisation. Additionally, every TA talks about teachers having different ways of working and examples of their concerns include:

You all know the school rules, but does that teacher do things differently? (L2: 12).

It's their way of teaching as well. It's their expectations of the year – we don't know – everyone's different. They all work in the same school but have different standards themselves (M: 7).

This section has identified a hierarchy within the school organisation and that attitudes and actions of senior leaders have a significant impact on the overall success of how they work as a school team. I would argue that if senior leadership and management acknowledge the value of TAs then they would encourage staff to do the same. I would suggest that this could shift the balance of power in the relationship where rather than the TA feeling a 'lesser being' they could be viewed as a full member of the team.

### **5.3 Summary of Chapter**

This chapter has offered an analysis and discussion of interview data around TA practice in schools. Chapter 4 had provided analysis and discussion on how national frameworks had affected the TA role in general and the how these frameworks and the biographies of the TAs had affected each other. This chapter has had a focus on how these frameworks and the TAs meet together within the environment of the school to put these policies into practice. The data suggest the TAs are particularly confident in their role with parents and children and have confidence that they can make a positive contribution to meeting children's learning and social and emotional needs. This sense of value is described through providing something they perceive as missing, in that there is a gap to fill between both these groups and teachers. Whether this is a bridge joining the gap or a wedge maintaining or widening the gap is unclear, but the TAs are clear that filling the gap is an integral part of their role. This provides a dilemma in the form of contradictions. All are parents, yet want to distance

themselves from being seen as a parent helper. They are not a teacher but describe much of their role within activities that could be described as teaching. However, this is not to say that do not perceive themselves as having a role of their own in schools. Although they use the word in-between they value this role as a niche role in itself and feel valued by both parents and children. Some of the participants also described their role being valued by teachers, though often the data referred to this working relationship as being complex. On a daily basis, teachers and TAs are the two adults who need to develop a working relationship, but the TAs talk of teachers feeling threatened by their role, particularly when they are seen to cross the line into the teacher's work. In this way the TAs perceive that the teachers feel their professional identity is questioned and challenged by confident TAs with an increasingly pedagogical role. Additionally, whilst a hierarchy has become apparent between TAs, teachers, parents and children, the TAs talk of parents and children preferring to interact with them than a teacher, so the power relations become more complex

The participants suggest that school support for TAs varies from school to school and the attitude of senior leaders is seen as crucial to this. The TAs acknowledge that schools are accountable both financially and through the standards agenda and that the work of TAs is part of this. However, they suggest their potential is not always used, for example because time is not planned to facilitate meetings between TAs and teachers and access to development and training opportunities are not readily available, and these could be facilitated through whole school organisation and leadership. There are examples of teachers and TAs working well together however and the TAs suggest that this happens when the teacher and TA have mutually agreed roles and that these do not have to be equal as the TAs suggest they are very accepting that the teacher takes the lead.

The data and discussion from Chapters 4 and 5 will now be used to support the final conclusions of this thesis, linked to the aims of this research and the questions it sought to explore. Chapter 6 will demonstrate how my thinking and conclusions have been informed by theory, literature around the work of TAs and this data and discussion.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter concludes this thesis, which has made a contribution to a field of study that is currently low on researched evidence, and has increased my own knowledge and understanding of the working life of TAs. The project had three aims:

1. To explore the implications of national frameworks around the current work of TAs.
2. To examine TAs' perceptions of the roles they have in schools and classrooms.
3. To examine social and institutional factors that impact on the role of TAs in schools and classrooms.

My substantive question, 'Working within a national framework – what are teaching assistants perceptions of their working lives?' aimed to examine these as lived and spoken within the schools, with the underpinning driving force being that the perceptions of the TAs themselves should be privileged in order that their own views around the joys and tensions of their role could be heard. This research asked three sub-questions:

1. In what ways do TAs perceive their work is driven by national frameworks?
2. How do TAs perceive national frameworks are enacted in policy and practice of schools and classrooms?
3. How do TAs consider they are positioned within schools and classrooms?

This chapter explores how the knowledge gained through this process has helped to achieve the aims of this thesis and make a contribution to the existing body of research around the work of TAs. The chapter firstly summarises the extent of how the aims of this thesis were achieved and describes how the main contribution of this study is to privilege the perceptions of the TAs themselves, albeit with the caveat of using the lens of my own interpretation. The chapter then summarises my interpretation of these perceptions within the data, presented through the three sub-questions underpinning this research, using literature and theory to support this discussion. The contribution these make to the body of literature in this field of study is discussed and these lead to suggestions for future policy in the work of TAs and suggestions for further research. The thesis ends with my own final

thoughts on my own hopes and fears for the future of TAs that have emerged through this research process. Finally, in keeping with the approach of this study the final words are those of a TA.

## **6.2 The Perceptions of Teaching Assistants**

I suggest that the main contribution of this research project has been to provide an opportunity listen to the voice of TAs, directly exploring their views and perceptions of their roles in school and classroom.

Flutter and Ruddock (2004) suggest that changes in education tend to produce a framework that concentrates on a controlling technical framework rather than considering how humans live and work:

It overemphasises linearity and pays insufficient attention to how people respond to change and either support or subvert it (Flutter & Ruddock, 2004: ix).

This study has acknowledged how the working environment in schools has been subject to a range of external pressures and changes, which Ball (1993: 120) suggests is, ‘a massive over-determination of the work of teaching’. To simply map the demands of government fails to, ‘acknowledge the impact of macro and micro influences that serve to shape any policy into practice’, according to Ball (2008 cited in Tucker, 2009: 297). Most studies at the micro-level of schools are written from the viewpoint of others, including teachers’ (Yarker, 2005), bodies linked to the accountability of TAs (Ofsted, 2009; TDA, 2009), and researchers interested in aspects of TAs such as the remodelling agenda (Gunter, 2007; Hammersley-Fletcher & Adnett, 2009). There is not a wealth of literature on TAs that explores the perspectives of TAs directly (Bedford & Wilson, 2008), as reflected by Mackenzie (2011: 2):

TAs appear to have little say in what should happen to them, and appear to be often excluded from discussions about the children of whom they have expert knowledge.

Most other literature that does explore the views of TAs has a narrow focus such as gender (Graves, 2013) or training (Brown & Devicchi, 2013). O’Brien & Garner (2001) and Dillow (2010) explore the lived experience of TAs as a whole through telling their stories, providing a broad picture of their role and my research project also aims to put TAs perceptions at the

heart of a study with a breadth of focus. However, this project provides an original contribution to research in that it reflects a changing political landscape during a time when the work and impact of TAs is being questioned. Additionally, using interviews as method led to analysis that makes explicit links to the implications of national frameworks on the TA role and the positioning of TAs within schools.

This research project has been carried out and written in the second decade of the twenty first century, during a time of political change. The Coalition government had been elected in 2010, replacing a Labour government whose policies such as remodelling the school workforce and Every Child Matters had influenced the growth and popularity of TAs in schools. The Coalition brought in changes that would negatively affect TAs such as dissolving the TDA and reducing the work of Local Authorities and this political change is documented in Chapter 2. Moreover, this research project began after the publication of a report by Blatchford et al. (2009) that questioned the impact of TAs on the attainment of children and these changes in the world of TAs are reflected within this study, ensuring that the contribution and originality of the thesis are as current as possible.

The chosen research method is interviews. Whilst Silverman (2013: 4) may consider this decision is made because I am part of an 'interview society' where 'lived experience must be investigated', similar arguments could be made that Dillow (2010) is part of a reality television society where lived experience must be laid bare for all to see. Chapter 3 clearly explains my decision, where in order to examine TAs' perceptions of their role, this study strove to explore their world using Kvale's metaphor as a traveller. The interview was viewed as a 'construction site of knowledge' (Kvale, 1983:174), with the interviewer telling a tale of the travels unfolded through interpretations upon returning home. Whilst I have visited and worked for years in the world of TAs, using this metaphor I have sought a different perspective on this area, that of the local inhabitants. In doing so I recognise that I am recounting this world through my own eyes and ears, not free of my own values and histories (Brown, 2008). This has been a complex process with myself firmly situated within the research, and an acknowledgement that these perceptions have been created and told as a contextually bound and mutually created story (Scheurich, 1995). I also acknowledge that both myself and the participants operate within current discourses on education. Ball

(2013: 19) suggests that we both may find it impossible to think or be outside a discourse, with Foucault suggesting this is the domain of subconscious knowledge.

This thesis has opened up discussion and contributed to the body of literature around the work of TAs, from a different perspective to other studies. Chapter 4 provides a space for TAs perceptions to be voiced and listened to and Chapter 5 draws together their perceptions with frameworks and literature that surrounds their work. The perceptions of the TAs remain at the heart of this study and are used to draw conclusions on how national frameworks have affected their working lives, how these frameworks are enacted and implemented and how the TAs perceive they are positioned in school.

The contribution of this research project is therefore to provide a space for the perceptions of TAs to be heard. These perceptions not only paint a picture of their working lives, but have been listened to closely in order to draw conclusions about their work and to make suggestions to improve their working lives in the future. Their perspective on day-to-day life in schools sometimes made uncomfortable reading for me as a teacher, particularly on the perceived unapproachability of teachers for children, TAs and parents. Despite working with TAs for years, some views that they offer through this process have surprised me and have demonstrated that there are alternative versions of reality and truth. These will now be explored through the three research questions, where the contribution to knowledge and links to literature within this research will be made explicit.

### **6.3 The Research Questions**

Tucker (2009: 299) suggests that whilst it is important to understand the political terrain around government and TAs, it is necessary to understand how the macro and micro levels of experience intersect and relate, so we see:

The emerging policy into practice trajectory within the context of a broad socio-political framework where dynamic tensions occur and will continue to do so.

The first question therefore explores how the work of TAs has been driven by national frameworks on a macro-level with the remaining two questions having a focus on how these are enacted in practice at a micro-level in schools.

### **1. In what ways do TAs perceive their work is driven by national frameworks?**

This question links to Aim 1, to explore the national frameworks around the current work of TAs and I suggest that this relates closely to the text of policies which Ball (2004) would argue create circumstances giving a range of options or particular goals or outcomes. I recognise that a Foucauldian account would suggest that there is a set of complex relations surrounding this 'successive metamorphoses of the school' (Deacon, 2006: 176), and rather than just a chronology of events there is a set of contingencies that surround and shape the work of TAs. My interpretation of the data suggests an example of such a contingency, with the desire of women to work outside the home emerging as a key factor in the employment of the participants, providing a workforce eager to fulfil a role that fits in conveniently with other commitments. In this way Foucault has challenged my thinking that there is a simple cause and effect model of government policy and legislation. However, I suggest that policy and legislation provide a legislative vehicle for written guidelines for the educational system which schools are expected to follow. I therefore suggest, following Ball (2004), that the apparatus of the state cannot be ignored and that actions (and non-actions) by state systems have made a difference to the work of TAs as experienced by the participants.

This research project has extended knowledge and understanding of how state frameworks have driven the work of TAs. Whilst the data does at times reflect existing literature, this existing work is presented as a patchwork of literature about how state systems may affect the work of TAs. The data and analysis in this study offer clarification that their work is affected by commission and omission by state systems. In this way this study clearly suggests a binary of how proactive commission of policies by government has affected the TAs, whilst inactivity in government policy has also affected the work of TAs and in this way draws together the perceptions of TAs with existing literature using a different perspective to other studies.

#### Commission

This research suggests that the commission of national policies and frameworks has affected the work of TAs with three issues emerging:

1. The role of the TA has changed during the working lives of the participants, some of whom had worked as TAs for over fifteen years, with the TA role now including the support of children's learning, behaviour and social and emotional development and also support of parental engagement with the school. In this way they carry out 'a myriad of roles' (Muiji, 2003), having wide ranging roles and levels of responsibility (Hammersley-Fletcher & Strain, 2008) requiring adaptability (Graves, 2013). These data also agreed with the view of other scholars that the TAs are used as part of the inclusion agenda (Blatchford et al., 2009; Teeman et al, 2009) and to support curriculum strategies (Tucker, 2009). The implications of commissioning such a large number of adults in classrooms who are not qualified teachers, undertaking a diversity of roles and tasks are explored throughout this conclusion.

2. TAs in this study have limited awareness of discourses around their own accountability. The data suggest that the participants believe and accept the altruistic aim of the commission of the Workload Agreement (2003), which was to raise standards and to tackle teacher workload through the use of support staff, by constantly referring to the perceived advantages of their work for children, parents and teachers. There is some awareness of 'performativity' (Ball, 2009) with reservations expressed about using TAs for whole class cover and they use language which suggests teachers and TAs could be held accountable for children's learning, such as 'outcome' (A: 3) and 'impact' (L: 2). However, only Linda was explicit in explaining how this agenda could result in TAs' own external accountability in that they can be spoken to by Ofsted in their own right. Her view could be interpreted as the TAs having an acceptance of discourse around their work and the work of schools: 'Well that's what life's like isn't it? That's just what happens, its school life in general' (S: 7). This acceptance is not highlighted by other scholars, so I suggest this is a contribution to knowledge by this research. I also suggest that as an individual interested in the work of TAs this is a cause for concern, because there has been an increasing discourse questioning the value of TAs in recent years. Other scholars suggest that the increased commission of TAs has been rooted in other policies and legislation such as increased accountability through Ofsted and a standards agenda (Stevenson, 2007; Hammersley-Fletcher & Adnett, 2009), so it would follow that the large amount of a school's budget being spent on TAs could be questioned in relation to impact on children. Recent literature has presented a negative view on the accountability of TAs (Whitehorn, 2010; Brown & Devicci, 2013, Blatchford et al.



2009), where the impact of TAs on pupil attainment has been questioned. This could reflect and develop the continuing direction of performativity and market forces evident in current government policy such as the promotion of academies and I suggest schools and TAs may be forced to consider this to support their further commission and sustainable employment.

3 This project has particularly highlighted that the role of the TA could be seen as a job of convenience, rather than a career choice per se. The data demonstrate how the commission of policies encouraging the employment of TAs has provided work for a large group of women (Watson et al., 2013) in an educational, professional environment, valued as a return to work that created minimum disruption to child care. The attraction of the role is evident in that the sample TAs have changed to this employment from a variety of skilled jobs held previously and this research suggests this attraction is related to their lifestyles and a gender imbalance within TAs, reflecting the work of Graves (2013).

Whilst the data therefore supports literature that many TAs take on the role because it fits in with family commitments, the role may not just be a job of convenience for mothers. In recent years I have worked with Apprentice TAs who are not parents, but have still chosen to be a TA because it fits in with their lifestyle. One apprentice is involved in theatre performances so school hours provide additional time for rehearsal; one wanted to complete an education out of college or high school and even Jean who began this thesis with her comment, 'She makes me feel like a lesser being', was a teacher who wanted what she perceived to be a less stressful job than that of a teacher.

In this way, this research adds to literature because the role may not be initially attractive as a vocation, a career in itself, but instead seen as a role by TAs as convenient, part-time and facilitating a life outside that of education. If TAs begin with little training or without a sense of vocation, they begin without these professional constructs (Friedland, 1994), which when working alongside teachers could perpetuate the impression of a TA as 'a lesser being' (Jean) by others in and out of school. However, they are being increasingly commissioned to perform a role that could be described as teaching and this has implications in practice which will be discussed through the two questions later in this chapter on practice and positioning.

## Omissions

Butt & Gunter (2005) suggest that commission of TAs occurred even before research on the use of TAs was complete and Tucker (2009) suggests little thought seemed to have been given to how their deployment would unfold in practice. The data agree that lack of direction has had implications for the work of TAs and particularly highlight three omissions in National Frameworks that have had an impact on the role. All three omissions identified reflect the findings of other scholars.

1 None of the TAs apart from Harriet had a relevant qualification before starting work as a TA, reflecting that national policy has failed to stipulate a minimum qualification requirement for employment as a TA (Good Practice Guide, 2000; National Agreement, 2003). The importance the TAs place on the teaching qualification and their desire for knowledge themselves is a thread running throughout this research, and the data suggest this omission has a large impact on the identity of TAs, their working relationship with teachers and on the positioning of the TAs within the school which is discussed later in this chapter.

2 The TAs talked of low pay scales, which are based on an hourly rate and how they are expected to work extra hours without being paid. This reflected Blatchford et al. (2009) and Ofsted (2010) who commented that that their good will is indispensable in schools. Salaried teachers, paid with an expectation that they work longer hours than the contact time with children, seemed to ignore in this study that TAs have different pay and conditions. Again this has had a major impact on their professional identity and positioning in school and this is discussed in the remaining two questions.

3 The data also demonstrate that there is no mandatory national framework for on-going induction, training or appraisal. The TAs are therefore reliant on school systems being in place for them to know what is happening in lessons and what was expected of them in their role. These findings reflect a wealth of literature (for example Cajkler et al., 2007; Bedford et al., 2008; Blatchford et al., 2009). The data suggest TAs seek information from the teacher, but its accessibility depends on whole school systems within the organisation in addition to the attitude of the teacher. This is compounded by the omission of training in 'working with other adults' in teacher training. I particularly consider that this research

reflected the work of Blatchford et al. (2009) who argue that it is unrealistic for TAs to be held accountable for pupil progress if national policy has omitted to put frameworks in place to support their work in schools.

The final two questions explore how the implications of these commissions and omissions on the work of TAs and the whole school community.

## **2. How do TAs perceive national frameworks are enacted in policy and practice of schools and classrooms?**

This question explores how the participants suggest that in practice the TA role is multi-faceted. The data suggest that they adapt not just their practice, but their sense of identity to meet the needs of themselves and others, reflecting Hall (1992 cited in Jones, 2007: 5), 'we are confronted by a bewildering fleeting multiplicity of possible identities any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily'. Whilst this multiplicity of identities is described as having a chameleon quality by Graves (2013), in this research project it becomes particularly evident that their identities as a parent, TA and teacher form an underlying issue in their practice. Firstly, the participants are parents, but the data suggest that they want to distance themselves from being parents whilst in the role of TA. Secondly, the participants suggest they accept that they are not teachers, but accounts of their role would suggest they are carrying out activities that are teaching. Whilst these identities are reflected in literature (Graves, 2013; Farr, 2010), this research project particularly highlights these contradictions in their identities throughout the data, shaped not only by their own perceptions of who they are, but also the perceptions of others. In other words the role is not just multi-faceted because of the jobs they do, but because of their contradicting identities.

### Parents, but Not Parents

It is well documented throughout the thesis that the participants are all parents and this research suggests there are two implications of this for their work with parents in the school community.

Firstly, being a parent is seen as advantageous for a TA. The TAs suggest that having the skills of a parent are very appropriate for their role, such as discipline and control alongside

listening and comforting in that they offer emotional and behavioural support to pupils. It could provide, 'a form of identity affirmation and cultural legitimacy' (Watson et.al; 2013: 130). The TAs emerged as confident in working with parents, considering themselves to be an approachable face of the school. The participants suggest that parents are willing to approach a TA, because they link TAs with their own identity of being a parent as Laura explains, 'They see you as a parent yourself, but don't see the teacher as a parent; they see a teacher as a teacher' (L2: 3). The TAs suggest that parents find the perceived attitudes of teachers as a barrier to them being more involved with their child's learning. In this way, the data suggest that the TAs are intermediaries between home and school, reflecting findings from other studies including Alborz et al. (2008), Tucker (2009) and Griangreco, Suter and Doyle (2010). The TAs express that they have a sense of value by providing a role where it is advantageous to be seen neither as simply a parent or a teacher, but someone in-between.

The alternative facet of a parental identity for the work of TAs is that the TAs seek to distance themselves from being a parent in their role as TA in the classroom. They suggest their work requires additional skills and knowledge to that of a parent helper, showing awareness of their increased pedagogical role and allegiance to being part of the school team. This research therefore suggests that there is a contradiction in their role where the identity of parent is valued, yet they distance themselves with a more professional identity at the same time, so they are caught between 'a rock and a hard place' (Farr, 2010), not only in their own eyes, but in the eyes of others.

### Teachers but Not Teachers

This thesis suggests the second contradiction in the identity of TAs is that they are teaching, but they not qualified teachers. Again, the TAs suggest that their identity is multi-faceted, seen by themselves, teachers and children in different ways. The data suggest that TAs carry out many aspects of teacher's work, reflecting the role of TAs nationally (Butt & Lance, 2009; Hammersley-Fletcher & Strain, 2008; Blatchford et al., 2009). This is despite a suggestion that 'there has been a general denial that TAs are in fact teaching', (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010: 446). The data suggest the TAs link themselves to a teaching role through a description of their work and by suggesting their role requires more skills and knowledge than a parent helper.

Linked to this is a debate surrounding the contribution of pastoral care within the practice of teaching. Hamblin (1978: xv in Edmund & Price, 2009: 302) suggests:

Pastoral care is not something set apart from the daily work of the teacher. It is that element of the teaching process which centres around the personality of the pupil and the forces of his (*sic*) environment which either facilitate or impede the development of intellectual and social skills and foster or retard emotional stability.

As a participant in this study says, 'In our school, the role is to support the children's learning, not just educationally, but emotionally & socially' (A: 1) and the TAs enjoyed this pastoral care and feel valued by the children in that they talk of children finding them 'comfortable' (N: 11, L: 18), and 'approachable' (N: 12, S). This positioning of TAs will be discussed within the next research question, but the TAs consider that children view them as different to teachers, 'She comes to me because she knows I'm a different person to the teacher personality wise and that she feels she can talk to me' (K: 6). The word 'in-between' (N: 10) is used in a similar way to the parent – teacher relationship. The data suggest that some TAs perceive they are providing this support instead of the teacher, that children approach TAs in preference to a teacher, as an alternative. In other words, the children value them as having a different identity to a teacher, valuing this perceived emotionally and socially supportive role.

The TAs identity in the classroom therefore emerges as multi-faceted, seen by themselves, teachers and children in different ways in different situations. Moreover I suggest that it is not just the different tasks they perform that makes their role diverse and complex, but also these multiple identities that they change and adapt during their working day when working with teachers, children and parents.

This practice of qualified teachers and unqualified TAs working together leads to the discussion of the third question of this thesis, which centres on how the notion of power affects the work of TAs.

### **3. How do Teaching Assistants Consider They Are Positioned Within the Framework of Schools and Classrooms?**

This research highlights a contradiction in the data, regarding how TAs see themselves positioned within schools. The TAs suggest they work within a hierarchical system in schools, yet at the same time that more complex power relationships are at play.

The data suggest the TAs are part of a hierarchical community, positioned between teachers and parents and also positioned between teachers and children. The data suggest that the TAs have superiority over parents, for example with Avril's comment, 'I started off as a parent helper, I was a nobody' (A: 18) and this distancing from a parent role has been explored in the previous section. However, the TAs consider teachers to be in a superior position to themselves in schools, linked to being haves or have-nots of a teaching qualification. It has been documented throughout the thesis that TAs consider the teacher to be professional (A: 18, K: 28, M: 5) using qualifications as both defining professionalism and power within the relationship. This reflects Lowe & Pugh (2008) who suggest TAs view power as something that is held and exercised by others and that the tangible teaching qualification as the unquestioned difference between themselves as teachers, with the perceived specialist knowledge providing unquestioned power. The data suggest that TAs accept their position, 'We don't want to be equals' (L2: 15) and 'We know our place' (S: 8), using though no-one goes as far as TAs in the study by Watson et al. (2013: 115) who describe themselves as 'pond life'. This mirrors my own previously held view that there is a top-down structure of power in schools, though I had considered TAs being seen by others as underdogs, as lesser beings rather than 'in-between' (N: 10), and this had been a trigger for undertaking this study.

Whilst the TAs express this seemingly clear hierarchy and to being in-betweeners within school communities, the data supported by readings of Foucault on power relations suggest more complex power relationships. He argues that power should be seen as a verb rather than a noun (Mills, 2003), where power circulates in a network and this network of power relations is evident within the data. This study has already documented that legislation provide a vehicle of power enacted by government, but the thesis has also explored how

legislation and policies are enacted in practice in different ways in consideration of policies of text and practice suggested by Ball (1994) in Chapter 1.

Despite demonstrating an arguably top-down approach, the data has shown how TAs enact their role in different ways. Whilst the TAs may consider that they are superior to parents, literature supports an alternative view. Ball (1993) suggests that the introduction of market forces into schools means that elements of control have shifted from teachers to parents via parent governors, parental choice and published test results. Parent View, an on-line survey that is used as a main source of gathering parent's views is used to contribute towards, 'Ofsted's risk assessment process to determine when a school should be inspected' (Wilshaw, 2013). Parents are consumers, bringing funding to the school through the enrolment of their children and their views could direct the use of TAs as Gunter (2008: 267) suggests:

The irony is that the most unmodern of those involved in Remodelling, that is, parents, could be the ones to derail the deregulation of schools and teaching, mainly because they will want their children to be taught, and taught by qualified teachers.

The data also suggest that TAs consider that their position is more integrated with that of teachers and parents because of the multi-faceted identity discussed in the previous question. The TAs are seen as shifting between the identity of TA, parent and teacher, so the notion of a fixed hierarchy proves difficult. The TAs talk of teachers holding power over themselves, parents and children, but I would suggest that generally these three groups centre their lives or work on meeting the needs of children so children become part of this network of power relations.

Finally, there is a range of literature suggesting that teachers can consider their professionalism is being undermined by TAs (Yarker, 2005, Butt & Lance, 2008) and the data suggest teachers can feel intimidated by confident experienced TAs and that their own role is under threat by unqualified staff, with the TAs noting that they consider teachers can feel 'jealous' (S: 1) or 'threatened' (A: 18) by their presence in the classroom. Following discussion around the previous question, the TAs could be seen as pushing the boundaries into the professional identity of the teacher. Despite the TAs linking qualifications to professionalism which could be seen as 'outside-in' professionalism described by Stronach

et al. (2002: 115), I would suggest the 'inside-out' professionalism of teachers is a much more personal, internally driven concept of what it means to be a professional. The multi-faceted identity of a TA could touch or even seem to be attacking the core of what a teacher considers a professional teacher to be, a sense of autonomy and responsibility for the whole child, academically and pastorally:

Qualified Teacher Status indicates a recognition, acceptance and commitment to the ethical claims of the role, to its moral and social dimensions (Yarker, 2005: 174).

However, within this set of power relations I would conclude that the perceptions of the participants could be reassuring to those concerned about teacher professionalism and this reflects Dillow (2010). The TAs are clear that their role provides them with their own special position in school and they feel valued and confident in this. They have agency themselves when working with parents, teachers and children. Watson et al. (2013: 115) suggest that whilst the discourse of TAs providing support has 'worked to legitimise their poor status', TAs could instead be regarded as different professionals with the TAs in their study constructing 'their own form of professionalism in a far more subjective manner based upon relationships, rapport, support, empathy and a genuine concern for children'. This will be discussed further in the final section of this conclusion.

#### **6.4 Suggestions for Further Research**

The focus of this study has been deliberately wide in order to privilege the voices and concerns of TAs through my substantive research question, 'Working within a national framework – what are teaching assistants perceptions of their working lives?' and this chapter clarifies how the aims of the study have been achieved through examining my three research questions. Throughout the research process data emerged that was unexpectedly interesting which could potentially have taken the focus in a variety of different directions. These could be used as a springboard for further research, to follow one or more of these tangents in order to extend the study and develop the work further:

1 Further exploration of how gender affects the way male TAs are viewed in schools by others or research into the perceptions of male TAs on their role. Statistics demonstrate that numbers of male TAs is relatively low compared to females (Blatchford et al., 2009) and



research could suggest reasons for this and perhaps trigger change in this gender imbalance.

2 The voice of others in discrete groups such as children, parents or teachers could provide an understanding of the TA role from different perspectives. There are studies with a focus on the perspectives of teachers, for example how working with TAs raises questions on professionalism (Yarker, 2005) and there are also studies examining the perspectives of both TAs and teachers on working relationships (Wilson & Bedford, 2008; Butt & Lance, 2012). However, there is particularly little work on the views of children or parents and Tucker (2009: 248) suggests that:

In order to gain the most comprehensive view possible as to the nature, relevance and value of the work undertaken by TAs, it is necessary to capture and analyse the views of both children and their parents and carers.

He acknowledges that there is much more work to do in this area and that the perspectives of these groups is hard to locate. However, I would argue that such work would provide valuable insight into the micro-levels of experience surrounding the TA role from stakeholders directly involved with the practice of TAs.

3 Research on how the pastoral work of TAs could add to the attainment and achievement of pupils. The participants consider they make a large contribution here, but this study also indicates a changing landscape where performativity and accountability are seemingly driving government policy. Further research around the contribution of pastoral support to children's learning may support their sustainability as part of the school workforce.

4 Further exploration of how schools can be encouraged to support the work of TAs, for example through guidance to schools or teacher training. This need has been highlighted many times in previous literature (Blatchford et al., 2009; Balshaw, 2010; Brown & Devicci, 2013) and by 8) which suggested that whole school organisations need a clear strategy in supporting the work of TAs. The data suggest TAs would value this in developing their role in classrooms and that mutual understanding of roles is imperative within the close working relationship in confined classrooms.

## 6.5 Suggestions for Practice and Final Thoughts

In conclusion, I am drawn to Flutter and Ruddock (2004:3) whose analogy of a football stadium to describe the school environment for teachers and pupils seems relevant for schools today, where the work of teachers and TAs and performance of pupils is being watched and scrutinised:

Targets and goals, 'performance' and 'league tables' are the banners waved enthusiastically by policy makers and the media and, just like football teams, teachers and pupils [and I suggest TAs] find their performance vilified when public expectations do not seem to have been met.

At the time of writing this thesis, this study suggests there are banners being waved that could have a profound effect on the employment of TAs. Funding is changing, such as The Children and Families Act 2014 which changed funding attachment to children with SEN previously used by schools to fund TA support. There has been criticism of TA's close interactions with children (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010), and questioning of progress made by children they support (Blatchford et al. (2009). Also schools are externally judged through SATs results which are measured academic outcomes and it could be difficult to measure the impact of this social and emotional support. This research suggests that it is at school level where national frameworks and the professional and personal identities of the people involved meet and work within this 'football' environment. Teachers and TAs are the two adults who need to develop a working relationship on a daily basis in the classroom within complicated relations of power, and personal and professional identities.

The TA role has become diverse and multi-faceted and data suggest that it changes not just from school to school, but classroom to classroom and each of the TAs had differences in their histories, bringing different strengths to their schools. The TAs in this research consider that they should be supported and valued for what they are and the benefits they perceive to bring to the role. This thesis now makes suggestions for practice, based on the perceptions of TAs within this study:

1 This research has provided a different perspective for looking at the role of the TA and they have been clear that they have a valuable role to play. I suggest that schools and staff

need a shared understanding of what they want the TA role to be, particularly a shared understanding of how TAs contribute to learning through emotional and behavioural support. It would seem appropriate, following the different perspective offered by this study, that TAs should be involved in these discussions.

2 The TAs perceive that pastoral support is an integral part of supporting children's learning and they contribute to this. In these times of increased accountability and standards agenda, this research suggests this could be recognised and used in as a contributory factor when tracking children's progress.

3 TAs see themselves as providing a link between school and parents and I would suggest that schools could consider whether they are hard to reach schools for parents. A suggestion for future practice is to encourage these 'approachable' TAs to bring parents into school life through informal meetings and projects, with a view to introducing them to teachers in informal ways. This could encourage the use of TAs in being a bridge into school and increase partnership rather than hierarchy.

4 The participants were keen to distance themselves from a parent helper role and this research strongly suggests that the TAs would value on-going development. Induction, appraisal and Continuing Professional Development emerge as ad hoc and this research suggests that the attitude of senior leaders as crucial in this. I suggest it is difficult to attribute blame to TAs themselves if their knowledge of pedagogy is seen to be lacking in any way if they do not have access to on-going professional development opportunities.

5 This study suggests that the TAs are clear that they perform a valuable discrete role in school, about the benefits they bring and what they need to continue and develop this. The TAs talk about what affects their role, but it has also emerged how they have affected the world around them. This research suggests that the participants see their role not as replacements for teachers and not as an unqualified helper, but as a role that is valuable in itself. Kate and Laura in this study both gave examples of teachers and TAs working as a team together, working within mutually agreed roles, demonstrating that this is possible.

This research suggests that the TAs value their role and with management of schools devolved to head teachers, albeit within a discourse of performativity and it is, as Balshaw

suggests (2010:338), 'the attitude of these school managers that matters'. Following Foucault, it would seem prudent for government, schools and staff to consider whether they are in a mesh of power relations and that value for the role of TA from policy makers and school communities would ensure that TAs (and teachers) need never again to have to say they feel like 'a lesser being', but instead they are just different, both with a role to play in helping children to learn and to be happy. Finally, it seems fitting to end with a short phrase from Laura which sums up a message from the perceptions of the TAs that I suggest has emerged through this thesis:

But we don't want to be equals – we don't want the work and the planning they do but I think there is a line when any adult deserves to be treated with respect. We all work in a school, we daily tell children to treat each other with manners and respect and certain staff can totally do the opposite (L2: 15).

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## Appendix 1

### Pen Pictures of the Roles of Teaching Assistants

#### **Level 1**

Under the direction of the classroom teacher, mainly concerned with the physical needs of pupils, will have a limited involvement in the supervision of directed set tasks, but will have greater involvement in the preparation of resources, basic record keeping and supporting the teacher with classroom organisation. It is envisaged that their contribution to the curriculum would be limited to ensuring the availability of resources, aids and materials.

#### **Level 2(a)**

Would be expected to receive clear guidance from the teacher in respect of their work with individuals or small groups. Their role would be to ensure pupils remain on task and to report progress to the teacher. These staff would build positive relationships with pupils and assist them to complete structured learning activities.

#### **Level 2(b)**

Under the general supervision and direction of the teacher, to plan and implement learning activities for individuals and groups. To monitor pupil progress and provide feedback to the class teacher and establish supportive and constructive relationships with pupils parents and carers.

To provide short term cover for classes to which the Teaching Assistant is normally assigned, when the class teacher is unexpectedly unavailable.

#### **Level 3**

Expected to work with the teacher in a collaborative way, by contributing ideas and strategies. Will assist with the planning, delivery and evaluation of the curriculum and its differentiation amongst pupils. Would be expected to plan and implement teaching and learning activities to individuals and groups, to undertake supervisory cover for classes as appropriate and establish - supportive and constructive relationships with pupils, parents, carers and the wider community.

**Higher Level Teaching Assistant**

Will work under an agreed system of supervision, supporting the qualified teacher as a part of a professional team. The HLTA will contribute to a range of teaching, learning and pastoral activities in areas where they have expertise. The HLTA will plan their role in lessons, preparing, delivering, assessing, and marking learning activities for individuals/groups or short term for whole classes. The postholder may have responsibility for a specialist area within the school and may also co-ordinate and manage the work of other Teaching Assistants.

## Appendix 2

### Transcript Avril

M As concisely as you can you tell me what you think the role of a TA is in your school?

A: 1 In our school, the role is to support the children's learning, not just educationally, but emotionally & socially. To support the teacher in delivering objectives, so you are supporting the teacher with their learning.

M That's great, so in your school how would you say you actually do to support children's learning?

A: 2 Various roles. They have their 1-1 role where a pupil that's been identified as maybe having a specific difficulty the TA will support that child, whether it's literacy, numeracy to make sure the objectives are broken down into smaller pieces, discussed more. If it was a whole class TA, making sure that everybody is listening, so you are sort of behaviour management, poking & prodding where necessary, making children focussed.

M Thank you, so you have said the specific and in the classroom. What sort of things does the TA do to support children's learning?

A: 3 Well, I'm just trying to think for me, reading the plans, so knowing what the outcome needs to be, so I would've sat with children who needed that maybe needed that extra input and explain it a little bit more clearly using extra resources, so children might get whiteboards. Some children are more visual learners. It's looking at children who are not in the er... normal category.

M That's great. So in your school what I want to know is what helps you do that job as well as you can? What is there in place that helps you as a TA really feel you can do your job to your best?

A: 4 Having clear guidelines from the beginning when you are working with a member of staff, to make sure that you fully understand what they want you to achieve by the end of that lesson. All different staff work differently. I find that at the beginning of a lesson, I like to have the plans or a copy of the plans, gather my own resources (pause).

M That's fine. So really, you're using your own initiative going to look at the plans, aren't you?

A: 5 Yes, but I've worked with certain members of staff that don't come up with plans, or don't like handing their plans over to TAs.

M We will come on to that in a minute, but let's look on the positive – so it helps you do the job if you can see the plans.

A: 6 Yes, if you know the learning outcomes.

M So what about the structure in the school. As a TA do you have a particular responsibility or is it just a responsibility in that classroom? Some TAs do more literacy, or they do an intervention programme?

A: 7 At the beginning in our school, the TA was given to each class who did everything – literacy, numeracy... Personally, I did literacy & numeracy and the afternoon was spent doing literacy & numeracy booster groups.

M Right...

A: 8 I was seen as that was where my talents lay, so I never got to do any of the nice things like Art, DT, which are the nice things you get down with the kids to do. That's how I was used for the first couple of years. Then things changed. I was all day in class with a different teacher with a different year group, so I just did literacy, numeracy, reading group and not as much intervention – more classroom support. So I've been used in various ways.

M So it's changed from year to year and from teacher to teacher.

A: 9 Yes, yes.

M And what about senior management. Would you say senior management support the TAs in their jobs? Do you think the TAs feel valued?

A: 10 I think that they are very overstretched in our school, so in one way I think they are extremely valued. They will be asked to do extra intervention, or booster programmes so in that way, yes, but as a TA you do look on it that you are pulled from pillar to post to try to cover too many lessons. It doesn't seem to be much fun. The teachers seem to have more

fun! Do senior management value TAs? I think they value the work that they do as long as they are doing what they're told.

M Thank you. So... what about the structures in school that supports you. Do you have appraisal?

A: 11 Supposed to. It has happened previously, but we have had a change of head. The previous head we didn't, we had a temporary head – we did, we have a newish head – we are supposed to.

M So what about your training needs then?

A: 12 My training needs are – I have a very good relationship with our head and she trusts me to know what my training needs are so I go to her and nine times out of 10 it's a yes.

M Right thanks for that. So you say things change from teacher to teacher. Let's think about the teachers you have a good relationship with. What is it about the relationship with a teacher which helps you as a TA do your job well?

A: 13 Trust. I've worked with several teachers. All of them have been a positive experience. I've worked with one teacher for quite a long time where we used to read each other's minds basically, so I was very rarely asked to do something it was just automatically done. but now looking back, I'm no longer with that teacher, I did more than expected and was frowned upon by other TAs because I was doing more than they were and ...

M Are you saying that between the TAs themselves there can be some tensions about their role?

A: 14 Yes. There are those that do and those that do that extra and I'm one of those that will do that little bit extra. I use my own initiative quite a lot and I think that's got me where I am now.

M So what is it about the relationship with the teacher that enhances your role?

A: 15 Trust and expectations I think. I need to know what they expect at the end of each session and having that good relations is very important.

M So let's think on the negative side. In your school what is it about the structures, the organisation that you're working in that could stop you doing your job as well as you want to?

A: 16 Jealousy is one.

M Who from?

A: 17 From other teachers who have TAs who don't pull their weight. So if you went to them and asked for advice, they are very reluctant to share things with you.

M So why do you think that is?

A: 18 Because I think some of the teachers might feel threatened themselves. A TA has come in and hasn't got the same qualifications. I started off as a parent helper, I was a nobody who has come in & is now valued in the school & a teacher, old school, would say you are crossing the line you stay out of my business really. They may feel threatened.

M That's interesting, thanks. So is there anything else you want to add about any negative aspects that could be a barrier to doing your job?

A: 19 There are a lot. It's just identifying them. I do think it's I trained to be a teacher and you are only a TA. You haven't put the work in as much as I have.

M That's been great A – thank you.

### Appendix 3

#### Harriet Transcript

M Thank you for talking to me. If I asked you what the role of a TA was, what would you say?

H: 1 I think it's to support the children, the teacher and the school.

M So what sort of things would you do to do that?

H: 2 Well first of all for the child, it could be to prepare work and lesson plans, have an input with the class teacher as well – hopefully work together, not team teaching but together as a partnership..

M Right...

H: 3 And also then to support the ethos of the school, so then it all flows together.

M So you see it as 3 things really, the children, teacher and then the whole school. So on a day to day basis then with the teacher, how would you help the teacher – what sort of things would you do?

H: 4 Well first of all, hopefully it is a partnership so you know each day what you are meant to be doing, probably sharing lesson plans, so I know where I fit in and also the needs of the children on that particular day, so I fit in with what the class teacher wants for the particular needs of that child or children.

M OK, so if you were supporting a child with learning, what sort of things do you actually do to do that?

H: 5 Well I could prepare worksheets or flashcards, or perhaps games, or I might withdraw the child from the group if they were struggling, though I think it's important to support the child within the group so it's not as noticeable, so you are supporting everyone and the child does not feel singled out.

M Good, so in the classroom you seem really clear what your role is, so what sort of things help you do your job really well? There are 2 ways of looking at it – from the actual teacher



you are working with the person you are working with and then the organisation with school or classroom organisation, so let's look at the school as a whole – what helps you do your job as a teaching assistant?

H: 6 Probably being included as a member of staff within the school, first of all and being made to feel valued. Then have a clear view of your role – what the school expects – that could be entirely different from the class teacher, and also to be part of the group in staff meetings, what goes on in the school, so you feel a team member

M So you feel valued and part of the school?

H: 7 Yes. Yes I do. I've been really lucky. Not only with the school, but friendships within the school as well.

M So what makes you have that feeling of being valued?

H: 8 To be included for a start. To be asked my opinion on different things is really important and also to feel you can approach people if you have a problem.

M So you feel that actually happens with you.

H: 9 Yes, yes I do.

M Good, thank you. So you feel being valued is the main thing that helps you do your job.

H: 10 Yes I do and also to feel your viewpoint counts.

M Thank you. So is there anything that happens either with the teacher or the school that is a drawback to you or that is a barrier to you doing your job really well?

H: 11 I've been lucky. I haven't really found barriers. I feel that if I was unsure about role I would actually go & speak to the teacher face to face to get a clear understanding of what you both expect and it's nice then to work as a partnership, valuing each other's skills & qualifications & things like that.

M So you feel the teacher has made you feel a partner?

H: 12 Yes

M So how have you managed to do that?

H: 13 For a start off, it's the way you are being spoken to, it's being asked the question, it's the checking that any guidelines are known by both of us, not just one of us. It's also being able to have quality time when you can come together to go through things.

M How did you manage to have that time?

H: 14 Sometimes it's done first thing in the morning or I have a copy of the lesson plans and just a conversation – it doesn't have to be a formal meeting, just a chat, even if it's over lunch or after school.

M Good and just one last thing on that – was there time built into the school day or did you find yourself doing it at lunchtimes or when you were paid?

H: 15 Both. We used teacher training days, but I was lucky, I was given time to prepare things. Once the group had settled down I was able to do other things, so it did fit around what was going on.

M Thank you. So within the classroom, what do you feel the benefit is for the children in having more than 1 adult in the room?

H: 16 Well its 2 pairs of eyes & ears & 2 pairs of hands so that's useful... Also if a child's struggling yourself or the teacher can go and deal with that need. It's great for differentiation. If the teacher is working with the more able group you have time for the lower group and the middle because they can get left out. Plus you can bring your own experiences with you as well so you can almost team teach. In emergencies you can step in and help – it is like team teaching, it's valuing each other's skills.

M Yes, would you say the children had a similar relationship with you & the teacher or were there any differences do you think?

H: 17 I don't think so. I think the children know who the teacher is. I always feel very valued in the class & the children always know who to go for what they need so the boundaries were sub-consciously set.

M So what sort of things would you say they come to you for, perhaps come to you first instead of the teacher.

H: 18 I don't think there is anything in particular but for learning they would look to the teacher first, but if they needed extra support they know that support is there, so it's a safety net. I think they find it very useful.

M I don't mean this in a negative way, it can be very positive too – how do you think they differentiate between you, with the things they would ask you and the things they would ask the teacher?

H: 19 I think they know who the teacher is. I think the boundaries are already set. It comes from the discipline the teacher sets.

M So you talk a lot about the advantages, but do you think there are any disadvantages first of all for the children & secondly for the teacher.

H: 20 I can't see any disadvantages apart from the fact that it was noticeable if I'm not there. It's nice to be missed not only by the class teacher, but by the children themselves. I think the teachers I have worked with are more than capable to work without me, but it's nice to have that person there. The advantages – some may say that they grow dependant, but really it's getting that balance right so they are encouraged to be independent rather than dependant.

M Are you talking about the children there or the teacher being dependant on you?

H: 21 Both probably.

M Thank you that has been really helpful. Is there anything you want to add?

H: 22 I just think that the role is a super role if you can get it right & it's really nice to see it develop.

M What do you mean by that?

H: 23 Years ago you were just there as a body in the class. I think the role has come on leaps & bounds. It's nice to see it taking on a more professional role, one where people can

actually gain qualifications in, rather than being just an extra pair of hands, which is how it used to be.

M Can you just put into words what you mean by it's a professional role?

H: 24 Well it's more professional in that professional training is now being offered and that's really important. I feel teacher themselves look on it in a different light and so do parents so the whole role has changed in a more professional and positive way.

M So I'm trying to understand what you mean by the word professional, because that's an interesting word to use. By saying a TA is professional, you have said there is training available and you are valued by teachers and parents and you are saying the role has developed. Can you say a bit more about how the role has developed?

H: 25 In the old days, it was seen as mums coming into school to help and it would only be a bit of reading or sitting with a child in the corner, but the role's developed more now.. Lots of TAs do preparation, they have an input into class planning, they are given areas of responsibility, they have been encouraged for self-development, but also people have lots of skills schools can use. They didn't in the past. It's also a bit more status because people are more aware of having TAs in school.

M Thank you very much.

H: 26 The teacher needs to be confident and competent in what they do or they will feel threatened.

H: 27 The teacher could do more group work and could meet bright children's needs, but not at the cost of the others. The middle group did well too and I was based in the lower group.

H: 28 I went through each year and this was a massive advantage because I knew the children inside out & parents are happy to talk to either of us.

H: 29 If the teacher isn't there one day, the class continues as it is set by the class teacher. Supply teachers ask me what to do. 2 people take the pressure off the class teacher. Displays are great – she just lets me get on with it. I can carry on when the children are

having story or register. It frees up the teacher if a child isn't very well. You are meeting a lot of needs – you are sharing the pressure.

H: 30 Certain schools abuse the rule by using the TAs as teachers and teachers feel threatened – this was always about saving money.

## Appendix 4

### Kate Transcript

M In a nutshell, what would you say is your role?

K: 1 I would see my role as supporting the teacher to promote learning and to support the child under the direction of the teacher.

M Thanks very much. So what sort of things do you do in a typical school day?

K: 2 In a typical school day would be preparing for any creative activity that we might be doing, talking through with the teacher the plan of the day and prepare for small groups. I would perhaps take a small group for numeracy or literacy and then covering for teachers breaks, lunch breaks, outdoor duty, assisting children if they needed the toilet. Again, activities in the afternoon, I would prepare for the activities, then maybe read the children a story if the teacher had other things to do – she would be in the classroom but she might have other things to do and then possibly seeing the children off in the afternoon.

M That's great thanks that gives a flavour of what you do. Thanks. So what would you say the advantages are of having a TA in the classroom? There are 2 ways of looking at it, from the teacher's point of view and what do you think the advantages are for the children?

K: 3 First of all for the teacher, I feel she can concentrate on teaching and taking the children's learning forward

M What do you mean she can concentrate on the teaching?

K: 4 She doesn't have to worry about preparing for the day because I'm there to prepare, to get paint ready to get the activities ready for the day. Say for instance for Under the Sea I would set up an Under the Sea theme in the water trough or sand or whatever – whatever. She can call on me to take a child to the toilet so her teaching isn't interrupted if she is taking the group session – I would be there to do that...er...what else...

M So you are saying really that she is the teacher so she's got the main teaching role?

K: 5 Yes she's got the main teaching role and I am there to support her.

M Right, that's fine, that's really helpful. So what are the advantages for the child?

K: 6 For the child, it's another adult in the classroom that the child can trust. If for instance the child needs the toilet they get to understand that I would take them or be there just to assist them and also they get the trust of another adult in the classroom, so if there is an issue .. Well I have one where there is a little girl where in my view she is a bit wary of the teacher, but she comes to me because she knows I'm a different person to the teacher personality wise and that she feels she can talk to me.

M So what you're saying is that children see you as different, er not in a negative way but she sees you different in your personality.

K: 7 Yes

M Do you think she sees you different in any other way?

K: 8 Er...

M Or do you think it's a personality or approach thing?

K: 9 Yes approach. I work with a number of teachers and my role is to support a number of teachers. If for instance the teacher is in the classroom, again with that particular child, that child won't go into the classroom if she knows that teacher is in with a small group of children and she will come to me.

M I wonder why she won't ask the teacher?

K: 10 She told me – she's 4 – she told me that the teacher doesn't like to be interrupted when she's got that small group.

M That's great, that gives a real flavour of your role. So what would you say the disadvantages are then for the teacher?

K: 11 Erm, the disadvantages could possibly be a personality clash... They might not get on. I think you have to try to find a balance and though it's not discussed you find a plateau for your role.

M Do teachers think there are any disadvantages?

K: 12 Speaking from a teachers point of view I wouldn't know if there any.

M Are there any disadvantages from the children's point of view?

K: 13 Other than if the TA hasn't got the right approach to suit that child

M From what you've said, you see the TAs approach as different to the teachers.

K: 14 Yes, yes.

M Why do you think there's a difference in approach?

K: 15 I feel that in the school I work in, there is a distinct line between teachers and TAs and you know because you are not a qualified teacher, there is a certain line you can go to and the teachers, maybe subconsciously think they are the professional and you are there to support them and the children.

M Yes that's fine so you are saying there's a fine line and one thing is the teacher's qualification. Is there any other reason?

K: 16 It could be the personality of the teacher. We have one teacher where her and her TA work very well together. Her personality is 'let's all get on together' but she is still the teacher, she has the responsibility. I've seen another teacher and TA who work differently – they are quite business like and they have their own territories that they get involved in.

M why do you think there's a difference in territory – that's an interesting word.

K: 17 I would say that's the main reason. The teacher is qualified and you take on the role of a TA knowing that you haven't qualified and you haven't got that responsibility.

M So, you've defined what your role is, so what happens in your school to help you do your job?

K: 18 We have a folder to tell you about your role. No-one has actually gone through it with me; they just give it you to read. So before I started I was given this package about my role. They also gave me a package of how to work in literacy & numeracy as a TA. No-one has actually gone through it with me but the positive in my school is we have an excellent head of year who is very good.



M Why is she good?

K: 19 She is very approachable, she is a very busy person but she always has time and at the beginning of the year she went through my role. She goes through the planning and what she expects from me as a TA. We have a weekly meeting about how it's gone and the next stage.

M How is that done?

K: 20 There is a lesson so we have allocated time to prepare or if the area needs improving. Her time is precious but I always make sure we have that meeting to help the children's learning.

M You mentioned children's learning there, so how would you say you support the children's learning?

K: 21 At this point in time I am concentrating on fine motor skills so I research how I can help the children with this so it would be playing with gloop, shaving foam, tweezers.

M So they told you what to do but then you had some control over what you do.

K: 22 yes I have a certain amount of control. I researched it but went through it with the head of year

M So in other words, you contributed to the planning

K: 23 I researched it but went through it with the head of year

M So in other words, you contributed to the planning. So, that's what helps you. Is there anything that hinders you doing your job?

K: 24 We don't get any training. I personally have done my own training through doing a degree

M So how would you say how TAs find out about how to support children's learning?

K: 25 I think you learn from each other. I've learnt from other TAs, I've learnt from teachers, especially in literacy, how phonics are taught. I've gone & found out & asked how you teach children to read and TAs help each other.

M So what else hinders you doing your job?

K: 26 The busyness of the school. Sometimes you need to ask something and there might not be the time. You have to think on your feet the whole time and hope that you are getting it right. There is no training. I've suggested that we have training. I feel that it's important for TAS because the majority of people who are taken on are mums so we all have our own perception of how we promote learning, but I think there needs training. There are facilities for training teachers, but at this point in time TAs don't get any

M Why do you think that is?

K: 27 Maybe the school doesn't feel the TAs are valued as much as the teachers are.

M I want to back to something you said early on in the interview – you said the teacher is a professional. I'd like to know why you think a teacher is professional and whether you think a TA is professional.

K: 28 I think the teachers professional because she's gone through a degree but a TA might not have done. It's qualifications. But I've seen teachers who I personally feel aren't very good teachers and I've seen TAs who would be fantastic teachers if they had that qualification. But there again, do they want to be teachers? Maybe they've taken on the role because it fits in with their lifestyle. There is only 1 I know in my school who isn't a mum.

M Why do you think mums take the job on?

K: 29 I feel that it fits in with their lifestyle, they get all the holidays and also they are near their children. I think that some teachers value TA roles because it supports them in their job. I feel some teachers don't value TAs because I think it's their personality. I think it's the personality of the teacher, the professional, but I feel TAS would be more valued if there was training in place even if it was only once a term, just to keep them updated on what's happening in the curriculum.

M Just one thing on training. Does your school have INSET days?

K: 30 The TAs are never asked but the teachers do have INSET days.

## Appendix 5

### Linda Transcript

M So Linda, in just a few sentences, in your words, how would define what the role of a TA is?

L: 1 Well over the years, the role of a TA has changed massively. Back in the day it used to be the role of putting up displays, general dogsbody supporting the teacher in their role, giving them more time and space with the children and we were given more menial jobs which helped them work with children. Over the years, it led more into working directly with children, perhaps in groups or individuals, but still massively led by the teacher. Time went on again and you were given a bit more responsibility and not to the point of planning, per se, but using your own imagination somewhat. I suppose your skills helped with that as well, to the point now where TAs often do classroom cover. Now, TAs don't do displays. I'm not sure who does them now and often it's the TAs in their own time after school. Looking back over 20 years, the role has changed so much and you do wonder who does the roles that we originally did, because we've moved on so much.

M That's a really good point I think.

L: 2 We have so many more responsibilities and you are spoken to by Ofsted in our own right, rather than Mrs So & So's helper – mums who help in school – which it used to be.

M Yes I've seen that myself over the years, so what you are saying is that now you have a real role in supporting children's learning.

L: 3 Yes.

M So... how would you say that as a TA you support children's learning?

L: 4 I think a lot of it is...em... we have more availability to go on courses and they are more structured courses now – they are more teacher based – it's more for us to work with children, rather than to help children. It's more for us to lead rather than just help the teacher, so it's more responsibility to us. Leading from that was HLTA and that personally to me wasn't the way I wanted to go. I just saw it as teaching on the cheap. I didn't feel that

was valued. I just thought that was just another government initiative to get teaching on the cheap.

M Right, that's very interesting. So, obviously you have got a lot of years of experience and a lot of expertise, so what would you say there is in your school to help you do your job as well as you can? How do you feel supported to do your job as well as you can? First of all I want you to think about structures in school and the organisation in the school and classroom and after that if you would like to tell me about the relationships in school and how that affects the way you do your job.

L: 5 I think as far as classroom organisation is for a TA if they have their base in that room, they can input a lot of what they want as well because it is important that they have a secure base, that they know where things are and they have the freedom from their class teacher to enable them to do that. I think that's quite important. You've got to have lots of resources, because TAs have to think on the spot. If something happens they have to have something prepared, which isn't always easy.

M So are you saying that could happen when the teacher leaves the room what do you mean?

L: 6 Yes you have to have something ready – not just jump in and look as though it's amateur. I'm sure that with classroom organisation, if you knew where things were, you could do that and feel comfortable doing that. In planning – this is a big issue really, that you should work with the teacher – not setting up the plans, that's her job – but if you are allowed access to talk through the plans together, but the big issue there is time. There is not always the time and not all class teachers are forthcoming in letting in TAs.

M In your experience are you allowed access to the plans?

L: 7 Very occasionally.

M Does it depend on the teacher?

L: 8 Yes definitely. But time is the number one and number 2 is the different teacher's expectations of TAs and trust.

M We are looking at what helps you do your job at the minute. Are you saying that it helps you do your job if you know what the plan is?

L: 9 Yes.

M And when the teacher knows what your job is.

L: 10 Yes it's a 2 way thing. You know what their expectations and their outcomes are and they can talk to you and trust your expertise or guide you in something more specific that they want you to do. It's got to be a 2 way thing.

M So we are moving on to the relationship side, but before we do, thinking of the structure, the planning and organisation, would you say the senior management team have an impact on your work?

L: 11 I think senior management have to value TAs roles or else you are just a mum helper there, because you feel yourself not valued.

M Who is your line manager?

L: 12 The head at the moment – it has changed over the years. It has been the SENCo, but at the moment it's the head, but yes you have to have the support of senior management or else you are not valued.

M So you are saying this in the area of things that help you, so do you feel you have the support of your senior management?

L: 13 Yes and I think that's a big thing because you have to feel valued in your role or else there is no point.

M We seem to be talking about relationships – they are creeping in a lot really – what about appraisal? Do you have appraisal?

L: 14 Not at the moment, no, there is no time and it's never been mentioned for a couple of years really, it used to.

M What about training? Have you been allowed to go on any?

L: 15 Yes we have been really lucky. We've done quite a lot of training. I did a course a couple of weeks ago.

M So as far as structure of the school, do you feel we have covered all that? So now let's think more about what helps you to do your job. Think of the teachers that you work with can you put your finger on what helps you in your role?

L: 16 I think you have to have a personal relationship. I think you have to be likeminded people and I'm sure that friendships go a long way.

M I suppose that with some teachers you can't really have that personal relationship, but from a professional relationship in the classroom, what do you think helps there?

L: 17 Having the same expectations and understanding where they are coming from and what they want, whether they are solely for the children or it's just a job to them. There are some teachers who are just there for the job and don't like children. There are others who are passionate about their role and they are more dynamic people to be around and it rubs off.

M So in your experience it's those teachers who are committed to raising attainment & achievement in children that you find it easiest to work with.

L: 18 Yes, but it's not only the SATs levels or whatever at the end, it's their relationship with children, they like children. The children are more comfortable with us as adults, they trust us, they like to be in school, but you can also see children who don't want to be there.

M So you have been very positive. Let's look at the things that prevent you doing your job as well as you can. In your school, what would you say about the structures and organisation hinders you from doing your job as well as you can.

L: 19 That's massive! Well I'll make a start. I think if you work in a disorganised environment, your mind is disorganised and you are not concentrating on your role. I think relationships with staff as well.

M Thinking about appraisal, how does school know your training needs?

L: 20 Currently they don't. It's just that courses come up, we think yes that would be valuable for us, but it's not structured.

M So it's not linked to the SDP, it's more on an ad hoc basis.

L: 21 The head has a vision, it comes from that vision, but it's not regular.

M Is there anything else organisation wise?

L: 22 Yes if you don't know what the plans are, you are just chasing along behind, you are not really part of it because when the children are listening to it, you are listening to it at the same time. You have no pre-knowledge of what the expectations are.

M What stops you looking at the plans?

L: 23 Time. Sometimes the teachers don't want you...or don't trust you, I don't know.

M What is it about your relationships with teachers that hinder you doing your work?

L: 24 If you don't personally get on with them. I think it's something to do with the different roles teachers and TAs have. Often children are quite willing to come to a TA rather than the teacher and I think that can make the teacher feel jealous. And I think it's about control... They obviously have ultimate control and if they think that is being threatened it can affect their relationship. It's control and they don't like us crossing the line and don't like it when the children are open with us. I think that if one child needs help and they have 30 children to look after, they are losing control of this one child and they don't like it when we have that freedom.

M Thank you very much L that was great!

## Appendix 6

### Transcript Mary and Laura

M We are going to talk about how TAs can be helped to be effective so if you could talk about what happens in your classroom.

L2: 1 I think it all depends on the relationship between the TA and the class teacher. TAs have to be on their wavelength, be supportive, non-judgemental and be there for all of them. The relationship with the teacher is vital. Just to get on with them on a day to day basis is vital and I think it goes above being professional as well and you have to have some sort of camaraderie between you for it to work. Perhaps not going as far as friendship, you've got to keep it professional but teachers have to be on the same wavelength as us or it is an us and them situation. With the teacher and the TA it can be an us and them and that must have an impact on the children's learning because plans aren't discussed or implemented the same way. If there wasn't a relationship, it would just be well that's what we're doing but if there was a positive relationship, plans could be discussed and it would have an impact on the children's learning.

S: 1 Some teachers are firm, whereas the TA can be mumsy and more approachable and some teachers can be jealous because you do form a relationship.

L2: 2 We don't play 'good cop bad cop' but sometimes it can look like that to the children. Sometimes they would rather come to you than the class teacher and children give confidences to you that they don't want the class teacher to know.

S: 2 And often that goes with the parents as well as some parents don't want to approach the class teacher – is that crossing the line, it's difficult to know if you are crossing the line. They see you and will approach you and again, teachers don't like this and maybe feel a bit jealous there. The TAs are nearly all local people, therefore other parents know them, maybe not on a social level, but on a 'knowing level' and so we are more approachable than a classroom teacher, because they are not necessarily local with children in the school. We are more approachable and they trust us a bit more.

L2: 3 They see you as a parent yourself, but don't see the teacher as a parent, they see a teacher as a teacher.



M So you're saying that parents see a difference?

L2: 4 We are fortunate in having the church and I go to church, but most teachers don't go to church in our parish, so I form relationships there. I think I get to see children there every week and they get to know you better and they look forward to having you – a friendly face.

M So how do you think that makes the teachers feel?

L2: 5 A bit resentful maybe

S: 3 Yes

L2: 6 We have the time to build relationships so we put more effort in.

M Do you think the teacher would feel resentful of another teacher who was local or do you think it's because you are a TA?

L2: 7 Because we are a TA

Me Why? What is the difference?

S: 4 Because we have a different relationship with the kids. We have more time

L2: 8 I think its basic things like smiling. If you are stood in the corridor and smile at a child. You don't find many teachers walking round smiling and or taking time talking to children.

M There is a difference emerging in your talk between the role of the teacher and the role of the TA. Let's go down a negative route and then we'll have a look at the positive. On a negative viewpoint why can TA's sometimes find relationships with teachers strained?

S: 5 I think the teachers study for qualifications for so long and they've worked hard it can seem that TAs just walk into jobs or they do it through an easier route and still get respect for it. So teachers see themselves as more qualified than TAs , though some TAs are well qualified but perhaps have taken different routes and don't have that qualification as a professional, a teacher.

M Are there any other reasons why relationships can be strained?

L2: 9 Time. They haven't got time at the beginning of the day to discuss daily plans or weekly plans. The relationships not there at the beginning of the day. You don't have time to say hello before you are thrown in to situations so that doesn't help for a good working relationship. Personality – if you are not the same type of person and you wouldn't dream of socialising with them or having anything to do with them it must affect your working relationship. You try and be very professional but it is not always easy with certain people – and vice versa for them.

M From a TA perspective, what other reasons could there be for tension?

L2: 10 Organisation maybe. How you want things run – tidy and organised and some members of staff aren't, that can have a massive impact. It's very hard for you to adapt to somebody else's way of working.

M Every teacher is different I suppose with different classroom organisation...

S: 6 Yes and different attitudes to children, different ways of dealing with children. Their teaching skills could be 20 years different in training, so they come out of college with different skills, so it's difficult for a TA to adapt to everyone's way of working.

L2: 11 Some teachers are very target led and as long as they are done, they are done, so the TA deals with the behaviour issues.

M So, as a TA, what would help you then in the classroom?

L2: 12 Making sure you are all singing from the same hymn sheet so you know what's acceptable and what's not. You all know the school rules, but does that teacher do things differently? Also, what the teacher expects from the children – having that clear outcome at the end of the lesson. If you are not aware of what that outcome is, then it comes down to time again.

S: 7 It's their way of teaching as well. It's their expectations of the year – we don't know – everyone's different. They all work in the same school but have different standards themselves.

M On a positive note what has worked in the classroom to have that positive relationship?

L2: 13 Being able to use life skills. Allowing TAs to use their life skills to impact on the children makes a more 'working' classroom. And really to be valued, valued and respected. A teacher had very high standards and I worked very hard and I put in a lot of time, but it wasn't a very friendly atmosphere but the relationships that I've had that have been very friendly haven't had the correct academic side. If you want the academic, the personal side goes down, if you want the personal then the academic side goes down – that's what I've found anyway. It's getting on with them – asking what they've done at the weekend – the staff that I haven't had that with, the banter, it doesn't work. Surely that has an impact on the children, because it's modelling good behaviour by 2 adults having a conversation.

S: 8 Children pick up on it – children pick up on atmospheres

L2: 14 It's the teacher being confident for you to lead and go with your initiative.

M In the classroom are you treated as equals – do you want to be treated as equals?

L2: 15 Some teachers don't treat us as equals – they have qualifications so are better than us. But we don't want to be equals – we don't want the work and the planning they do but I think there is a line when any adult deserves to be treated with respect. We all work in a school, we daily tell children to treat each other with manners and respect and certain staff can totally do the opposite

M Some teachers do treat you with respect but some teachers don't. Why do you think they don't?

L2: 16 Some are scared of letting us win are they? They want to have the classroom to themselves as their classroom. It's ownership - the control – if they let you in you may judge them or correct mistakes and if anything goes wrong having an extra adult might be added pressure from their point of view.

S: 9 It's their name on the door. They think they are in charge and we are just there to mop up bits around them. In some classes you work as a team and they are grateful and thankful for the work you do, but others you just get the impression it's theirs and you are just an extra pair of hands.

L2: 17 Teachers vary. One teacher may ask you to sit with a group or sit with an individual, then you mark their books, then you do the whole class marking. The responsibilities change – they fluctuate massively between members of staff. I find the more that you do, the more they will give you to do. I remember taking books home, papers, but other classrooms weren't doing anything like that. I think it depends on the teacher. That teacher valued me and I enjoyed being valued and I enjoyed having that responsibility.

M So there's control that they don't value you, letting go and qualifications they don't value you

S2: 10 We can feel threatened because they have power and control over you. The teachers can feel threatened by us because we have a better or more positive relationship with the children, they feel they are losing control over the classroom, but going back to what L2 said that the more she did in a class the more she was given to do that can be seen as a positive thing as well, because the teacher can be trusting you to do things and in a positive relationship, you don't mind taking things home. You could see it that they are putting more and more work on you but in a positive relationship, you don't mind.

L2: 18 Yes that relationship makes all the difference. I loved it I thrived on it. I wanted to prove myself by doing a good job. That's when my career took off because I was more confident and trusted in my role. But there are other teaching assistants in school who haven't even been given spellings to mark. They are not valued and that is all within one setting. That causes massive hierarchy between the TAs. There are the ones that 'do' and the ones that 'don't' and the ones that 'never'.

M Is there anything in the whole management of the school that could help TAs?

L2: 19 Appraisals definitely and ...I'm not sure... getting together to talk about things....but that is not always positive, because, like you said, there are the ones who 'won't' and the ones who 'never will'

S: 11 Being included in regular INSET days is vital so you've got all your dates and planning – being included makes a massive difference. Having your opinions asked for, like sports days, how can we make it different? It gives us ownership of things.

L2: 20 Yes some are good at sports, some at cooking – utilise our skills.

M Before we finish then, can you just try to summarise the main issues, as you see them in creating partnerships with teachers?

S: 12 Power and control – whether the teacher feels threatened or not, or jealous of your relationship with the children. They want to keep their status.

L2: 21 Yes and I have found that teachers who were trained in national curriculum and strategies are more restrained in what they want us to do. Now with the creative curriculum, teachers are a bit more flexible. So the younger teachers are more open and the older ones who were trained years ago.

S: 13 Some teachers have a lack of respect for our skills and background – it's linked to power and control.

L: 22 Yes the teacher is the boss.

## Appendix 7

### Nicole Transcript

Me You are a TA in Lancashire, so when you go to work what do you do? Do you work part-time or full-time?

N: 1 27 and half hours

I OK then when you go to work on a typical day what do you do?

N: 2 On a typical day we do 10 minutes reading intervention with individual pupils.

M Is this a specific reading programme? Do you measure their progress?

N: 3 Yes they've all got a book and if they get it right you tick it and if they don't you put a dot and they have to read the same word repeatedly every day until they get it right and then they get a sticker as a reward.

M Do you think it works?

N: 4 Yes the stickers then turn into a prize. I think it does improve the reading. It's measured because of the words. They are not given a test at the end of it. It's on-going

M So you do that, then what do you do?

N: 5 We go to the usual timetable starting 10 past 9. Usually I'm in Learning Support working with small groups of children or individual children and we use a programme called Nessie.

M What's that?

N: 6 They are assessed to see the level and it's basically a reading and spelling programme that starts off as easy as it can and it goes through all strategies for spelling, reading and then it's the same as the other where they get a chart...

M So it's another intervention then.

N: 7 Yes it's another intervention. The children that do it come out of French so the students who do it are not allowed to have French lessons cos they see it that if they can't

read English they are not going learn to speak French. Some parents totally object to it because they don't want their children separated from the others.

M So when you've done that, then what do you do?

N: 8 Well like I said it's either individual or a group situation. Might do little games or spellings.

M Do you do that most days then?

N: 9 Yes every day.

M Right well I can get a flavour of what you do – that's great. So generally, how would you describe the role of a TA?

N: 10 To help the teacher and the children. Well to help the children access the curriculum. If they don't understand what the teacher is delivering to them I'm a sort of in-between. They can sort of say what are they saying or I don't understand. I might be able to break it down for them.

M And why would they ask you not the teacher?

N: 11 I think they feel more comfortable with me sometimes.

M And why do they feel more comfortable with you?

N: 12 Because I'm more approachable maybe. Perhaps I'm younger. A lot of the teachers are older and they see me in the morning so they know me.

M Right so we know what you do. So what would you say really helps you in your role?

N: 13 It helps when the teacher knows what I'm going to be doing in the classroom for a start. I find it annoying when they tell you what to do, who to sit with and a lot of teachers will say oh will you just copy this for them and I have to say I'm not here for that I'm here to help the children who need encouragement and help. Mainly its lack of communication with me or with other TAs.

M Do you get the opportunity then to talk to teachers?

N: 14 Not about what they want me to do. Maybe in the lesson you can have a little chat so we can give feedback. But some teachers don't want you there. I think they think it's an insult to them. I know you are supposed to help the teacher but I think a lot of them feel like ...well not threatened, but if the kids are coming to you all the time and not them I don't think they like it..

M Do you think the teachers can feel threatened by the TA being there?

N: 15 Yes Sometimes.

M What do you mean? Why do you think that?

N: 16 But it's because of the difficulties the children have and we know them in more detail than they do. They can access their needs when they want, but they don't so we know the children better – the ones that we work with. That's why we are in there, to help the children, not as a reflection of their teaching. We have a different relationship with the kids, we have more time.

M OK so that's really interesting. Earlier you said you have an NVQ level 3. Can you tell me how you did that?

N: 17 I started going to college when my children were under the age of 4 I did 2 days placement in a primary school and I did 1 day a week at the college. I had to put a portfolio together and it involved daily write ups about what I did with the children as well as the essays and things.

M So you were a parent of 2 young children and you did that in your own time and you days voluntarily to get the placement. So then you got the job.

N: 18 Yes then I got the job and it was my first interview and I got it.

M Excellent. (Yes it was – N). As a follow up have you had access to any other training?

N: 19 No but in the year before I took maternity leave I started a programme called Hickey and I was being trained, kind of, by the teacher. I had to plan lessons and I had to do a lot of planning at home. I taught it to individual children. Oh and I got the Nessie training, but



you train as you do it. I would feel confident now teaching it to other children. It was good like that, yes.

M Do you have an appraisal?

N: 20 Yes we do, every year.

M and are your training needs discussed there?

N: 21 They are but they are never acted upon. I got the job as a level 2 when I was a Level 3. It was only my 3<sup>rd</sup> appraisal that my boss actually noticed that I had the qualification which I was a bit miffed about. I felt I was doing Level 3 work easily. I was planning lessons. I was doing Level 3 work apart from the hours. So the work I was doing in the hours I was there were definitely a 3. I was working with groups of children on my own unsupervised, when Level 4 staff were off my boss felt very comfortable in me doing it and I did, but when it went from a couple of days to a few weeks I went to see the head and I said I've been doing this work.. I get paid as a Level 2 but I want to get paid as a Level 4. He said no. (ME- Why?) . He said it would set a precedent for everyone else who did extra. So I was slightly annoyed cos I get paid as a 2 – which isn't brilliant money. Also we have to do break duty to look after the children that couldn't socialise outside and that was not paid either.

M Plus you didn't get a break yourself

N: 22 No you are sat with the kids

M The conversation started with what helps you in your role, but we've gone to what stops you doing your role really so why do you think teachers have this attitude?

N: 23 I don't think teachers are made aware of what TAs do or supposed to do. In a reading time I am given a book and a chair and its pointless time. I'm not doing anything. I'm sat reading a book they are reading. I could be doing other things but we can't just leave the classroom.

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N: 24 The thing is I've disciplined children when the teachers done nothing. I've had to shout at children but what do you do if they are not doing anything?

M So what do you think teachers feel worried about?

N: 25 Maybe because the children like you more than them. And perhaps they think they are not teaching as well as they could be because there's someone else in the classroom.

M well we've talked about the classroom and what helps or hinders your role. What about the school as a whole. You said you have an appraisal.

N: 26 Yes they are really good cos you talk about what you do and what you'd like to do but I don't feel that my wishes or anything I've asked for has come true.

M And why not?

N: 27 I don't know. Because they'll say how brilliant I am and like the targets & things, we are meeting them, but I think it's money. I don't think they can afford to pay you. But they do hours a week. I can't do the hours. They pay you for the hours, not what you do in the hours and I can't do an extra hour cos I've got the kids to pick up. But what I do in those hours I do as much as the Level 3's. I've taught classes, I've had to plan lessons

M And how do you feel the teachers thought about that?

N: 28 Well these were groups usually run by a HLTA, but I think it should have been a supply teacher doing the job not a TA.

M So why do you think they asked a TA?

N: 30 Because they don't have to pay.

M So what would you say are the advantages for teachers having a Ta in their classroom?

N: 31 I think it helps the children engage more in the lesson. If some of the kids are particularly shy or not confident you can give them that boost. If the teacher needs a hand giving things out, just the background things, an extra pair of hands sometimes.

M And what do you think is the benefit for the children?

N: 32 Again, think they are more confident in the classroom because they've got someone there they can ask without feeling uncomfortable. They know exactly what they are doing

instead of saying so they get their work done otherwise they might just sit there. If you weren't there they just wouldn't get it done.

M Do you think the teachers feel it's a benefit that you are there?

N: 33 I think yes. I think some teachers would prefer them not to be there I think a lot do appreciate you, but I think it's because you are an extra pair of hands, which isn't what we are meant to be there for. But it happens quite a lot.

M Do you feel your skills are used?

N: 34 Not entirely (M Why?) because I think the teachers don't know how to use us. Or how to. Don't think the teachers are trained to know what to do with TAs.

M Erm do you feel valued?

N: 35 Yes I feel valued by the SENCo. You can talk about what you've done. and by the kids as well. They're the ones.

M Is there anything else you want to say about being a TA?

N: 36 It's really rewarding, but that's because I like the children.

M And why did you choose to be a TA?

N: 36 Well, honestly it fitted round my kids and I did know I'd be good at it and since I've been there it does make you think about going on. I would like to do my HLTA but I don't think the courses are still on. But saying that, because I Was a Level 2 and working all the hours and doing the work of a Level 3, after I'd had Alice I've not been inspired to go back. I don't feel I'm missing, because I wasn't given enough to do If they'd said when you come back you'll be a Level 3, but they didn't offer it so I thought sod it. I'm not going back earning money just to pay for nursery. She's coming on so much

M So you feel your talents weren't used?

N: 37 Not really. I could've gone back in September but it's a bit disheartening when I'm not made a Level 3.

M So thank you very much. That's been really helpful.

## Appendix 8

### Sarah Transcript

M In a perfect classroom, what would be there to help you do your job as well as you possibly could?

S: 1 The relationship is the key – communication.

S: 2 –We need time. I work doing breakfast and then, on my own I go and talk to the teacher about what is happening that day.

M so in a perfect world you would have time each morning

S: 3 Yes. Every morning when I go in I spend 5 or 10 minutes not paid and it's only for myself to judge the relationship to do this. In a perfect world you should be paid.

M From a TAs point of view what works in the classroom?

S: 4 Respecting the experience of the TA. The TA might have a lot of experience to use to help the teacher. Yes you can learn experience from the teacher, but the teacher should be secure enough in themselves and in their teaching ability to allow the TA to have a freer rein. The teacher should trust the TA with certain areas of confidentiality. Sometimes you see things that the teacher hasn't got time to do or see, but if you don't fully know the background to a child (though I know it's on a need to know basis) the TA is not equipped to deal with children in the class. It's as and when things happen - if you are there on the spot, you are aware of problems and you can look after that child's welfare.

M How else do you think the teacher could help you?

S: 5 Sometimes the teacher needs to have more confidence to say things to the TA. For example if there is more than 1 TA in the classroom, discussing something when the teacher is talking and the teacher doesn't ever correct them for doing that. But they should have the confidence to say and that makes for a better relationship – rather than it building up inside the teacher and thinking 'how rude'. But perhaps they don't know they are speaking as loud as they are and it's disrupting the activity. If teachers and TAs had time to build up a proper relationship with regular meetings and time to talk without having to grab 2

minutes while the children are getting the books sorted out and you can speak to them about how the teacher wants them to behave and it is clear to both parties . Sometimes if the children are on the carpet and the teacher is talking and the TA is me mawing around or telling children she is disrupting what the teacher is trying to say, so again, if there was time to build up a strong relationship between the 2 of you and to discuss strategies – the teacher can say to the TA “You are shouting above the children” and it makes the TA think about strategies for dealing with the children.

M so we’ve talked about what you would like the classroom to be like – does that happen in real life?

S: 6 Sometimes...

M So why does this happen or not happen?

S: 7 Well that’s what life’s like isn’t it? That’s just what happens, its school life in general.

M Yes but I’m trying to pinpoint why it’s like this – what is it in day to day life that is a barrier to this happening?

S: 8 You are not listened to or your views are not respected. But sometimes the teachers’ workloads put pressure on the work of TAs because they think ‘I’ve got to get this done’. It can be security of the teacher if they’ve moved into a different class and they are unsure of things and we have been there before. We know our place, but we have experience to offer. There could be jealousy between support staff - if some are offered more hours or given somebody else’s job there can be jealousy. You just get on with it but it can make our job difficult.

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S: 9 Consistency can be a problem with different teachers or senior management team in managing the children in different classrooms. There are different expectations. Some teachers give you more responsibility than others. You have to go into a classroom and gauge the situation.

M What do you mean?

S: 10 A newly qualified teacher who is out to prove she can do the job – I don't need any help, this is my classroom. It is their domain and they want it to be. As a TA if you are experienced you know how to get round those barriers and you just need to play a waiting game - you have to be subtle and hope the relationship happens.

M Are there any other barriers?

S: 11 It can be a barrier if you are just employed from half past 9 til half past 11. You can walk in a class that is in full flow and you go home before the class is finished. You don't have time to talk. I always stay that last half hour anyway and then one day I left early and I'd been there a year and they didn't realise that I really finished earlier and they asked me where I was going!

M Do you think that these cut backs now are a barrier?

S: 12 Yes, a big barrier. Jobs are on the line and we are fighting for our jobs.

M So what could be put in place as a solution to these?

S: 13 Time to let us know what they want us to do. Ask the TA what their strengths and weaknesses are and also what the expectations of the TA are and what the teachers expectations of the TA are – what they want the TA role to be because every teacher is different. I think that for teachers PPA time we should get another time with their TA to discuss things that are working well or not. It's finding the right time when you can do that – or you could pay the TA for half an hour before school or after school. I think every half term or every month you need good quality time with your teacher

M Paid for by school?

S: 14 Oh yes, paid.

M Is there anything else you feel you want to say?

S: 15 No I don't think so...

M Well thank you very much for giving me your views...