Chapter

Perspective Chapter: Learning to Work Smarter with Teaching Assistants to Develop a Dyslexia-Friendly School

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Abstract

Schools now widely rely on the deployment of teaching assistants (TAs) to support the inclusion of students with learning differences, including students with dyslexia. However, research findings forthe effectiveness of their deployment has been mixed. This chapter therefore seeks to draw upon research evidence of best practice to aid teachers in maximising the quality of their collaborative work with TAs, where TAs are working in-class or in teaching structured programmes of literacy support with individual or small groups of students. This chapter take a critical stance, framed by the social model of disability, advocating a whole-school approach to managing TAs' deployment and recommending a rethinking of joint working practices with teachers, so that they are both fully involved with supporting students with dyslexia and other learning challenges in the classroom. It also warns of the double-edged nature of the 'paradox of the expert', where classroom teachers maybe working alongside dyslexia specialist-qualified TAs

Keywords: teaching assistants, inclusive education, Dyslexia, Dyslexia-friendly schools, social model of disability, whole-school approaches, collaborative practice, joint working

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s Teaching Assistants (TAs*) have played an increasingly important role in both mainstream and special education in England. However, there was originally some confusion over their roles in schools. This confusion was highlighted by Balshaw [1], who identified early perceptions of TAs as: 'piggies in the middle ….left in no-man's land' …dogsbodies …[or worse still] a spy in the classroom [or] an overgrown pupil' (1999:12). Since those early days, the number of TAs in the English workforce has grown steadily, from 24,000 full time equivalent (FTE) posts in 1997 Balshaw [1] to 221, 481 in 2010 and 271, 370 in 2020 [2]. The chances are, therefore, that newly-qualified teachers (NQT) will find themselves working in a classroom alongside one or more of these paraprofessionals, so it is vital that the working collaborations

between teachers and TAs are positive, productive, and mutually respectful experiences for both parties and ultimately help foster inclusive classrooms for all learners, especially those with learning differences such as dyslexia. This chapter explains the development of the various dimensions of the TA role, explores some of the challenges that TA/teacher collaborations might encounter and draws upon the latest research evidence about maximising the potential benefits of joint working in the classroom, with the aim of better supporting dyslexic students. In doing so, I will also draw upon my own research and professional experiences as a classroom teacher, dyslexia-specialist teacher, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCo), and teacher-educator. This chapter also draws upon models of disability and neurodiversity in framing how schools need to consider dyslexia support and TAs' roles within those processes in the dyslexia-friendly school.

2. The development of the TA role

As Balshaw's quotation above suggests, there was not only confusion in schools over the TA role but also their status. Balshaw [1] noted that the early deployment of TAs in schools was largely to fill ancillary roles, but their brief soon widened to include much more of a learning support role, both within the classroom and withdrawing individual and small groups of students to tackle programmes of extra help for those who had slipped behind in their learning: in particular, extra literacy support; and this included many of those identified with dyslexic-type difficulties. Much of this was driven by the then government's drive to remodel the teaching workforce [3].

Initially, there was suspicion from some mainstream teachers, about the presence of TAs in their lessons. Teachers were traditionally used to their classroom being their own private domain. Nor, as Sebba and Sachdev [4] noted, had they routinely had training in *how* to work with TAs. There were also fears that TAs were not just present in their classrooms but perhaps judging their performance. Many mainstream teachers, faced with the demands of developing more inclusive teaching for the diversity of learners in their classes, in response to a series of government-led Special Educational Needs Codes of Practice in England [5–7], have often felt that they were potentially facing demands for which they felt ill-equipped and that they might be under scrutiny where this lack of confidence was exposed [8]. For their own part, many TAs felt that they were being thrown into teaching and learning situations for which they has little or no training, including, supporting students with dyslexia [9] and that they, in turn, would be judged as inadequate by the classroom teachers.

In response to the confusion and misgivings reported above, the English government established a set of national professional standards for TAs [10] linked to the workforce remodelling drive, and a generic package of induction training for TAs was rolled out to schools [e.g. 11]. In addition to this, a range of other training courses at Levels 2 and 3 have been developed over the last 15 years by various professional development providers, sometimes leading to the Level 4 Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) qualification, and Level 5 Foundation Degrees in Learning Support, which many TAs have taken advantage of and value [12]. However, access to such training opportunities has been, according to Hussart and Croucher [13], somewhat unsystematic and many TAs have reported that, after initial induction training packages, access to further training has sometimes been hard to get [14]. In terms of

specific dyslexia training for TAs, the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) has developed the Accredited Learning Support Assistant (ALSA) qualification, offered as a Level 4, 5 or 6 course [15].

3. Challenges in the deployment of support staff

A major research project on the use of TAs in schools the *Deployment and Impact of Support Staff* (DISS) was reported in 2009 [16]. The report identified many shortcomings in the ways that TAs were being deployed in schools and the ways in which they were interacting with students in their support roles.

The DISS research team's main areas of focus were around staff preparedness, deployment both in and outside the classroom, the practice of support staff and the impact of support staff.

3.1 Preparedness

- Relative lack of training opportunities for the majority of TAs
- (Echoing Sebba and Sachdev's 1997 findings) The majority of teaching staff still did not receive training on how best to work with support staff.
- Lack of teacher/TA joint feedback and planning time for the majority of staff.

3.2 Deployment of support staff both in and outside the classroom

- The majority of TAs' time was spent in pedagogical roles rather than in assisting the teacher or the school.
- The vast majority of TA time, both in and outside the classroom was spent in supporting those individuals or groups of students identified as low attaining or as having special educational needs (SEN).
- At the secondary level, there was evidence that the more time these pupils spent with TAs, the less individual attention they received from the class teacher.

3.3 The practice of support staff

- TAs' interactions with students seemed to be more focussed on task completion rather than actual teaching and learning activities for learning.
- TA guidance for students tended to 'close down' rather than to 'open up' talk to develop learning
- This support was often 'reactive rather than proactive' (probably reflecting the lack of pre-lesson preparation time identified above).

3.4 The impact of support staff

- One positive effect of the involvement of support staff was the effect on teaching staff workloads and their concomitant stress levels and job satisfaction.

Another positive impact of TA involvement in the classroom with the overall level of classroom control and the amount of individual attention available to individual students (though *which* students were receiving individual attention from *which* staff has already been raised as a potential concern).

At the primary school level, access to support from TAs seemed to have little effect on students' positive attitudes to learning; however, at the secondary level, having TA support seemed to help students to be less distractable or disruptive, to help their interactions with peers and to help them work more independently.

Nevertheless, in terms of student progress in English, Maths and Science, there seemed to be a *negative* relationship between the amount of in-class and small group support that students were receiving from TAs and their overall achievement, even controlling for variables such as prior attainment and 'SEN' status.

The DISS report concluded:

> *"The picture concerning impact is therefore a mixed one. Though some of the results presented here have identified problems in current deployment and practice we would not want to give the impression that support staff do not have an important role to play. Our general view is that problems may have arisen from assuming that extra support will lead to positive outcomes for pupils without first establishing a clear understanding and view of the role of support staff and how it affects pupils. Classroom based support staff have huge potential in helping teachers and pupils but there are questions raised in this report concerning the way they are currently deployed in schools and this may be one reason why supported pupils may not make as much progress as expected. The findings have wide significance in the context of concern with the lack of progress made by some pupils in school. Given that lower attaining pupils are more likely to be given extra support in schools it is vital that this support is well organised, prepared and effective." [16: 140, my italics]*

The DISS team not only reaffirmed the potential of TAs to be deployed more effectively, but they also made it clear that their conclusions should form the basis for education leaders at all levels to consider support staff in schools in terms of their 'wider pedagogical role' (WPR). That involved taking together TAs' characteristics, conditions of employment, preparedness, deployment, and practice and thinking about these in their wider contexts. The DISS research team's summary report [17] stressed that

"The WPR model can help identify the possible factors and levels that need to be considered when seeking to account for effects of support on academic progress

> *It helps show that the effectiveness of support should not be personalised or individualised just to properties of individual pupils or TAs because this would seriously underplay the situational and structural factors within which TAs have to work and which will affect their impact. The practice of support staff therefore needs to be seen in the context of decisions made about their deployment by teachers and headteachers, which are largely outside their [TAs] control, and also in the context of their preparedness and conditions of employment. In reality it is likely that individual characteristics and situational and structural factors will all be important and that there will be a complex interplay of relationships between the various components." [17:9, my italics]*

In fact, in terms of the focus of the rest of this chapter, the importance of context must frame any meaningful and effective consideration of working smarter with teaching assistants to support the inclusion of students with dyslexia. With that

framework in mind, before exploring practical ways forward that support a dyslexia-friendly school, we need to consider how we think about those students who have attracted the label 'dyslexic' in terms of differing models of disability and wider discourses of neurodiversity.

4. Considering the student with dyslexia within differing models of disability

In order to develop effective working practices between teachers and teaching assistants, I would argue that they both need to share a critical understanding of how students with dyslexia have been traditionally conceived of in educational discourses and to draw from what has been useful but to challenge where they see limiting and inadequate ideas, some of which are quite deeply ingrained into many teachers', TAs' and schools' belief systems. This section outlines how dyslexia (and other SENDs) are conceived through the lenses of the Medical, Social and Biopsychosocial Models of disability, as well as differing models of neurodiversity. The aim is to develop shared critical reflective approaches to practice, grounded in deeper shared understandings of dyslexia and the need to respond to individual differences within a disability rights-informed dyslexia-friendly school.

4.1 The medical model of disability

From the earliest studies of dyslexia as a 'phenomenon' from the late nineteenth and into the first half of the twentieth centuries, dyslexia had been the subject of a medical gaze [e.g., 18, 19]. Over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, this framing of dyslexia as essentially a neurobiological issue has persisted and has driven vast amounts of research into the subject with parallel strands of research based in the field of cognitive psychology (see Elliott and Nicolson [20] for a useful summary of both). These medical-neurobiological and cognitive-psychological conceptions, which have dominated the field of dyslexia research can also be tracked in many other fields of research into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The focus has been firmly on the individual subject and their deficits in learning, language, motor skills or attentional skills, depending upon the field of behavioural interest. The subject is de-contextualised and scrutinised for clues, with the aim of treatment and possible cure of these 'pathologies'.

As Cotterill [21] has noted, in the field of education this framework has led to the employment of a wide range of professionals whose roles have been:

> *'..to judge the limitations of a child with special needs or a disability against functional and developmental norms. The child's performance is compared to the functions carried out by others of the same age to determine the severity of the child's SEN. The child's limitations are labelled through screening and assessment and are described using clinical terminology including 'the pathology of impairment' or 'aetiology of the syndrome'. In attempt to cure the condition, the symptoms displayed by the child are treated using therapeutic or educational interventions and drug therapy.' [21; 84]*

This psycho-medical approach, based on the deficits-based medical model, has traditionally dominated, and arguably continues to dominate, responses to dyslexia in the field of education [21].

Useful though much of this research and practice has been and can be, in socio-cultural and educational terms this approach to understanding dyslexia (and other SENDs) has traditionally underplayed or ignored environmental factors in people's lives. In cultural terms, in particular, the dominant discourses have been of tragedy and pity, sickness and cure, protection and rescue, 'handicap' and charity [22].

4.2 The social model of disability

This traditional framing of SEND remained largely unchallenged until the 1970s, when, in the wider societal context, disabled people themselves began to question these dominant discourses and demand a refocus upon the restrictions being placed upon them in a world geared towards people without impairments, failing to accommodate a greater diversity of people and leading to their social, educational and economic marginalisation [22].

This movement grew through the 1980s, both in the UK and internationally, and was crystalised in the work of disabled academic, Michael Oliver, whose key 1990 work, *The Politics of Disablement* [23], set out and contrasted medical and social models of disability. These models contrasted the (psycho)medical approach to disability, largely led by non-disabled professionals: the Medical Model, with a Social Model, which considered a disability in its full socio-political context, in which disabled people, actually being disabled by lack of representation and societal opportunities should challenge and fight for their civil rights through demanding changes to the societal arrangements in the worlds of education, employment and daily living, to *maximise their opportunities to live independently*, accessing support, where needed, on their own terms. The key methods of the Social Model approach are to identify the barriers to these opportunities and to eliminate, or at least minimise them. The social model seeks to clearly differentiate *'impairment'*, which is an individual's differences or set of challenges, be they physical, cognitive or sensory, from their 'disability', which represents the ways in which narrow societal arrangements and facilities fail to accommodate people's diversity of needs, which Goodley [22] describes as 'ableist'.

Oliver's work has influenced the development of Disability Studies as a field of teaching and research in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, which has been able to provide counter-narratives to the traditional psycho-medical discourses of deficit in the field of disability. Social Model narratives also led to changes in legislation in the UK'; importantly in the 1995 and 2005 Disability Discrimination Acts [24, 25], which acknowledged the legal rights of disabled people, and the 2010 Equality Act [26] , which includes disability as a characteristic which must be protected from direct or indirect discrimination under the law.

These challenges and reforms have found their way into the world of education, through the SEND Codes of Practice for schools [5–7], as well as a movement to develop more generally inclusive schools, reflecting more the diversity already 'out there' in society, and whose disabled students' rights to presence and participation are legally backed.

The 2015 SEND Code of Practice (SENDCoP) [7] emphasises that students with SEND are the responsibility of *all* teaching staff; not just the SENDCo and specialist teachers or TAs. It calls for the voice of the student to be heard, for the recognition views of their parent or guardian as 'expert', as well as for joint working between them and the professionals and between the professionals themselves as the key drivers for successful inclusion in education.

The Social Model has come in for some criticism, which Hodkinson [27] summarises as:

- a lack of acknowledgement of the lived experience of pain and illness, with a heavy emphasis on social contexts.

- a homogenisation of disabled people a single group, thus failing to acknowledge the individual differences in their lived experiences linked to gender, class, ethnicity and so on.

In response to these criticisms, other models of disability have been invoked as alternative frameworks, such as Engel's Biopsychosocial Model [cited in 27] or Shakespeare's Interactionist Model [28]. These sought to focus on the complex interplay between biological, psychological and social factors in individual people's lives. However, whilst these models do offer nuance, Oliver himself, in a 2013 response to his critics, pointed out that he did not seek to eliminate individual biology and impairment entirely in his social model and that his model has been thus misconstrued [29]. He acknowledges individual differences in circumstance but maintained the need for disabled people to continue to unite and struggle for real emancipation. After all, it did take the politicisation of the disability to drive through the legislation noted above, and as Hodkinson [27] has noted, the Biopsychosocial Model, for example, 'has not had a great impact upon health or education.'

So, how can we link this discussion back to the context of effective joint working with TAs in the context of inclusive dyslexia-friendly schools? Riddick's research identified the limitations of psychometrically-based approaches to the inclusion of students with dyslexia in education, including dyslexic trainee teachers in higher education, and was one of the first to invoke the Social Model to identify discriminatory learning environments and attitudes as the issues that need addressing [30]. These findings were echoed in MacDonald's use of the Social Model in reporting interviews with dyslexic adults reflecting upon their experiences at school [31]. He also noted how socio-economic factors might mitigate or aggravate the effects of the barriers that they encountered.

More recently, Giangreco [32], has recognised most of the DISS project's findings in the USA education context and uses a Social Model-influenced framing of the issues to show how many shortcomings and challenges identified in DISS reflect continuing ableist attitudes underpinning school organisational and curricular arrangements (all be they within well-meaning school governance regimes). In considering the deployment of TAs in schools, he insists that the struggle for disabled students' still-constricted civil rights needs to be maintained. This echoes the Social Model's insistence upon challenging ableist attitudes (even when unconscious) and, like MacDonald [31], upon opening up spaces for student voices to really be heard.

The next section of this chapter, which considers developing smarter ways of working with TAs in promoting a dyslexia-friendly school is therefore informed by a Social Model framework, which focusses on reforming school environments, not just 'fixing' students. Firstly, however, we will also consider how using the concept of 'neurodiversity' can inform more nuanced approaches to embracing student diversity in the classroom.

5. Neurodiversity and dyslexia

As well as using the Social Model of Disability to underpin this discussion, at this point, it may also be useful to consider the concept of 'neurodiversity' and its relation to current thinking about dyslexia. This might help us reframe some of the issues of pedagogy and joint working to develop more inclusive practice

The term 'neurodiverse' was originally coined by the sociologist Judy Singer [33] as a way of reframing what she considered her negative label of 'autistic'. The term subsequently became applied to the wider range of learning differences often bracketed under the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) [34]. However, this SEN-based conception of neurodiversity has been criticised as being firstly, merely deficit-focussed [35]; secondly, subscribing to a false dichotomy between notionally 'neurotypical' and 'neurodivergent' populations, where in fact these 'boundaries' and cut-off points are merely arbitrary social constructs [36] and thirdly, that human neurodiversity is much more nuanced and universal [36]. Masataka has suggested that neurodiversity, therefore, be considered in the same ways as biodiversity [37].

Recent studies from the field of neuroscience are starting to offer evidence in support of these critiques of the siloes of discrete 'SEN syndromes'. A recent major research project undertaken at the Cambridge University Cognition and Brain Science Unit [38] has revealed that there seems to be no consistency in the neural network patterns of people categorised under the same SEN labels.

This problematisation of traditional SEN categories with clear diagnostic cut-off points has come under increasing scrutiny in the case of dyslexia. In a recent review of the state of the definitions and understandings of dyslexia, Snowling et al. [39] echo this developing conception of dyslexia as 'dimensional' rather that neatly 'categorical' in nature, where diagnostic boundaries are leaky and where dimensions of dyslexic-type difficulties (e.g. poor phonological awareness, weaker working memory capacities and decoding problems in reading and/or spelling, etc) are by no means universal in dyslexia, nor are they unique to dyslexia. Furthermore, many people who have attracted the diagnostic label of 'dyslexic' have other co-occurring difficulties, sometimes in motor skills, numeracy or attentional issues (though these themselves would not be considered as diagnostic criteria for dyslexia). These complexities within the spectrum of profiles of people usually singly labelled as 'dyslexic' have important implications for the ways in which teachers and TAs need to collaborate to support these learners. The somewhat leaky boundaries of the threshold for dyslexia diagnoses, often inconsistently applied in assessments can also mean that some learners who may have dyslexic-type difficulties fail to 'make the cut' in 'official' identification of their needs. Kirby [40] also noted a social class dimension confounding some diagnostic practices, with some families having the economic means to pay for private assessments not automatically available to students from poorer backgrounds. The implications of inconsistent diagnoses mean that teachers and TAs supporting learning in the classroom may need to be aware of some students' needs for support for these types of challenges, despite having no formal identifying dyslexia label.

Further implications of these findings for supporting the diversity of students in the classroom will be discussed in the next subsections of this chapter.

6. Developing policy and practice for working smarter with TAs in a dyslexia-friendly school

6.1 Introduction

The Social Model of Disability clearly suggests that the development of more inclusive educational provision for students with dyslexia needs to be based on an equal rights-based approach, where student's voice is heard and where learning environments, rather than just individual student 'remediation', are the focus.

This final section of the chapter does not just aim at a list of 'tips for teachers' (though issues of strategies and resources will be touched upon.). There needs to be a deeper under the understanding of the key underlying principles of joint working and the deployment of TAs that can promote a more dyslexia-friendly school. In outlining these principles and practices, I will be drawing upon some key research, much of which has been developed in response to the DISS report findings. Two, in particular, will help us consider priorities for action in working smarter with TAs: firstly, *Challenging the role and deployment of teaching assistants in mainstream schools: The impact on schools. Final Report on the Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA) Project* [41], summarised in guidance for schools by Russell et al [42], and secondly, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) report *Making the Best Use of Teaching Assistants* [43].

The 2012 EDTA project was undertaken by the same London team that researched the DISS project and drawing upon the lessons learned, reported action research in schools aimed at maximising the effectiveness of TAs, using the framework of the TAs' Wider Professional Roles (WPR, see above) under the headings of: the preparedness of TAs, the deployment of TAs and the practice of TAs[41]. The 2018 EEF report, partly by members of the same team, offered an updated review of good practice and the report's seven key recommendations will be referred to in the following discussion [43].

As well as drawing from the two key research reports noted above, I will also refer to other recent research on working collaboratively with TAs in the context of developing a dyslexia-friendly school. The chapter section will draw upon two reports based on the finding of the 2016-2018 *Dyslexia Support Project (DSP):* firstly, *What works in dyslexia/SpLD friendly practice in the secondary school and further education college sectors: Four case studies of effective practice* [44] and secondly *Teaching for neurodiversity: training teachers to see beyond labels* [45].

Using the WPR structure seems a useful way of exploring these principles of smarter collaborative working, but I also add an extra subsection, based upon further research by Griffiths and Kelly [46], to discuss the particular issues around collaborative working with TAs delivering structured interventions to support literacy skills, including those delivered by dyslexia specialist-trained TAs.

The chapter section also reflects how effective joint working between teachers and TAs needs to incorporate the voices of the TAs and the students themselves in developing inclusive practice within the wider framework of a whole-school approach, underpinned by the Senior Leadership Team.

6.2 Auditing the preparedness, deployment and practice of TAs in collaborative working

Whole-school audits can be very powerful in the process of developing more inclusive practice in schools, as the *Index for Inclusion* [47] has demonstrated internationally [48]. Following the Social Model of Disability, the prime focus, as mentioned earlier, is on facilitating *all* students' rights to a more enabling learning environment, rather than just trying to 'remediate' individuals in an unchanged school context. The *Index* invites stakeholders to consider the Cultures, Policies and Practices of their school with a view to doing more of what works and reconsidering where challenges still remain in the processes of developing inclusion.

In the case of maximising the effectiveness of TAs through joint working, Russell et al. [42], emphasise the importance of auditing as being driven by the school's senior

leadership team (SLT). The effectiveness of this whole-school level, audit-to-action plan model is echoed in Griffiths and Kelly's research on dyslexia-friendly schools [44].

Russell et al [42] have suggested that, in auditing the TA deployment and preparation in school, the TA WPR framework is used to form section headings of the audit document. A whole-school TA audit needs to have a clear-eyed and critical approach, making an honest appraisal of the current 'state of play' in a school and using the data to establish a baseline for a school improvement action plan. The process is not a one-off activity: the TA action plan, having been put into practice, will need a thorough review as part of a cycle of action and reflection, ideally carried out annually. Russell et al [42] also note that this audit of TA preparedness, deployment and practice might also consider the effects on pupil progress of the various TA-delivered structured intervention programmes, including those to support the literacy skills of students with dyslexic-type difficulties.

It is important that there is 'buy in' to this auditing process and so it is suggested that the school's TAs are thoroughly briefed on the rationale for the audit and that this is not in any way an assessment of individual staff member's *competency*, it is all about maximising their effective deployment as part of whole-school improvement. Given the central importance of joint working practices here, it is also important that all the school's teachers are also thoroughly briefed on this process, with the same key messages emphasised.

To encourage 'buy-in' and to gain a more democratic feel to the audit process, it might be a good idea for a TA deployment working party to be convened to carry out the audit and to conduct an initial analysis of the data drawn from it. It would be logical to have the school's SENDCo as a SLT member of this working party, but in order to move away from the idea that TA deployment is not just a SEND issue, it would be important to have another senior teacher as a member. For transparency and equity, it would good practice to then put out a call for expressions of interest for teaching staff and TAs who might also wish to volunteer to join. It would also be useful to get a cross-section of staff, representing different age-phases in the school (particularly for primary schools) and/or different subject/curricular areas (particularly for secondary schools).

The Audit Team is then formed and the job of gathering the data can get underway. It may well be useful to pair up teachers and TAs to carry out various strands of this work, in order to foster the culture of collaboration that lies at the heart of the aims of the process.

So what data might be gathered for this audit? Russell et al [42] suggest a two-level approach to this process: TA deployment and activity at whole-school and at classroom levels.

At the whole school level, TAs should be asked about the extent to which they:

- 'Work in and away from the classroom
- Lead whole classes.
- Provide pastoral support to pupils.
- Perform non-teaching [administrative] tasks...
- Prepare for/deliver and/or assess work for intervention or booster sessions
- Meet with teachers to plan and prepare

- Meet/liaise with outside agencies'. [In the case of supporting students with dyslexia, this might include consultation with specialist dyslexia advisory teachers or education psychologists]. [42:21]

At the classroom level, TAs should explain the extent to which they:

- 'worked with pupils on a one-to-one basis or with groups of pupils
- worked with higher-, average- and lower-attaining pupils and those with SEN
- roved (walked around) the classroom, perhaps in a monitoring role
- led or addressed the [whole] class
- did other... [administrative]... tasks
- listened to the teacher teach (e.g. were part of the class audience)' [42:25]

The EDTA [41] team found it useful to get TAs to keep 'work diaries' to monitor the time they spent on these various tasks and this would form useful 'hard data' for any audit as a basis for action. In parallel to this, questionnaires could be sent out to teachers to examine the nature of their collaborative work with TAs.

In addition to gathering this data, Russell et al [42] suggest that focus groups of teachers or TAs be established to reflect upon their working practices together and to 'compare notes'. It is suggested that these are convened without SLT presence to help allow for open discussion and to minimise feelings of being appraised/judged.

Complimentary to these sources of data, the DISS and EDTA [41] projects made use of extensive observations of TAs both in and out of the classroom, noticing the ranges of duties that they were carrying out and how and with whom they were working, including with which individuals and/or groups of students they were spending the bulk of their time. Blatchford and Webster [49] nearly 10 years after the DISS project, found that students with SEND in mainstream schools were *still* spending more time interacting with TAs than either with their teachers or their peers.

These sources of data can then be triangulated together to gain a fuller picture of the deployment and practices of TAs within the school. In addition to these voices being heard in the audit, I would add that the voices of the students themselves should be heard. Even quite young children can be consulted on their feelings about TA support if the right elicitation methods are used. For example, Pinkard [50] used the Mosiac method of combining verbal interviews and visual stimuli to explore 10-11-year-olds with a variety of SENs' views of their TA support (discussed further below).

Finally, the audit should gather data on TA and teacher *preparedness* in working together. The data should include the extent of training that teachers and TAs have had in SEND and in inclusive pedagogy, TAs subject area knowledge and confidence in supporting those subjects whether teachers and TAs have had any training in how best to work together. With regard to working with teachers to support students with dyslexia, Preen [9] and Griffiths and Kelly [46] gained insights on TAs' views on their preparedness and the challenges of collaborative practice (discussed in more detail later in this chapter), which have important implications for whole-school staff development.

It is clear, then, that developing smarter joint working practices with TAs to support the diversity of students, including those with dyslexia, needs to be based upon a full picture of what is currently happening and what the stakeholders all feel about this state of affairs. The TA audit is a vital tool in this process. Recently the National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN) has developed a useful simple guide to developing and conducting a whole-school review of TA deployment, including a series of review templates auditing all aspects of practice [51].

6.3 Smarter deployment of TAs and teachers for a dyslexia-friendly school

Having conducted the TA audit, and action plan for school improvement needs to be drawn up. As the EDTA, EEF and DSP findings have indicated, the smarter deployment of TAs to promote inclusive joint working in a dyslexia-friendly environment needs to be action-planned *at the whole school level* [41, 43, 44]. As Russell et al [42] point out, a clear vision of what the effective deployment of TAs should look like is the necessary precursor to decisions around their preparation for their roles and the practices that they need to develop.

We will look at the deployment of TAs to support dyslexic students out of class in structured literacy interventions a little later, but the key overriding principle in considering the deployment of TAs in the dyslexia-friendly mainstream classroom is that the DISS research has taught us that just attaching a TA to the students with SEND, including dyslexia is not the most effective or fair way to proceed [16]. As Giangreco [32] reminds us, using the lens of the Social Model of Disability, the student with SEND has as much right to teacher time as any other student. The EDTA research [41] and EEF review [43] further show, where teachers can work more directly with students with SEND including those with dyslexia, they gain more understanding of those students' strengths and challenges and gain confidence in developing their inclusive pedagogy. This issue has been explored by Pinkard [50], whose interviews with students with SEND reflected their keen awareness of their reduced contact time with the class teacher where a TA was being deployed. Furthermore, in my own experience of working with dyslexic students in secondary school classes, many older students feel acutely uncomfortable and self-conscious with a TA 'velcroed' to their elbow.

The more effective deployment of TAs in the classroom should follow a 'team teaching' model, where teacher and TA work closely together and the time where the TA merely sits listening to the teacher is minimised. The EEF research suggests that where the teacher is introducing a topic, the TA might be taking some notes onto the class whiteboard. They might be developing a list of key words and terms for the lesson, for example, or they might be noting student suggestions and answers to the teacher's questions.

The teacher and TA might identify different groups within the class and could take turns, on different days to work with different groups. Blatchford and Webster [49] further suggest that these groups should, where possible, be mixed- ability, which seems to offer better opportunities for students to interact with a wider range of peers and also for students to be able to get help from peers where needed, for example for a dyslexia student, remembering new key words, discriminating similar sounding key words (e.g. implode/explode) or just checking the spelling of a word. The mixing of groups also means that teachers and TAs are more likely to share out a 'roving' role around the whole class.

The policy for the deployment of TAs, moving them away from just supporting students with SEND needs to be, noted earlier, a whole-school policy and applied consistently, directed at SLT level.

Russell et al [42] suggest that strategic models for deployment can be based upon linking TAs to a particular class or year group (often favoured at primary school, or early in secondary school, in my experience) or linked to subject departments (often favoured in secondary schools). Auditing the TAs' skills, interests and experience can often offer useful guidance as to where they might be most effective, for example, a TA with good Mathematics skills or a TA skilled in working with younger pupils. One additional role for the deployment of TAs in a dyslexia-friendly school might also be in a non-teaching, but pastoral role. The challenges of mainstream schooling for students with dyslexia can have social and emotional consequences for some students who struggle [52]. As part of dyslexia-friendly school provision, therefore, access for the students to counselling support and a staff member to advocate for them can be crucial. Whilst clinical counselling support may better be left to professionals, TAs can play a key role as a listener and offer to advocate for the students about their learning needs and to teach them self-advocacy skills [53]. They can also act as a point of liaison between the school and home [42]. Gaining dyslexic students' and their parents' viewpoints on their education is a key element in the processes of dyslexia-friendly schooling and the pastoral TA can play a vital role here [44].

This change of philosophy in the deployment of TAs involves a change in schools', teachers' and TAs' mindsets, and cultural change can be hard to achieve. These changes will need time to really bed in. In the case of teachers working with those TAs that have had some SEND training, this can often be rooted in what Giangreco [54] has called 'the training trap', where teachers just assume that the specialist TA has got to be the automatic first choice to work with 'those sorts of students'. This training trap was noted as a particularly strong phenomenon in my own research interviewing dyslexia-specialist TAs about their roles [46], which we termed 'the paradox of the expert'. The aim should be the sharing of skills and knowledge, between teachers and TAs, which is a two-way process. These changes may well have also to be explained clearly to the parents/guardians of students with SEND, including dyslexia, who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which might indicate a certain level of hours of in-class support. The message is that that level of support is still there but delivered in a slightly different way and that involves more direct contact time with the teacher, who will therefore get to know their child's strengths and challenges much better so that they can teach them better.

6.4 The Preparedness for TAs and teachers to work together for a dyslexia-friendly school

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that staff will need training for more effective teacher/TA joint working to develop more dyslexia-friendly practices. Once again, the Social Model reminds us that the potentially disabling environment for dyslexic students is what needs to be changed for their rights to access the curriculum. This is echoed in the 2015 SENDCoP [7], which insists that 'reasonable adjustments' to teaching need to be made to facilitate this access. This, in turn, means a whole school-approach to training and preparation for staff. Griffiths and Kelly [44] found that for a dyslexia-friendly school to be achieved, this meant that dyslexia-friendly cultures policies and practices were backed by SLT as 'non-negotiables' with staff. For this to be realised in the classroom, both teachers and TAs need dyslexia awareness training, which includes input on the nature of dyslexia, the challenges that this can present for dyslexic learners, as well as classroom resources and strategies that help support them. They also need to understand that, with neurodiversity, these needs will not always

be identical. TAs interviewed by Preen [9] noted that such knowledge, skills and understanding were lacking for them but that there was a real appetite for this kind of professional development. Therefore, all staff should be given mandatory training and support in their development, which also means identifying targets for improving their practice and monitoring and mentoring to achieve these aims (perhaps with more of this for less confident staff members). This might involve a senior teacher or perhaps a local authority dyslexia specialist teacher/advisor. They might also have opportunities to shadow and observe skilled practitioners at work in the classroom. This training should also prepare teachers and TAs in identifying where access arrangements may be needed in tests and examinations for dyslexic students, for example, student access to a reader and or scribe or use of a word processor, plus extra time and how to provide this support competently and fairly. This should also involve hearing students' own opinions and preferences about their access to support [55].

Teachers and their TAs need to have joint planning time built into their timetables. This may come at a small financial cost for extra TA timetable hours, but the EDTA researchers [41] found this to be one of the lynchpins of effective practice. Teachers and TAs may also benefit from specific training on joint working practices. TAs need to know the lesson learning objectives and how they will be deployed during the different activities. This could be indicated on the written plan for the lesson.

6.5 Developing dyslexia-friendly joint practice for teachers and TAs

As well as changing the ways that teachers and TAs are deployed in the classroom, both the DISS and EDTA projects noted the dangers of fostering student dependency on TA support in class [16, 41]. Russell et al have argued that many TAs feel under pressure to show their effectiveness by focussing on task completion rather than fostering understanding and this often leads to them spoon-feeding answers to pupils and, in my experience, even completing tasks for them! The EDTA [41] and EEF findings reflect the need for staff to be focussing on developing students as independent learners and this is often a challenge for dyslexic students.

In a review of teaching and learning in dyslexia, Reid [56] noted key among challenges for dyslexic students are issues of accessing text, working memory in retention of learning (particularly information only presented via the auditory channel), organising and completing extended writing tasks and, linked to that, sequencing skills.

In order to facilitate a more independent dyslexic learner, therefore, teachers and TAs need to be designing and teaching lessons that can help students minimise or circumvent these issues. There is much professional literature that goes into some depth about developing a dyslexia-friendly leaning environment [e.g. 56, 57]. Whilst the scope of this chapter limits what can be covered in this regard, findings from four case studies of dyslexia-friendly schools and colleges found the following strategies and resources to lie at the heart of dyslexia-friendly teaching [44]:

- access to training about the nature of dyslexia and how to support students with dyslexia in the classroom;
- access to training about the nature of dyslexia and how to support students with dyslexia in the classroom;
- access to ongoing advice and support from a mentor with specialist knowledge, including team teaching opportunities;

- access to peer support through peer observation and through sharing examples of dyslexia-friendly strategies and resources;

- a commitment to using multisensory techniques and resources in teaching and learning across the curriculum;

- use of ICT, including iPads and apps, to enhance teaching and learning across the curriculum; opportunities for students to use alternative recording strategies to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and understanding (e.g. using mind maps, audio recording, role play, etc.); a consistent school /college-wide approach to developing study skills;

- linked to this, a fostering of students' metacognition about their own learning habits;

- supporting weaker working memory in dyslexic students (e.g. in the use of pictures to support verbal instructions)

- fostering student feedback on their learning tasks;

- supporting dyslexic students' sequencing and organisational skills (e.g. breaking down tasks into smaller sequences of steps);

- consideration of the use of text in teaching: minimising overload, considering text layout, supporting text with pictures;

- support with extended writing tasks (e.g. use of writing frames, sentence starters, etc);

- use of the classroom's physical environment as a teaching and learning tool (e.g. the development of 'learning walls');

- extensive use of group work to foster cooperative learning (e.g. use of Kagan sets activities);

- maintaining an awareness of the emotional climate in the classroom and support for students to recognise and manage their emotional states. [44:6-7]

Now, this might seem like a huge challenge for teachers and TAs in differentiating lessons for dyslexic students, but in fact, those schools and colleges found that nearly all students in their classes benefitted from the listed approaches and that individual students might use different elements of this support as they felt they needed them. This echoes the findings of the *Teaching for Neurodiversity* project [45], where teachers were experimenting with 'teaching beyond labels' and finding that students with dyslexia felt less singled out and thus self-conscious. It also offers support to the notions of individual neurodiverse variation across the dyslexic population.

These approaches also fit well with the philosophy of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which is based upon the idea that all learners are unique and that they can benefit from choosing from a wide range of available ways to present

learning material, ways to engage with learning tasks and ways of recording and demonstrating their new learning [58].

In summary, dyslexia-friendly teaching is generally inclusive teaching for all learners. Teachers and TAs both need to get familiar with these approaches and gradually to build them into their lesson planning, whilst helping students to make choices that will help them access learning independently.

6.6 Teacher-TA joint support for individual dyslexia structured intervention programmes

Some dyslexic students may be withdrawn from lessons to follow the small group or individual structured intervention programmes to develop literacy skills. These programmes are usually based around a structured, cumulative strand of phonics, supplemented by working memory training, punctuation work and sight vocabulary work [59]. Griffiths and Kelly [46], interviewing specialist-trained TAs delivering these programmes, found that students were usually engaged with these programmes but that the teachers and TAs in the mainstream classroom were often ignorant of the contents of the out-of-class sessions and were, therefore, not well-placed to help reinforce this new learning in the mainstream lesson. The solutions to this problem could lie in teachers and TAs observing these lessons in action, having a copy of the students' schemes of work, with regular updates as to which elements students were currently tackling to build reinforcement opportunities into their lesson-planning. For this, liaison with the specialist TA should be organised regularly. In secondary school this would be with the student's English teacher which, the research indicated, seemed to work well. These intervention programmes also need regular monitoring in terms of whether the TA is teaching all the required elements appropriately (programme fidelity) and whether the student is actually achieving measurably better as a result.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, the key message is that teachers are responsible for the learning of *all* students in their class. The Social Model of Disability frames this as a *rights* question: it is neither fair nor effective to simply leave certain students identified with 'special needs' to be supported by TAs with limited access to their teachers [32]. New teacher/TA joint working and team-teaching approaches need to be adopted, not only to enhance all students' right to access to their teacher, which is key to enhancing their progress but also for teachers and TAs to develop their range of knowledge, understanding of and skills in dyslexia-friendly practice, which also recognises how these relate to the neurodiversity of *all* the students in their classes. A whole-school approach, which sets out the non-negotiables, needs also to support teachers and TAs in undertaking this journey.

Nomenclature

TA	Teaching Assistant
LSAs	Learning Support Assistants
LSS	Learning Support Staff
LSW	Learning Support Workers
CAs	Classroom Assistants

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