

Intervention programmes in mathematics and literacy: teaching assistants' perceptions of their training and support

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We approach the recent argument put in this journal that teaching assistants (TAs) should be more strongly trained, monitored and supervised when teaching on intervention programmes. We suggest that the argument sits uneasily with wider management and educational literature. We examine TAs' experience of delivering important intervention programmes in mathematics and literacy. TAs report considerable variation in both their training and the quality of management involvement in their teaching. Consequently, we argue for an approach that includes TAs in a form of distributed leadership which recognises their specific capabilities rather than the model advocated both by government documents and some researchers.

Keywords: management; school improvement; governance

Introduction

Recently there has been considerable discussion on the deployment and the management of teaching assistants (TAs), and we analyse TAs' views on their experiences of training and support in delivering intervention programmes with pupils needing extra support in mathematics and literacy, seeking to throw light on training and interactions with colleagues from TAs' perspectives. We argue that a more collaborative approach to their management may be appropriate than those advocated by the government and the leading experts.

Our focus is on the support and guidance TAs receive when implementing the programmes, rather than on programme selection. Extensive evaluations of literacy and numeracy programmes by Brooks (2002, 2007) and Dowker (2004, 2009), respectively, are already available. These evaluations demonstrate that different programmes are likely to be differentially suitable for schools and children alike, and that some have been more robustly evaluated than others. This debate is outside the scope of the present article, as is the important question raised by Hancock and Eyres (2004) of whether the current emphasis on such programmes is appropriate. Rather, we analyse the current state of TA support and guidance in delivery against the prescriptions of influential researchers, setting these significant broader issues aside.

TA is one of the many terms used for adults who work in classrooms who are not teachers and their roles have been conceptualised by practitioners, academics and the public in a wide range of ways (Kerry 2005). A large number of TAs work in primary

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classrooms in England; much of their time is spent interacting directly with pupils. One large study found that when TAs were in classrooms, they were twice as likely to be working with pupils as on other duties (Blatchford et al. 2009c), and they are, therefore, often fulfilling direct pedagogic roles.

Most of the research on their roles is large-scale work commissioned by government departments which stress measurable outcomes, value for money and effective TA deployment (e.g. Blatchford et al. 2009b, 2009a). These accounts are largely framed within a policy and managerial discourse which pays minimal attention to TAs' experiences as reflected in their findings and arguments. Thus, Webster et al. (2011) criticise TAs for emphasising task completion rather than educational processes, when this appears likely to reflect teacher guidance. Narrative accounts of TA perspectives exist (O'Brien and Garner 2001; Dillow 2010) and demonstrate considerable variation in practice between schools and classes. Yet since these accounts are not analytic in relation to prescriptions for managing TAs, we ask what light TAs' experiences cast on differing recommendations about how they should be managed.

We begin by analysing the literature, showing the importance of intervention programmes and introducing two different perspectives on how TAs should be managed. One strongly emphasises training and monitoring, while the other takes a more collaborative approach. We then describe our sample and method. Our findings draw on TA accounts of the training and support they received to deliver interventions, showing that they perceive a very heterogeneous pattern. Their detailed accounts of implementation demonstrate that they do not always feel that their own contributions are adequately acknowledged, with demotivating effects likely to reduce their discretionary effort and, therefore, the overall volume of learning experiences to children in any given school.

Literature

Intervention programmes

We define an intervention programme as materials and instructions, usually for short- or medium-term use, aimed at raising selected pupils' attainment, and we focus on programmes used by TAs in primary schools in England for pupils receiving extra help in literacy and mathematics.

Such programmes have been extensively evaluated, with considerable differences in both the nature and the scale of the evaluations. Intervention schemes for children with literacy difficulties are considered in two reviews by Brooks (2002, 2007). Brooks draws on studies which included control or comparison groups and concludes that pupils with literacy difficulties will not catch up through 'ordinary teaching' alone, again underlining the importance of specific interventions. Brooks' stress on individual school circumstances raises the question of whether these school-specific circumstances also affect the levels of support, training and recognition received by TAs.

Evaluations of mathematics intervention schemes by Dowker (2004, 2009) confirm the growing use of such interventions between these dates, concluding that different schemes may suit different children and that effective training and management are crucial to success. Her report contains summaries of particular

programmes, and we note that even where materials are freely available to schools, the report considers them only in the context of their careful implementation as part of a wider project, usually coordinated by local authorities. This significant local authority support has been severely reduced in many areas since 2009. Discussion of intervention strategies also occurs in the Williams' review of primary mathematics (Williams 2008), which makes 10 recommendations for a proposed intervention programme to be developed nationally. The first recommendation is that programmes should be led by qualified teachers, though a later recommendation on the same list acknowledges that appropriately trained TAs may lead less intensive interventions.

Reports on mathematics and literacy intervention studies thus increasingly suggest such interventions as the way forward for children with difficulties. The detail of implementation in so far as it involves TAs is essentially unexplored though the need for effective training and management are widely recognised and, indeed, emphasised.

TAs, intervention programmes and their management

Several studies point to the success of intervention programmes delivered by TAs (e.g. Evans 2008; Savage and Carless 2008), and a research review concludes that they are likely to raise attainment if accompanied by appropriate training and guidance (Alborz et al. 2009). Hancock and Eyres (2004) suggest that TAs' role in the implementation of the National Numeracy and Literacy strategies has been undervalued.

An alternative not only more pessimistic but also influential view has been advanced, linked to prescriptions for close management of TAs. Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) advanced such a view at an early stage, seeing tightly prescribed interventions as an effective way of deploying TAs (OFSTED 2002, 5). A more recent report by OFSTED (2009) continues to advocate thorough training of TAs and co-operation between TAs and teachers, when considering the implementation of National Strategy interventions which tend to be tightly scripted. However, the report is also positive about TAs adapting programmes effectively to meet the pupils' needs. Some research commissioned by government questions TAs' effect on pupils' progress in English and mathematics (Blatchford et al. 2011). Blatchford et al. (2011) and other researchers suggest that one way forward may be for TAs to run targeted intervention programmes (Blatchford et al. 2011; Webster et al. 2011; Alborz et al. 2009). These are seen as increasing the likelihood that interventions will have a positive impact on pupil attainment, provided that sufficient training, support and guidance are given. Webster et al. (2011) argue that an initial decision must be taken as to the 'elementary' question of whether TAs should continue to have a pedagogic role at all. Given the great extent of their use in schools in this capacity, it appears unlikely in practice that the trend towards an increasing pedagogic role is likely to be reversed. Webster et al. (2011, 17) argue that if TAs are to continue in their pedagogic role, then 'at the least, the TA's role should be restored to a secondary educator role' and that not only better training – a feature common to many commentators, whatever their other views – but also better 'monitoring' are essential. Debate between the two schools has ensued. In a critique of pessimistic views, Fletcher-Campbell (2010)

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questions many of the assumptions behind suggestions that TAs are ineffective and the proffered solution of deploying them on structured interventions.

135 The prescriptions criticised by Fletcher–Campbell are based on a neo-classical management approach that stresses control and monitoring, a tradition founded in the early nineteenth century which extended as industrialisation proceeded. The prescription explicitly refers to the organisational hierarchy (the ‘secondary role’), but an organisational emphasis on the hierarchical role definitions has been shown to be ineffective in building social capital and by extension, knowledge transfer to other settings (Gooderham, Minbaeva, and Pederson 2011). The social capital concept encourages a non-hierarchical view of employees’ potential contribution, recognising the specific skills and experiences brought by employees of different formal skill levels (Adler and Kwon 2002; Whitley 1999). Employees acquire important knowledge by virtue of their proximity to tasks central to organisational success. In this conception, upward knowledge flows are at least as significant as those in a downward direction and recognition of this is central to employee involvement and motivation. Where this is inadequately recognised, knowledge hoarding is a more likely outcome. More collaborative approaches that recognise and seek to unlock the tacit knowledge embedded in employees by encouraging employee recognition and voice mechanisms facilitate the development of employee contributions to organisational capacities (Whitley 1999). These have been shown to be reflected in greater discretionary effort put in by employees, resulting in enhanced performance in those European firms that use them (Rizov and Croucher 2009).

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155 Educational research tends to have been conducted with little reference to a wider management inquiry and its results. Nevertheless, ideas resonant with aspects of this management research have been advanced by educational researchers (Mistry, Burton, and Brundrett 2004; Cremin, Thomas, and Vincett 2005; Williams 2008). Peer coaching, for example, is predicated on an equal relationship between the partners and was originally introduced by Joyce and Showers (1980) as a vehicle for enabling teachers to work together to implement change. It has since been recognised as a way of encouraging collegial working within schools beyond specific initiatives. Cremin, Thomas, and Vincett (2005) stress the advantages of collaborative working between teachers and TAs where role clarity exists. These more collaborative methods are also advocated by Williams (2008) in relation to TAs and mathematics interventions.

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175 There is evidence to support the proposition that such an approach might be fruitful in this context. It has been argued that TAs already possess relevant skills and knowledge. A study by Bach, Kessler, and Heron (2005, 2007) from an industrial relations perspective showed that TAs bring significant tacit knowledge to their roles, often acquired from domestic contexts or from proximity to the local community. The same study suggests that assistants’ roles vary considerably due to local factors; in one school with a stable group of TAs and a high turnover of teachers, the deputy head pointed to high-quality phonics teaching conducted by TAs who have been at the school longer than the teachers and can be called on to demonstrate phonics teaching to new members of the teaching staff (Bach, Kessler, and Heron 2006, 16).

180 Collaborative approaches may improve educational processes for pupils. Positive outcomes of collaborative work between TAs and teachers are noted by Cremin, Thomas, and Vincett (2005), who used an intervention strategy to develop three classroom models for teamworking. Each model was introduced to two schools for

180 use in literacy lessons, and the researchers reported increased pupil engagement in all cases in addition to positive feedback from the adults concerning enhanced teamwork and role clarity. Mistry, Burton, and Brundrett (2004) observe in the context of a whole-school case study that teamwork and communication were key factors in effective TA deployment. TAs implementing intervention programmes are likely to work across classes, making teamwork more complex and potentially
185 challenging for all involved.

In summary, the debate has centred on how effective TAs are under different circumstances and on how they should be managed. Two broad approaches have been advocated. One is based on stressing TAs' subordinate role and their training and monitoring, while the other rather emphasises teamworking. Whilst opinion is clearly divided on their effectiveness, large-scale survey evidence and official opinion
190 tend to the more negative view of TA capacities and to advocate tight training, monitoring and control of TA teaching activity. Significant alternative perspectives have, however, been offered, and these are based on conceptions of collaborative working that resonate with wider management literature.

195 **Research questions and method**

We derive the following research questions from this debate:

How far do TAs report receiving training, preparation, guidance and support related to intervention programmes and how useful do they find these?

This first question is intended to capture both assistance given by teachers and others, and downward information flows. Yet recognition of specific expertise, upward information flows and the texture of TA–teacher and TA–manager interactions are also theoretically important, hence, our second question:

200 How far do TAs claim and demonstrate expertise and to what extent do they feel this is acknowledged and accessed by teachers and managers?

The data are transcriptions of in-depth interviews with 24 TAs from mainstream primary schools in England, mostly women with families (in line with the national profile of TAs), and two-thirds of the sample considered themselves to be white British. Semi-structured exploratory interviews (Kvale 1996) lasting up to an hour, focused on TAs' experience in intervention programmes relating to our research questions. Analysis of interview transcripts was based mainly on those extracts from the transcripts that discuss intervention programmes, which were coded in line with the two research questions.
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Findings

215 Involvement in intervention was mentioned by the majority of TAs interviewed, with three describing the running of intervention programmes as the main part of their job and over half of the remainder regularly working on these programmes. In some cases, TAs reported that another TA in the school ran interventions, but only a few schools appeared not to use interventions at all. Because of broad and indeed liberal use of the word 'intervention', decisions had to be made about criteria for inclusion; the subsequent discussions consider only interventions in literacy and mathematics used with pupils with apparent difficulties. The interventions considered are based on named programmes with accompanying instructions, though some respondents were
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225 unaware of the official names and did not necessarily show detailed knowledge of instructions. Quotations are only provided when they are broadly representative of opinion within our sample unless they provide specific insight in relation to our research questions. We seek to make the difference evident in our account.

Training and preparation

230 Wide variation in training was reported. Many TAs in the sample had attended training, but about a third reported little or none, while others had substantial criticisms of the training offered. Some reported simply being handed written instructions in lieu of training, and we report Jan's experience below as representative of those who experienced this as demotivating:

235 I did have to do a phonics intervention with them over a period of six weeks, which I had to plan from a book. I was given a handbook and "Away you go." (asked if she was happy to plan it herself) Not really, because I'm not confident in what I'm doing. So I kind of just went by the book and did my own thing... I'm not happy with that at all. (Jan)

Some TAs reported access to training as rather haphazard, with TAs receiving training for only some of the programmes they worked on, or training happening after implementation:

240 I mean, I ran that for a couple of years before I actually had any formal training on it, which is quite funny. And I've since sort of taught the other TAs. (Audrey, Read Write Inc)

245 I've done FLS, but I haven't been on the training for it. Somebody else taught me how to do it. (Ruby)

Both of the above cases are notable for showing TAs socialising their knowledge and experience among themselves in the absence of formal training.

250 Those actually attending training generally reacted positively, possibly because training was often done by materials designers. Training was sometimes provided or facilitated by local authorities, and TAs were occasionally accompanied by teachers. The latter practice seems likely to promote a shared approach and knowledge sharing at later stages. Typical reactions are given by Tony and Lola:

255 It's called catch-up, I think. It's an actual, yeah, an organisation. So yeah, proper training, big booklets, lots of interactive whiteboard stuff and videos. (Tony, Catch-up Literacy)

I went to (local authority) learning centre to do that. I did that with the class teacher in year five, so both of us did it, and then I run the intervention. (Lola, FLS)

In other cases, senior staff provided training in schools for TA groups:

260 We all got given a trolley with some new whiteboards in and some pens and some magnetic letters and things like that, and then we had about a two-hour inset from the deputy head on how to do it, and she also did it in front of us with a group of children and so we can kind of get an idea of how to work it... She's very kind of literacy-orientated, so she kind of went on the main course and then fed back to us. (Jodie, ELS)

265 The strongest example of this type of in-school training came from Shirley, who described her work on Reading Recovery, a programme that is officially only delivered by specially trained teachers (Clay 1993; Brooks 2007, 74–76, 205–215). Shirley discussed Reading Recovery at length. Extracts are given below:

270 Reading Recovery is what I do a lot of. . . I watched what Rhona (Reading Recovery teacher) did and how she delivered the book and how she, you know, brought the child in. Sometimes children don't want to read straight away. They might just want to look at the pictures. And I picked all that up from Rhona, which was great, and then went away and did it myself, put it into practice. . . I work on my own. I've got a small room on my own. (Shirley)

275 Considerable detail followed. Shirley confirmed that she did her own planning and discussed how she liaised with the class teachers of the children she supported. Shirley's account fits with suggestions in the literature that TAs might increasingly be used for interventions previously considered the province of specially trained teachers and specifically it resembles Brooks' (2007, 51) descriptions of the programme FFT Wave 3. However, a key point here is that Shirley's positive account of learning from Rhona is closer to the mentoring and coaching mentioned by Williams (2008) in the context of mathematics interventions than the alternative model outlined above.

280 Some TAs also discussed how they drew on the knowledge gained in training for interventions or in the implementation itself to inform their wider work or potentially that of their colleagues by passing key insights on to others in their schools. Several who received training suggested that it had helped them in their work beyond intervention programmes. In short, it had a wider effect than simply preparing them for a specific task. For example, Audrey mentioned how Number Box training gave her a broader understanding of how to use mathematical materials with children. Lola discussed how she works in a classroom supporting 10–11-year-olds with difficulties in the daily mathematics lesson. Asked how she thought she had gained the requisite knowledge, she responded:

285 I've been on a few maths intervention courses as well, and that really helps, and literacy interventions, so you sort of know when you take a group how to support them. What exactly do they need to help them develop and how can you help them to achieve their objective, their learning objective? (Lola)

290 TAs also gained knowledge about the children they worked with on programmes, which could potentially be passed back to teachers. Yet some teachers were reported to lack interest in TA knowledge:

300 I keep detailed notes on what I do with the children, what they struggled in. Some teachers will actually ask me for them when they're writing their end-of-year reports. Some teachers won't. (Rita, Catch Up Numeracy)

305 Rita put considerable emphasis on the last phrase, apparently echoing comments elsewhere in her interview where she spoke not only very positively about the main teacher she worked with, but also explained that not all teachers are interested in TAs' views:

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310 I'm lucky and fortunate that I work with someone who encourages me. . . I have had the experience that they're the teacher, they're not interested in what you've found or what you've seen. (Rita)

315 Others confirmed Rita's experience, and although TAs often felt the information they passed on was valued, some felt either it was not valued or simply had no opportunity to pass information back to teachers, which TAs found demotivating. Almost all research on TAs suggests that more time should be set aside for such liaison, and lack of liaison is usually ascribed to time pressures, but some TAs apparently felt that it was also sometimes about this being a low priority for teachers. On occasion, TAs themselves restricted their inputs to their teachers because of this, coupled with a sense of how busy they perceived the teachers as being. Sheena, who had developed a number of imaginative ways of teaching children how to handle money, was a typical example. Her teacher runs an after-school club and asked if she had shared her innovations with her teacher, Sheena replied 'I won't even bother pestering her. . .'

320 Overall, the evidence illustrates the limitations to knowledge transfer both where hierarchical views are in evidence and where TAs prioritise sensitivity to teacher workloads above sharing innovative practice with them within that wider hierarchical context.

325 Overall, it was evident that in our sample, training was viewed favourably, but it was only available to some TAs, and access to it was only occasionally available to both teachers and TAs together. Moreover, while senior teachers sometimes shared knowledge downward to the TAs, teachers and managers' attitudes to upward knowledge sharing by TAs were more unevenly in evidence.

Interactions with teachers and managers

335 The responsibility for dealing with TAs wishing to conduct programmes in a particular way or to make changes is sometimes delegated to a specific manager or the Literacy or Numeracy co-ordinator but few TAs reported ongoing support from more senior staff and most suggested that once trained, they were expected to implement without further help.

340 In the first quotation below, Rita discusses Catch Up Numeracy, available only as part of integrated resources and training package, with teachers and TAs expected to attend together (Catch Up 2009; Dowker 2009, 29–30). Dipti discusses the Number Box, also accompanied by training (Five Minute Box nd a).

Everything that I do I run past my teacher, and she's quite happy as long as I run it. "Fine, Rita, that's brilliant, that's fine." (Rita, Numeracy Catch Up)

345 It's all individual, but you can do it as a group. I prefer to do it individually. . . (asked if she could make this decision herself) I can, yes, in liaison with the class teacher. Because we can have two totally different children, I prefer if I can give them my one-to-one attention and just support them in what they need. (Dipti, Number Box)

350 In the example below, Azmina mentions the Special Educational Needs **AQ4** Co-ordinator (SENCO), who supported the intervention in her school. This phonics programme, called Read Write Inc., was originally designed for all children when

learning to read but is now sometimes used as an intervention programme with older children experiencing difficulty (Brooks 2007, 69–70, 197–199).

355 . . . she believes in it a lot. Not everyone believes in it, because, I think especially when you get higher up the school, it's too basic for those children and a lot of teachers believe that being in the actual literacy lesson, even if the children are not participating, that they're hearing lots of things going on around them. (Azmina, Read Write, Inc.)

TAs also discussed contact with senior staff when they were observed working on interventions when in effect, unlike the two TAs quoted above, they were monitored:

360 . . . the SENCO at school and the deputy head have both observed me doing Catch Up and were perfectly happy that it was being done correctly. (Tony, Catch Up Literacy)

365 I mean, I was actually marked down once for delivering one of these programs with a child, I was working with a child who had processing difficulties, and one of the things with Five Minute Box is you don't let them fail. If they have any hesitancy, you step in and point it out. And I was sort of marked down and everything, but that's how the program runs. . . I was having an observation, and she said, "Well, you're not giving that child any time to process." I was having to say, "Well, no. That's part of this particular program." So it can be difficult when, as a TA, you hold sort of pockets of knowledge that maybe teachers at higher levels don't have. There can be some conflict, then. . . This was the deputy head at the time. So that was quite interesting, quite difficult. You have to sort of argue your corner a bit. Still didn't grade me any higher, but. . . (*Laughter*). (Audrey, Five Minute Box)

375 These two examples are similar in that both TAs have participated in the training by material providers and are striving to deliver the programmes in line with the intentions of those who designed them. However, there are also important differences. In the first example, Tony perceives the observation's focus as being whether the programme is 'being done correctly'. This implies that the SENCO and deputy are familiar with the expectations embedded in the programmes and favour their realisation in their school. This is consistent with the way Catch Up Literacy is supposed to operate, since it explicitly requires the commitment of senior staff who are required to attend training and to have the overall responsibility for the intervention (Catch Up 2011). In Tony's case, since the outcome of monitoring was positive and affirmative, the effect was unproblematic in terms of his motivation.

385 Audrey's evidence shows a rather different situation, one which led to some teacher–TA conflict. Audrey was clear in her explanation, feeling she knew more about the programme than the deputy head and was implementing it as intended by the designers. Both publicity from the designer of the programme (Five Minute Box, nd b) and evaluation (Brooks 2007, 52, 164) provide clues about the programme's approach, including the need for consolidation and the importance of not letting children fail. Audrey's implementation may, therefore, have been in line with the programme designers, but her approach was inconsistent with the deputy head's conception of high-quality teaching. The school, therefore, appears to have 'bought in' a programme with an approach inconsistent with the school's aims and values, a possible danger especially if senior staff are insufficiently involved from an early stage. In common with other TAs, Audrey suggested that:

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400 You actually become more knowledgeable about the way the program runs than the teacher does, so they start coming to you. They sort of discuss the difficulty with the child, they ask you to start on the program, and they then don't actually have much understanding of how the program works. (Audrey)

405 This quotation points up the importance of upward information flows, which Audrey suggests is recognised as useful by some teachers who grasp the TA's specific accumulated expertise acquired through proximity to the task. On occasion, TAs reported that this specific expertise was not fully recognised through the ways that they were deployed. Ruby, for example, reported that she had been 'stuck back in the classroom' instead of continuing to develop her work on interventions which appeared to us positively innovative.

410 Support to TAs is also related to the timing of their work, over which they have little control:

415 I'm timetabled to do that in the afternoon... which is quite sad, because I think focused learning like that should be done in the morning when the children's brains are fresher. I get them when they're tired after lunch, and normally the more fun activities are going on in the classroom, and I'm taking them out to do more maths. So if I had my way, I'd have it programmed for the morning.. (Rita, Catch Up Numeracy)

420 The current approach to meeting individual needs makes it clear that children deemed to need extra input in mathematics or literacy should still be included in normal literacy and numeracy sessions. This creates a problem for schools when timing intervention programmes, and TAs often had reservations about the solutions which were adopted. TAs sometimes made a link between this and the need for them to make the sessions a positive experience for the children. For example, Rita later spoke of how she sought to enhance sessions by including materials she bought herself:

425 ... in the pound shop they've done these little cars ... and they had these little butterfly things, and we replaced the counters with those, and the children love them... Because I was noticing, they'd see me coming, and they'd be painting and doing whatever in the afternoon, and they wouldn't want to come, because they'd want to be doing the painting, the clay activities, et cetera, so I had to try and make it as fun as possible... Otherwise, I think if it isn't fun I can't get them to engage. (Rita, Catch Up Numeracy)

430 Rita appears to have gone to some lengths to retrieve a difficult situation and make the programme enjoyable for the children. Given that she was careful about the programme's assessment and record-keeping aspects, it could be argued that her aims are complementary to those of the designers who stress careful assessment and design of activities. However, the central point here is that situations are structured for TAs, and that while the possibilities for restructuring them may be limited or non-existent, TAs perceived themselves to have and indeed appeared to us to have showed considerable expertise in overcoming the difficulty.

435 **Conclusion**

440 Our first research question asked how TAs perceived training, preparation, guidance and support related to intervention programmes and how useful they found these.

The first question is intended to capture both the assistance given by teachers and others, and the downward information flows. These matters, in common with those raised in our second research question, have considerable consequences in terms of TA motivation and thus are likely to have consequences for the discretionary effort that they contribute. Training provision for TAs was reported as patchy and very varied in quality and ranged from quite appropriate training at one end of the spectrum to none at the other. TAs' reaction to the training provided was, nevertheless, generally positive and, in some cases, TAs felt that it had increased their capacity to fulfil their role more widely than simply on the interventions. In terms of preparation, some TAs reported positive experiences from working closely with specialist teachers and deriving considerable benefit from it. Such experiences epitomise the collaborative, coaching and mentoring model identified as useful by other educational researchers.

Our second question asked how far TAs claimed and demonstrated expertise, and how far this was accessed by teachers and managers. TAs frequently claimed expertise in using intervention schemes and in tailoring them to the needs of specific children. Interestingly, while we recognise the obvious limitations of asking TAs about their own practice, we should report that there was no indication that they emphasised or prioritised task completion over educational processes as suggested by some researchers. Recognition of the contribution that some TAs wished to make in terms of understandings of specific pupils and how to motivate them or in wider senses was reported by the TAs in our sample to be uneven. In some cases, senior staff in schools were not perceived by TAs to be well-informed about the programmes that they were using, and these staff were not, therefore, well-placed to monitor or advise TAs; in fact, TAs were best placed to advise them.

Overall, TAs showed an underlying preference for an inclusive management approach that fully recognised their contribution, in line both with much wider management research from outside of the educational setting and a significant school of thought within the educational world. Often discussed as 'distributed leadership', the concept has been interpreted in a wide range of ways (Crawford 2012). From our evidence, the type of distributed leadership that engages expertise wherever it exists as advocated by Harris (2004) appears worthy of consideration. It nevertheless sits uneasily with some influential current thinking.

AQ6 Notes on contributors

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