

**THE ROLE AND DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHING
ASSISTANTS FROM 1997 TO 2000**

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ABSTRACT

This research has studied the role and context of teaching assistants (TAs) in one authority, and in particular in two primary schools.

The purpose of the study was to find out how these assistants support the teaching and learning of pupils in the classroom; to identify the factors which influence their effectiveness; and to identify strategies which could enhance their work.

The study began with a literature review of the historical perceptions of the role, effectiveness and development of teaching assistants.

In order to gain further insight into the assistants' role and needs within the local authority employing the researcher, the study proceeded with a survey of primary schools within the authority, the results of which were circulated to these schools. The results provided sufficient information to enable a rationale for professional development to be defined.

The next stage was a close look at the work of TAs in two primary schools which differed in the rationale for employing assistants. An ethnographical approach was used, including observation strategies, some video work, semi-structured interviews and field notes. The results were analysed and categorised.

A reflective diary recorded the changes taking place during the period of study. This, along with an updated literature review enabled the findings of the research to be set in a wider national context.

The key findings were:

- that assistants support teaching and learning in a variety of ways, often operating concurrently, and which include many characteristics of qualified teachers;
- their personal characteristics, opportunities for continuous professional development, and the school climate are important factors in their effectiveness, regardless of the nature of their employment; and
- while external agencies need to recognise and support their work, the way in which they are employed and deployed by the school is crucial.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

'A' level	Advanced level of the General Certificate of Education
ALS	Additional Literacy Support
APU	Anglia Polytechnic University
ATL	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CA	Classroom Assistant
CACHE	Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education
CLANSA	Certificate for Literacy and Numeracy Support Assistants
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSE	Certificate of Secondary Education
C&G	City and Guilds of London
DES	Department of Education and Science
DFE	Department For Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DH	Deputy head
EAIS	Essex Advisory and Inspection Service
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EPHA	Essex Primary Headteachers' Association
ERR	Early Reading Research
FAS	Funding Agency for Schools
FE	Further Education
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GEST	Grants for Education and Staff Training
GM	Grant Maintained
GTC	General Teaching Council
HE	Higher Education
HMCI	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectors
HT	Headteacher
ICT	Information and Communication Technology

I&DeA	Improvement and Development Agency
IEP	Individual Education Plan
liP	Investors in People
INSET	In-Service Education for Teachers
IS	Information Services
IT	Information Technology
KS	Key Stage
LEA	Local Education Authority
LGMB	Local Government Management Board
LGNT0	Local Government National Training Organisation
LMS	Local Management of Schools
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
MDA	Mid-Day Assistant
NAS	National Association of Schoolmasters
NASUWT	National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers
NC	National Curriculum
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NLP	National Literacy Project
NLS	National Literacy Strategy
NNEB	National Nursery Examination Board
NNS	National Numeracy Strategy
NOS	National Occupational Standards
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
NUT	National Union of Teachers
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
'O' level	Ordinary level of the General Certificate of Education
OU	Open University
PDR	Professional Development Review
PE	Physical Education
PLA	Pre-school Learning Alliance
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
RSA	Royal Society of Arts

SASD	Senior Adviser School Development
SAT	Standard Assessment Task or Test
SDP	School Development Plan
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SHA	Secondary Headteachers' Association
SIVA	School Improvement Value Added
STA	Specialist Teacher Assistant
STAC	Specialist Teacher Assistant Certificate
STAR	Student Teacher Achievement Ratio
TA	Teaching Assistant
TAWG	Teaching Assistant Working Group
TEACCH	Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped CHildren
TES	Times Educational Supplement
TTA	Teacher Training Agency
UK	United Kingdom
ULIE	University of London Institute of Education
USA	United States of America

Chapter 1: Introduction

“One of the most striking features of the work of classroom assistants is how little attention has been paid to it by researchers, practitioners and policy makers ... Even the label ‘classroom assistant’ is by no means universal ... This is due in part to their historical invisibility...”

(Swann and Loxley, 1997, p. 2)

This study investigated what Teaching Assistants (TAs) actually do to support the learning of pupils, what conditions promoted their effectiveness and in what ways these conditions could be enhanced. This chapter clarifies the aims and purpose of the study, sets the context and rationale for it, and indicates the structure of the study as a whole.

Chapter sections:

1.1 Who and what are teaching assistants?

1.2 Rationale for the study

1.3 The research questions

1.4 The framework of the study

1.1 Who and what are teaching assistants?

This study looks at the work and context of those adults who are paid to work in school classrooms in the United Kingdom (UK), usually directly with pupils. There are many names currently in use for these people. For the purposes of this study, they will be referred to as teaching assistants (TAs). The Good Practice Guide (DfEE, 2000a) defines teaching assistants (TAs) as follows:

“The term ‘teaching assistant’ is the Government’s preferred term of reference for all those in paid employment in support of teachers in primary, special and secondary schools. That includes those with a general role and others with specific responsibilities for a child, subject area or age group. The term captures the essential ‘active ingredient’ of their work; in particular it acknowledges the contribution which well-trained and well-managed assistants can make to the teaching and learning process and to pupil achievement. Consultation responses have supported the use of this term and the value of a generic term to reduce the confusion of different titles performing the same function” (p. 4).

Whether they are washing paint pots, making materials or working one-to-one with a child, they are supporting the learning of students of the institution in which they work, either directly or indirectly through supporting the teaching. Enhancing learning is usually a main aim of schools. The label *learning support assistant* (LSA) has come to signify supporting the learning of a child with special education needs (SEN) especially in secondary schools. *Classroom assistant* (CA) appears to put

more emphasis on the 'paint pot' role, and *teacher assistant* appears to assume the TA is an aide to a specific teacher. The very word *ancillary* means 'subservient', and *paraprofessional* could refer to any professional.

It should be noted that the title TA is established only in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland refers to this group as CAs. While other countries have aides or assistants, they have different titles. In the United States of America (USA), the 1960's job creation scheme saw an expansion of assistants in schools and the role of *paraprofessional* was recognised. In *Paraprofessionals today*, Gartner et al., (1977), describe a movement in the USA in the development of educational and human services following the anti-poverty programme of that time. They also saw the role as something beyond just helping in schools:

"Paraprofessionals have achieved prominence in a role to patch up an unworkable system. They must become a force in developing the education of the future - an education that prepares people for peace, social equality and human organisation" (p. 244).

In the USA, the term *paraprofessional* has persisted (Doyle, 1997), although *teacher aide* is also common. *Teacher assistants* or *teaching assistants* are the graduates who help out teaching staff in universities, for extra money while they themselves are taking postgraduate courses (Roach, 1995). In Canada, TAs form part of the trainee teacher programme, again in higher education (Saroyan and Amundsen, 1995).

Despite a common understanding that many professions, in the old fashioned sense, have their equally talented but less academic assistants, the teaching profession has been slow to recognise this group of people as key workers in their own right (Welty and Welty, 1976). Nursing has been a recognised paraprofessional job in medicine. Nurses are the doctors' aides, but are also now considered as being a profession in their own right, even if it was after a long struggle by Florence Nightingale in her later years (Woodham-Smith, 1950). The business world have personal assistants, lawyers their clerks, dentists their dental technicians. Foreign language assistants, nursery nurses, librarians and laboratory technicians do have recognition in schools. These assistants have clear roles, pay structures, their own training, with nationally understood qualifications and a career structure. Other support staff work in schools: administrative, caretaking and cleaning and kitchen staff, who all have a clear role in the working of the school. The general assistants did not, although over the period of the study, national and local developments have clarified some aspects of their role.

When first approaching the subject in 1994, the role of TAs was diffuse as well as invisible, even their name was often 'non-teaching assistants' as though they were 'non' people, *the "forgotten staff"* (Burnham, 1988, p. 31). Despite this, they performed a wide variety of jobs for which they

needed various skills, and were a group with an apparent fund of goodwill, enthusiasm and growing expertise.

1.2 Rationale for the study

1.2.1 Background

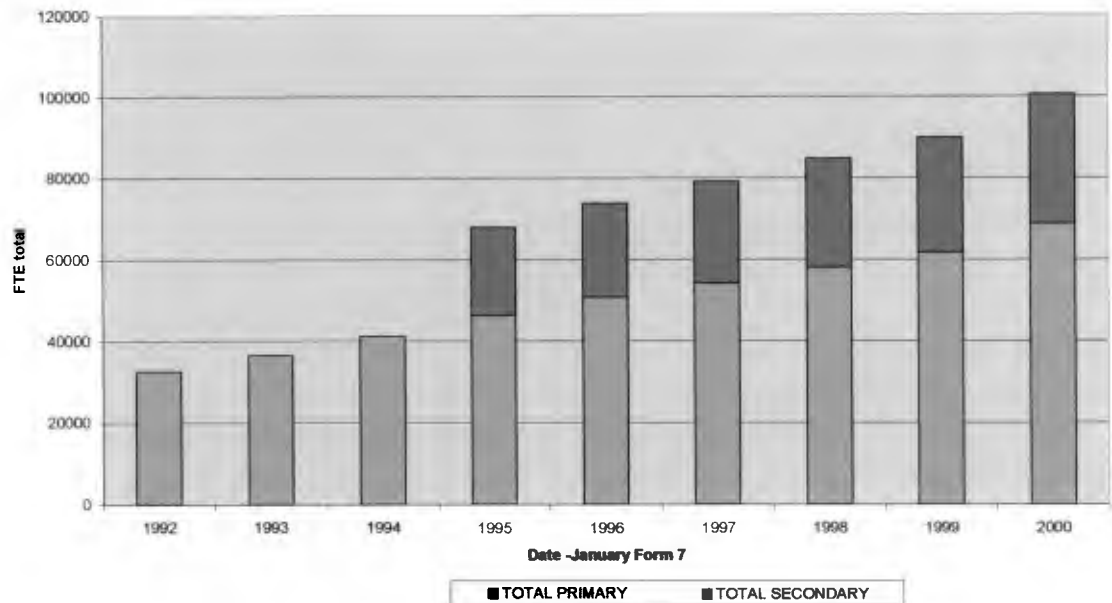
In 1994, the researcher became an adviser for Essex County Council, after twelve years as a headteacher of two primary schools. In this capacity, undertaking to run modest courses for assistants working in school, including those supporting teaching and learning in the classroom, it was evident at the beginning that there were limited opportunities for assistants to gain any training and few felt valued, yet they had a great deal of job satisfaction. In working in schools as a teacher and a headteacher, with TAs and teachers, and later with headteachers and whole schools, many issues were raised. Schools started to seek advice from the Local Education Authority (LEA) about assessing the effectiveness of TAs and their value for money. Questions were being asked particularly about effective teaching and learning and the use of additional adults. This study was undertaken in an attempt to clarify some of these issues and search with some rigour for some answers.

TAs had increased in number up to this time. Numbers are difficult to judge accurately, as the Form 7, completed by headteachers every January for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, previously the DfEE - Department for Education and Employment) has headings which are ambiguous with regards to nomenclature, and defining full time and part time staff. The returns to the DfEE until January 2001 were made in terms of hours worked, and then calculated to a nominal full time equivalent (FTE). Education Support Staff includes nursery nurses, those employed to support SEN and ethnic minorities, and those working in a more general capacity. The following figures in Table 1 for 1992 to 1994 come from an Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, 1996) report on class size, and those for 1995 to 2000 from the DfEE statistics office (Personal communication by e-mail, electronic data was not available prior to that date). They show a constant year by year increase. Chart 1 [p. 4] is a graphical display of these data.

Table 1: Education support staff in English primary schools from 1992 and English secondary schools from 1995 to 2000

Year of January count	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
TOTAL primary	32483	36441	41117	46324	50644	54143	58056	61729	68694
TOTAL secondary				21464	23105	24887	26550	28174	31765

Chart 1: Graphical display of Table 1 showing Education support staff in English primary schools from 1992 and English secondary schools from 1995 to 2000



SEN funding encouraged the appointment of helpers allocated to individual pupils, individual school control of budgets under Local Management of Schools (LMS) encouraged innovative uses of financial resources, and the very scarcity of money contributed to the growth in lowly paid, flexibly recruitable staff.

However, the picture changed during the study, particularly between 1998 and 2000. The change of government in the UK in 1997, with its emphasis on education and school improvement introduced new initiatives accompanied by financial resources which has brought about many of the things that researchers and the TAs themselves have wished for – at least in policy terms. Practice has yet to catch up, given local management. The main emphasis in school improvement has been a drive for increased attainment in pupils focussing on the quality of teachers and headteachers, and the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The literacy and numeracy targets and accompanying National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (NLS and NNS) also aimed to raise measurable levels of attainment. The support that TAs can give teachers was recognised as a significant factor in these initiatives, particularly in the Green papers on Teachers, and SEN (DfEE, 1998a; 1998b). Considerable funding was put into the TA initiative, £350 million over three years, renewed in 2001 to allow continuity to 2004 (DfES, 2001a). This has been largely put through the LEAs to schools for the recruitment of TAs, with an emphasis on supporting literacy especially in Key Stage (KS) 2 (DfEE, 1999a). Guidance, induction training, consultation on

National Occupational Standards (NOS), a framework of qualifications and pathways to teaching have accompanied it.

The researcher became involved in these national proceedings by virtue of this study and experience with TAs. The results of the study were of use in the national decision making process and subsequent developments, before any attempt was made to publish them as such. The materials which were written for the DfEE (2000b; 2000c) formed part of the training materials for the induction of new TAs.

1.2.2 Status

TAs had little status at the beginning of the study. They were not unionised. The move towards establishing nursery education in the early twentieth century, built on the work of Froebel, Montessori and Steiner, emphasised the importance of the relationships between adults and children (Bruce, 1987). The National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) came into existence in 1945, and established a two year course, examinations and certificates for training girls of sixteen to eighteen years and over *“in the development, care and education of the young child from birth to five years of age, at the same time continuing with their own education in general subjects”* (Parry and Archer, 1974, p. 67). There were few qualifications open to TAs other than the NNEB, until the establishment of the Specialist Teacher Assistant (STA) award in 1995, and that was still only for those working in KS 1.

Even nursery nurses, a group much more generally recognised, were called *Invisible Professionals* by Robins, (1998). Her literature review states *“there is no coherent body of research on nursery nurses and shows that their job as support or complementary staff is patchily under researched”* (p. iv). Yet nursery nurses have at least a recognised professional body, a recognised qualification and a contractual status. None of these yet apply to TAs who perform a similar role in main stream school to that of nursery nurses in a nursery school. Teenagers can voice their desire to be a nursery nurse when they leave school, but few young people express the wish to be a TA. Very few young men appear to join either group.

1.2.3 Lack of research

Prior to the study there was little published research, and little recognition by the educational leaders national or local. Loxley and Swann (1997a) argued that the difficulty lay in:

“accepting responsibility” and “Until this issue is resolved, primarily at national level with the DfEE giving a policy lead, the result will be disillusionment and frustration with the initiative, particularly for the students...they are probably the richest untapped resource in our education service. They deserve recognition” (p. 21).

Teachers' unions were openly antagonistic in the 1960s, fearing a dilution of the status of teachers. The unions are now less strong, more open to debate but are still protective of teachers.

There had been a general lack of attention paid to support staff as a whole, and particularly to TAs. Most literature on human resource management for schools still focuses on the teachers. Staff development for schools still frequently means professional development only for teachers, although Grants for Education and Staff Training (GEST) have been, and Standards Fund budgets are, clearly for the training and development of all staff and governors. The class size debate largely revolved round the teacher:pupil ratio and not the adult:pupil ratio or other resource provision human or otherwise or classroom size or learning environment (Ofsted, 1996a; Blatchford and Mortimore, 1997).

Management theory, epitomised by authors such as Senge (1990), along with ideas of Total Quality Management (Greenwood and Gaunt, 1994) have supported the practice of recognition of all people who work in an establishment contributing to its effectiveness. School effectiveness research endorses this (Sammons et al., 1995). The philosophy of Investors in People (IiP) (Chambers and Baxter, 1997) recognises that the training and development of all staff is important to the healthy growth of an organisation, but schools had been slow to commit themselves to the IiP process. Texts supporting staff development or human resource development in schools rarely mentioned support staff except in passing. 'Staff' meant 'teachers', and 'staff meetings' meant 'meetings of teaching staff' (Bolam et al., 1993; O'Neill et al., 1994). *Good Management in small schools* (Coopers and Lybrand, 1993) has a chapter on the crucial role of the secretary, school maintenance and support of parents and governors but other support staff are not mentioned. Appraisal and performance review work even in 2000 still only relates to teaching staff (DfEE, 2000d), although professional development "*should also be available to teaching assistants*" (DfEE, 2000e, p. 5).

Until the late 1990s, well into the study, there was a lack of work published on TAs and few major texts or projects to which reference could be made. Mortimore et al., (1992), commented on the "*relatively few studies*" and "*few education reports or books*" (p. 5) in their research report on non-teaching staff for the then Department for Education (DFE) which was published later in book form (Mortimore et al., 1994). Mortimore's report also recognises that this omission is surprising given:

"the influence of management theory and it's emphasis on team approaches to institutional management...HMI...researchers and educational writers have failed to emphasise sufficiently the potential of these roles" (p. 5).

1.3 The research questions

1.3.1 The main questions

Given the paucity of evidence about what TAs really did in classrooms, there was a need to find this out. This recognised that even at the beginning of the study, TAs no longer just supported the work of teachers, or the environment of the classroom, but were also increasingly working directly with children and young people. As the main aim of an educational establishment is usually to enhance the learning of pupils, supported by the community of the school, optimally itself a learning organisation (Senge, 1990; Sammons et al., 1995), the basic question asked by this study is:

What do TAs do to make a difference to children's learning?

In order to support these people in their work, as an LEA adviser, the subsidiary question was:

In what ways can their role be enhanced in order that they can be more effective?

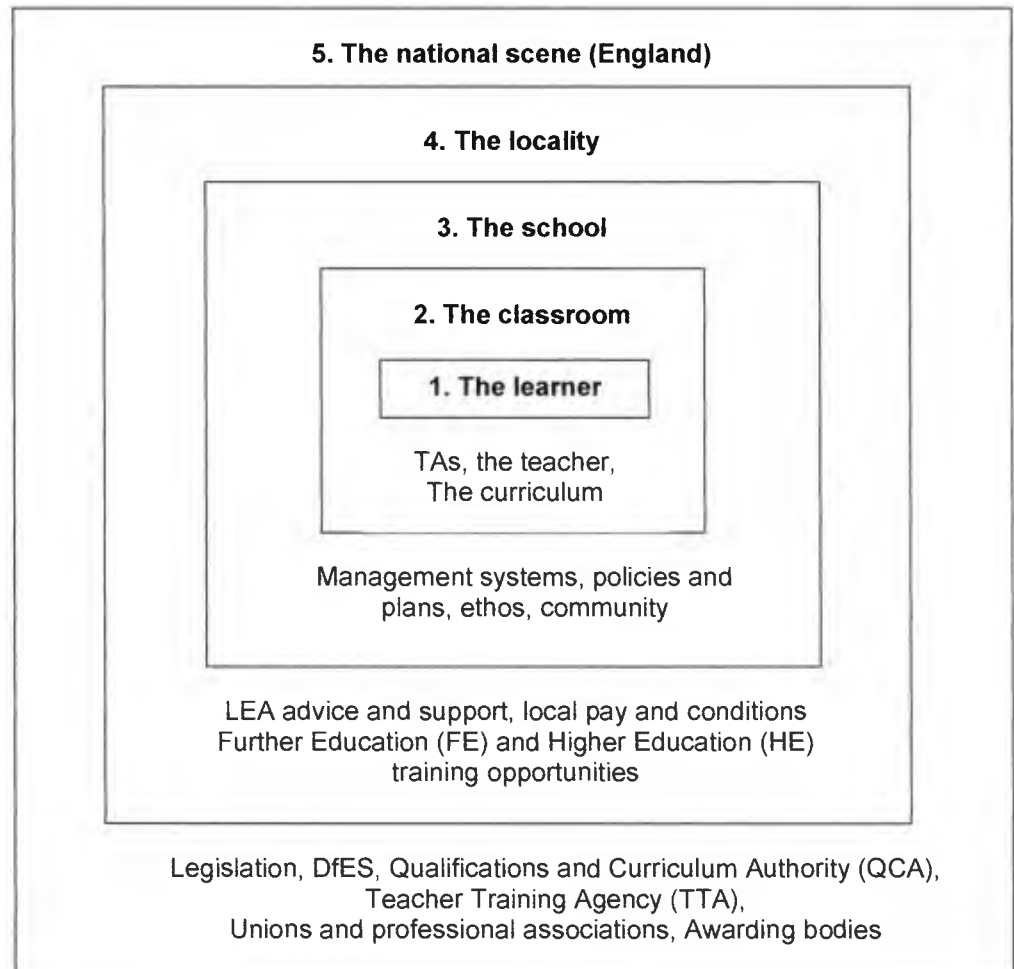
It is not possible to define the role of TAs simply. They work with children and young people throughout the phases of education, of all abilities, not just those with SEN. Some individuals had three different contracts, let alone performed a multitude of tasks in each one. They could work with several different teachers within a morning let alone a week. They themselves had a varied educational history, and their pay and conditions of service were varied. This had to be set in the complicated contexts of classroom, school, local authority and country, at a time of rapid changes in education as well as social, economic, and technological changes, all of which affected their work. In order to limit the range of this research, it was decided to concentrate on TAs working in mainstream schools, with pupils of statutory school age (five years old to 16 years old) supporting teaching and learning in a generic way, rather than looking at the support of pupils with SEN.

1.3.2 The context

The context of TAs could be described using Diagram 1 [p. 8], where various adults, working largely in a classroom context determined by the teacher, assist the pupil learner. The classroom environment is not an isolated area; the teacher works in a school with policies, practices, management structures and systems. Even in circumstances of high autonomy, the school must conform to certain national and local requirements, and will seek support from various agencies for the pupils and with professional development for the staff. Local authorities vary considerably in their funding and support mechanisms for state schools, and all schools have to adhere to a legal framework and national accountability of some kind.

In addition to this complex context, definitions of teaching and learning are constantly changing; public accountability is demanding numerical measures of attainment and achievement, alongside a recognition of the value of stimulating curiosity and creativity.

Diagram 1: The context in which the teaching assistants work



Adapted from Watkinson, (1998a)

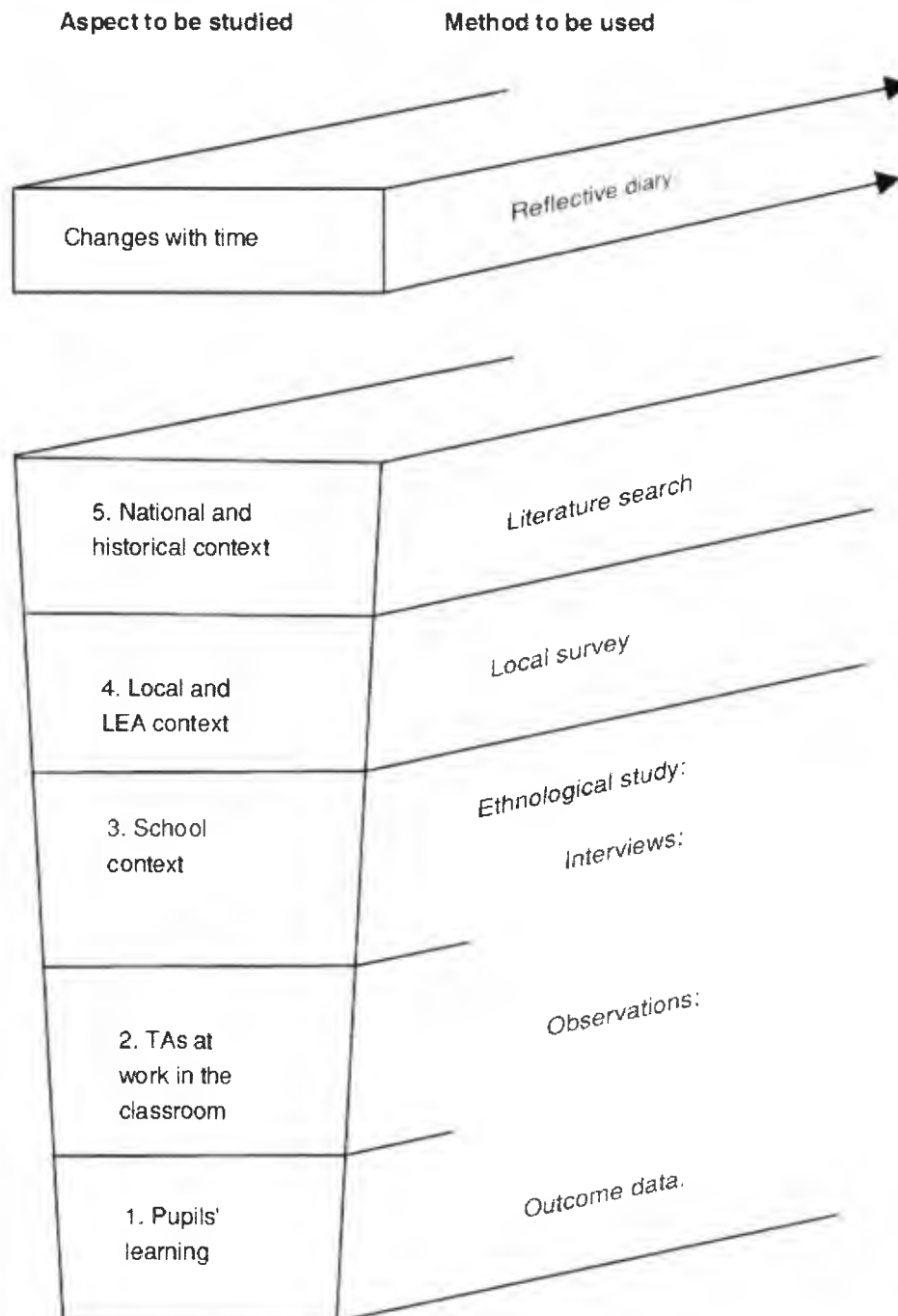
1.4 The framework of the study

1.4.1 The model for the study

Because of the complexity of the issues involved, a variety of methods of enquiry have been used in this study. The aim was to use *“the rigour of the natural sciences and the same concern of traditional social science to describe and explain human behaviour”* (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 5).

Thinking of the study as a section of Diagram 1 [p. 8], the relationship of methods to the context of the TAs can be seen in the following model, Diagram 2. The changes taking place during the study were also tracked.

Diagram 2: The relationship of methods used in the study to the context surrounding the teaching assistant



1.4.2 The format of the thesis

The thesis follows the order in which the work for the study was carried out, each chapter describing a different aspect.

Chapter 2 describes the research design in more detail.

Chapter 3 looks at the research literature and other material published up to 1997/8 to gain the wider context in which the more detailed fieldwork was set. The whole study took place between 1995 and 2000, which includes time before and after the fieldwork.

Chapter 4 gives the procedures followed and the results obtained from an LEA survey. Following the reading pursued in Chapter 3, it was decided to use a survey to get a better, but fairly broad, picture of the circumstances of TAs within the local context of the LEA where the researcher worked. This took place in the summer of 1998.

Chapter 5 contains the main part of the study. This looks at the interface of the TA and the learner, in the multifaceted context of the classrooms of two schools. It was originally intended to work in only one school, but as that school only employed TAs for children with SEN, a second similar school was also used. This took place over the academic year 1998 to 1999.

Chapter 6 covers the developments that took place during and after the field work in schools described in Chapter 5. The educational context changed over the period of the study nationally, raising the profile of TAs considerably. This period also saw funded research commissioned by various agencies and the results published, and the DfEE putting in large sums of money to the recruitment and training of new assistants. Some existing publications went into second editions, and new ones appeared to reflect the changes. A reflective diary was kept during the study. This enabled the researcher both to reflect upon these rapid changes, and to add a dimension to the narrow focus obtained from the case studies through visiting a large number of schools over the period.

Chapter 7 draws together the various strands, looks at the implications, poses some explanations and recommends some further action.

Chapter 2: The research design

“ ... the systematic and scholarly application of the principles of a science of behaviour to the problems of people within their social contexts, ... the problems of teaching and learning within the formal educational framework and to the clarification of issues having a direct or indirect bearing on these concepts.”

(Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 40)

This chapter describes the various methods that were used to address the research questions within the complex context of schools in the late 1990s. The context of the researcher determined certain practical constraints and raised some ethical considerations. The theoretical stance taken in the study is described. The reasons are given for the adoption of a multi-dimensional methodology. This is followed by the procedures used for data collection for each aspect of the study. The validity of the approaches and the issues raised are considered. The chapter ends with a description of the methods used for the analysis of each section of the study and how the study as a whole is interpreted and presented to reach the final conclusions.

Chapter sections:

2.1 The context: practical and ethical considerations

2.2 The theoretical stance

2.3 Research strategies - methodology

2.4 Methods of data collection

2.5 Interpretation and presentation

2.1 The context: practical and ethical considerations

2.1.1 Practical considerations

The study took a mixed philosophical stance in trying “*to make sense out of a total situation*” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 18). Denzin and Lincoln also set out a series of phases in ‘*The Research Process*’. These phases have been used as a basis for the order of the contents of this chapter.

Phases in the research process

1. The researcher as a multicultural subject

2. Theoretical paradigms and perspectives

3. Research strategies

4. Methods of collection and analysis

5. Interpretation and presentation (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 25).

The professional role of the researcher as an LEA Adviser and later Senior Adviser School Development (SASD) with the Essex Advisory and Inspection Service (EAIS), as well as being sometimes a member of an LEA Ofsted team, influenced the study profoundly, practically and ethically. The county line management was very supportive of the use of prime adviser time on the study, as they needed some of the practical results. They also encouraged advisers to be learners themselves and have continuing professional development (CPD). However, such were the demands of being an SASD, that time given to the study had to be judiciously managed, and at some times LEA work would clearly have to override the needs of the study. Long periods of time in schools on the study would not be possible, and some disruption to any planned timetable might occur. These possibilities set certain limits on the desirable design to investigate the research questions.

Some of the facilities of the authority could be used to support the researcher such as administrative time, advice and communication systems with schools. This was to be an individual study, not separately financed or part of a team effort. Given the nature of schools and the context of change, flexibility had to be built in. Arranging dates to do specific tasks within the study, could turn out subsequently to be inconvenient for the schools, and agreements made as to access might have to be renegotiated if workloads of schools' staff altered. Opportunities for close study were likely to be serendipitous rather than the result of systematic sampling. Research based solely on one method could fail to be completed. Educational researchers can however "*typically use an informal strategy to begin fieldwork, such as starting wherever they can slip a foot in the door*" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 43).

2.1.2 Practical ethical considerations

Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 290-296) outline various ethical considerations each of which are dealt with in the following:

'Worthiness of project' – The study was undertaken because of professional need, not only directly but also responding to needs expressed by senior managers in schools.

'Competence boundaries' – The researcher had expertise at many levels of school management and adviser/inspector experience, allied with research experience. This was backed up by administrative staff able to process numerical and written data in a confidential manner.

'Informed consent' – This was sought at each level of the study, the survey and the school visits. Protocols were established before starting any of the data collections.

'Benefits, cost and reciprocity' – Participants were keen that the study take place and were anxious to have speedy access to results. The schools involved were delighted to participate for their own interest and development. The LEA as an employer were keen to utilise the study material and promote the professional development of a senior member of staff. The

comment by one TA, that the researcher had become their advocate in policy making in high places, was reassuring.

'Harm and risk' – The schools' headteachers were able to ensure all those participating, either staff or children, whether responding to questionnaires, being watched or being interviewed, that they were prepared for the exposure such gathering of information might provide. The informants were considered first, safeguarding their rights, interests and sensitivities (Spradley, 1980).

'Honesty and trust' – The protocols established acted as a guarantee of this, and where this appeared to be at risk, the participants quickly acted to re-establish trust, and clarify the issues involved.

'Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity' – These were protected as described in the individual parts of the study.

'Intervention and advocacy' – It was hard at times for the researcher not to be diverted into the adviser role in schools where a more objective stance was being attempted. During the school studies, TAs, teachers and headteachers were eager to capitalise on the researcher's presence. Advice was sought by them as to policies, careers and opportunities for TAs. This had to be dealt with by noting it when it occurred, and setting that particular discussion on one side. The possibility of being involved in observing poor or even inappropriate behaviour of staff or children was recognised from the beginning, a situation which can occur on inspection. The professional experience of the researcher was invaluable here. Also, being observed by the researcher, knowing her county role, could have affected the TAs' performance. They could have felt intimidated by the presence of a senior colleague. When actually doing the observations and interviews in schools, the researcher was careful to dress and present herself as a less formal visitor to the classroom, rather than as an inspector/adviser. Such was the common sense of the TAs involved that the researcher appeared to be accepted as a fellow human, an equal colleague doing a different job, and not a senior one. To be a listener was important, they wanted to 'tell their tale' to someone who was interested. Whatever the outcome, the possibility of "*power relations*" had to be held in mind (Scott and Usher, 1999, p. 114).

'Research integrity and quality' – The personal background of the researcher determined the slant that the study took. As a primary generalist, with an interest in science rather than SEN, literacy or numeracy, the decision taken was to concentrate on the TAs' generalist role rather than their role in supporting particular children's needs, or a particular subject. The researcher's training and experience of a wide range of schools as an advisor and inspector was also useful, as was the ability to reflect ideas and judgements with critical colleagues within the LEA. In addition, discussion of developments with the staff of the University of London Institute of Education (ULIE) kept the researcher aware of instances of self-delusion.

'Ownership of data and conclusions' – All questionnaire returns and the originals of notes, transcripts, tape and film were kept by the researcher under lock and key and will eventually be destroyed. Copies of all observation notes, interview transcripts and video film were sent to the participants. The schools were consulted over the analyses done for their schools, but any final analysis was to be in the ownership of the researcher. All participants agreed to the use of the anonymised data for the purpose of this study. It was agreed that if any of the materials were used for wider publication, they would receive a copy of the draft before publication. All parents were asked to agree to the use of a camera on their children before the videos were made.

'Use and misuse of results' – It has been possible to use some of the work of this study to inform policy and practice during the course of the study. It is sincerely believed that this use has been to the benefit of the TAs and ultimately to the promotion of learning of children in schools.

'Conflicts, dilemmas and trade-offs' – One dilemma which did arise was in the use of the video material. It was increasingly tempting to use footage to show outsiders, as some of it gave clear demonstrations of competence. However, this was not done. Luckily, finance became available for separate professional films to be made, with the full permission and participant right of veto on footage to be used.

2.1.3 The role of the researcher

The role of the researcher in terms of bias, raised in the previous section, was a constant issue, which could only be resolved by being as open and perceptive as possible about the possible influence. Fine (1998) suggests one should “*probe how we are in relation with the contexts and with the informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations*” (p. 135). The actual role of the researcher has been described [pp. 3, 11-12]. Opportunities were made in meetings and interviews “*creating occasions for (the researcher) and informants to discuss what is and is not 'happening between'*” the actual meetings (Punch, 1998, p. 162). Punch also lists features that are not always clearly articulated in looking at the role of the researcher, for instance: personality, geographic proximity, nature of the research object, the researcher's institutional background, publishing, social and moral obligations. He also poses the fundamental dilemma of confidentiality, protecting the subjects as against the freedom to conduct research and publish findings.

Altheide (1998) lists some of the concerns in locating the role of the researcher. In this study, the entrée to schools and the local headteacher organisation was facilitated by the role.

Cresswell (1998) applauds the researcher as being part of the scene in which they operate. “*I see ethnography as an approach in which researchers bring a strong cultural lens to their study*” (p. 86).

He later describes how this can affect the description of the group, the analysis and the interpretation of the culture-sharing group. Interpretation makes a difference. Woods (1996) says:

“The researcher does not stand above and outside the research. The researcher is contextualised within situations and definitions of situations, researcher activities are constructed and interpreted in distinctive processes; and the researcher’s self is inextricably bound up with the research. Reflexivity – the need to consider how one’s own part in the research affects it is therefore an essential requirement” (p. 510).

He describes the initial commitment, the skills the researcher brings, including personality, and their values and beliefs which impinge upon the research. Southworth (1995) describes his account as possibly being impaired by the affective dimension of data collection. Researcher feelings in this study were logged in the reflective diary, and cannot be discounted, but were largely those of frustration at not being able to spend longer in the schools, and wonder at the competence of an often ignored group of people. A strong personal commitment to recognising and celebrating the role must also be recognised, but this also enabled the process to be continued over a long period of time.

2.2 The theoretical stance

2.2.1 The mixed approach

This study needed to have a mixed approach, in order to allow flexibility for the researcher and the questions asked, and to enable a more reliable outcome. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) talk of “*blurred genres*”, when using the full complement of paradigms. The time when a single paradigm could be used for an investigation is referred to by them as a “*golden age*” (p. 17). They also talk of “*multiple realities, where knower and subject create understandings in the natural world*”, and “*a bundle of skills, assumptions and practices*” (pp. 27,28). The researcher, having a training in science, leant towards a positivist or ‘scientific’ stance, desiring a deductive scientific report. However, studying the activities of human beings, does not lend itself to such an approach or to experimental methods. A more interpretive, constructivist approach was needed. The aim was therefore to utilise ideas and methods as appropriate to the situations, but with a clarity of purpose and an understanding of the criteria to determine the credibility of the outcomes.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) also talk of ‘post’ modernism and ‘post’ positivism, where there is no single authority, method or paradigm, and objectivity can only ever be partial. This study rests as they describe “*on a flexible set of guidelines that connects theoretical paradigm to the strategy of enquiry and methods for collecting empirical material*” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 28).

It is situated within the pragmatic philosophical framework of Denzin and Lincoln, (1998) which relates to practical management issues. The research questions:

**'How do TAs actually promote learning?' and
'What can be done to make this more effective?'**

are utilitarian, it is the middle and senior management who need the answers, decision-makers, and the TAs themselves. This need, along with the practical reality of the researcher's situation resulted in an eclectic set of preferred methods, answering questions of programme content and efficacy, and the needs of the subjects – the TAs.

In Cohen and Manion's (1994) terms, this is 'subjectivist' research. It is "*looking for sets of meanings which people use to make sense of their world and behaviour within it*" and "*searching for meaningful relationships and the discovery of their consequences for action*" and "*identifying conditions or relationships*" (p. 10). The traditional stance of the natural scientist - curiosity, flexibility, critical reflection, respect for evidence and sensitivity to living things and the environment (Harlen, 1985) also underpins this study.

A descriptive rather than experimental approach was required. The study aims to be ethnographic and interpretative (Scott and Usher, 1999), yet with as systematic and rigorous approach as practically possible. One interpretation of 'being scientific' is to be 'objective', to put the researcher outside the situation, to set up situations in which all but one variable is changed, thus enabling the change agent to be identified. But, this is not possible even in the physical sciences. Any social investigation has to take account of the human situation. This was a study of what was actually happening, not an attempt to be a change agent. Also, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) point out, objectivity:

"does not mean controlling variables ... rather it means open-ness, a willingness to listen and 'give voice' to respondents ... hearing what others have to say, seeing what others do and representing them as accurately as possible. Having an understanding ... which might be quite different from those of their respondents ... think(ing) comparatively ... maintain(ing) multiple viewpoints ... periodically step(ping) back and ask(ing) 'what is going on here?' ... maintaining an attitude of skepticism ... making comparisons - asking questions - sampling based on evolving theoretical concepts" (p. 42).

Post positivism, as seen by Guba and Lincoln (1998), is like more enlightened 'natural' science, it does not set out to prove, but to disprove. Science does not have 'laws' or 'facts', only frameworks which the current state of knowledge has not yet disproved, the use of which helps the human race move forward. The 'constructivist' or 'interpretivist' paradigm is described in terms of understanding the world, interpreting it, clarifying what and how people behave as social actors, the meaning of the language they use and the influence of the role of the inquirer.

2.2.2 Various dimensions

Fetterman (1989) talks of “*etic*” and “*emic*” perspectives (p. 30), where either the insider's view of reality is taken, or an external, social science perspective. The aim here was to get both, to construct a more complete picture of what was happening.

It could be argued that this study was in the feminist tradition of study. Hammersley (1998) talks of focussing on a relatively powerless group, predominantly female, which TAs certainly are. Punch (1998) describes a type of study typified by non-exploitative relationships, the subjects of the study seen as partners, participants, stakeholders, not suffering harm or embarrassment, a concern of the researcher with confidentiality, the details of the study sites and participants being unidentifiable. All of these apply to this study, but this does not preclude the use of other paradigms. It is another dimension.

2.3 Research strategies - methodology

2.3.1 Variety

Strauss and Corbin (1998) define methodology as “*a way of thinking about studying social reality*” (p. 3). This study used various approaches. The multi-paradigmatic focus immediately makes the “*practitioner sensitive to the value of a multi-methodological approach*” (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). The multi-methodological approach was also used to increase the validity and reliability of conclusions in a changing world. The danger was then of achieving a mixed economy, eclectic approach as depicted by Davies et al., (1984). Their paper describes a piece of research that failed because of over-ambition and under-management, but it did involve the work of several people being combined. As only the researcher in the proposed TA study was involved, other than technical support people, and was aware of the problem from the start, the benefits were considered to outweigh the pitfalls.

Hammersley (1998) in a graphical display (p. 185) describes how the greater amount of detail is gained with a case study approach, and the larger number of cases is more accessible to the survey approach. Greater accuracy in a case study can be obtained by increasing the number of cases studied. The only methodology rejected from the beginning, as being out of the reach of the researcher, was the experimental method. The complex way in which it was known that TAs worked, soon eliminated the possibility of any approach which aimed at controlling variables or even tracking them. The published information about TAs was still limited at the beginning of this study, thus this was more an attempt to establish and isolate what the variables were, in order to formulate them rather than manipulate them. The scope of such manipulation was also outside the practical remit and desire of the researcher. Schools are locally managed and not managed by officers of the LEA. The consideration for further work in this area is discussed in the final chapter.

The aim was to use both qualitative and quantitative data, to be as credible and trustworthy as possible, to be as open as confidentiality agreements would allow, to aim for understanding and explanation, rather than to prove any pre-determined theory. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) state:

“Qualified competent observers (researchers) can with objectivity clarity and precision report ... own observations ... and the experiences of others ... researchers have held to a belief in a real subject ... who is able to report on his or her experiences ... blend observations ... interviews and life story, personal experience, case study and other documents” (p. 24).

Miles and Huberman (1994) in their chapter on bounding data, warn against seeing one kind of data as being the only way. They suggest purpose is more important, and practicality should be considered. They also describe the links between the qualitative and quantitative being at three levels: counting incidences, comparing different types of data from the same source and being part of the overall design, developing a multi-method approach (p. 42). All three apply in this study.

2.3.2 Triangulation

In using a range of methods and sources of information the principle of triangulation, *“the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour”* (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 233) comes into play. This goes some way to address the complexity of the context, and increase confidence in the outcomes.

Cohen and Manion (1994) describe six varieties of triangulation and several of these were used in this study. The first, *“time triangulation”*, is addressed in the reflective diary. *“Space triangulation”* however is not addressed. The schools surveyed and studied in depth were all in the same local authority in England and reflected similar low ethnic mix. The literature survey was restricted to UK and a few USA studies. The methods used did show *“combined levels”* of triangulation as the final analysis and synthesis took in the results from a survey of a large number of TAs, interviews from a few TAs, ideas from the literature and comments made about national and local incidents and within single classrooms. The theoretical stance taken above is multi-dimensional, fulfilling a *“theoretical triangulation”*. Only one observer was used, the researcher, and so *“investigator triangulation”* was not possible, but the last, *“methodological triangulation”* was. Also, within the case studies themselves, several methods were employed (p. 236).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) recognising that *“objective reality can never be captured”*, nominate triangulation as *“not a tool or a strategy of validation ... (but) a strategy that adds rigor, breadth and depth to any investigation”* (p. 3).

2.3.3 Generalisation

In choosing a case study approach, even one with more than one case, and various methods of data collection, the possibility of generalising from one or two cases to a wider application was to be considered. Cohen and Manion (1994) suggest that "*human scientists ... have to exercise great caution when generalising their findings to the parent population*" (p. 14). As an LEA adviser, the researcher had access to many schools for classroom observation, the in-service education of teachers (INSET), formal and informal discussion and observations of many aspects of school life at all levels of the staff hierarchy, inspection and perusal of documentation. There were also opportunities for professional debate with senior colleagues in the LEA and the need and opportunity to do a county-wide survey. It was decided to keep a diary of relevant events, discussions and reflections on these with the more usual researcher field note diary. This, along with a survey, would provide evidence to hold alongside any work at greater depth within the chosen case study schools.

2.4 Methods of data collection

2.4.1 Variety

During the study period, data were collected from a variety of sources, with differing methods, qualitative and quantitative, to tell the story of development over time as well as provide evidence for any conclusions and decisions made. Strauss and Corbin's (1998) definition of 'Methods' is "*a set of procedures and techniques for gathering and analyzing data*" (p. 3). Guba and Lincoln (1998) say:

"at base all interpretive inquiries watch, listen, ask record and examine. How these activities might best be defined and employed depend on the inquirer's purpose for doing the enquiry. Purpose in turn is shaped by the epistemological and methodological commitments" (p. 222).

The various contextual levels were shown in Diagrams 1 and 2 in Chapter 1 [pp. 8,9]. In order to maintain some order within the complex situation, the study first looked at the wider context and gradually focussed in.

- *The wider, national context* was examined by searching the literature, and later using the reflective diary as the researcher became involved at this level.
- *The local context* was investigated with a survey.
- *School and classroom context and the TA/learner interface* were studied using an ethnographical study with interviews, observations and pupil outcome data.
- *The changes in time in each of the dimensions* were tracked with a reflective diary.

The sets of data from each method were analysed separately, reflected upon, and written up as a separate chapter in the study. Then a final amalgam analysis was attempted to bring out the

similarities and differences thrown up by the different methods. The rationale for each method is given below.

2.4.2 The literature search

This was undertaken in the first place to determine what was already known and published about TAs. While there appeared to be little generally available, it was possible that the research questions had already been investigated. It was necessary to know what had been found out, what methods had been used, what action if any had been taken, and what importance could be given to the findings if they existed. A second reason, because of the apparent recent development of TAs, and their seemingly ignored work, it was necessary to discover a little of the history of their development. Thirdly, apart from the research questions, it was necessary to obtain a broader view of the general understanding of TAs by academics and more authoritative workers in the area, to gain alternative perspectives. Lastly, it seemed likely that some of the methods used would be useful to replicate or could be adapted to look further into the areas of interest.

Historical research can:

“yield insights into some educational problems that could not be achieved by any other means ... help us understand how our present educational system has come about ... In turn help to establish a sound basis for further progress or change ... can show how and why educational theories and practices developed ... enables ... (use of) former practices to evaluate newer, emerging ones ... contribute to a fuller understanding of the relationship between politics and education, between school and society, between local and central government and between teacher and pupil” (Cohen and Manion, 1994, pp. 45,46).

Given that any research of this kind can become an eclectic collection of articles and books of varying usefulness and value to the investigation, it was necessary to determine a system of searching, cataloguing and evaluating the material gained.

Methods used

These included to

- search the ULIE library catalogue computers using keywords
- read the *Times Educational Supplement* (TES) and *Education Journal* for any reference to TAs and pick up references
- use the bibliographies in articles, survey and research documents once found
- listen at conferences and meetings for likely sources of interest
- discuss with colleagues related issues and publications
- search the wider UK catalogues using electronic access.

Until the results of these searches became available, the system of cataloguing was purely alphabetical by author. As the literature survey developed, the lack of similar posts and published

work on them in other countries, alongside the growing amount written in the UK narrowed the field of search to the use of TAs in the UK. Then the themes began to appear. These coincided with the foci of the research questions. Articles and chapters of books which were relevant were kept as photocopies for future reference, notes were made of items of interest, and a record kept of all titles investigated, with the reason why not pursued, if this was appropriate. All authors and titles investigated were recorded using Endnote software. The major surveys and books in the area, were purchased. This enabled references to be reviewed later in the study, as the scene changed.

Eventually, the main subject areas were determined as:

- general materials - largely texts - and items concerning the role of TAs
- supporting the child or SEN matters
- classroom and school management
- professional development and training.

Evaluation of the literature ascertained whether the text informed the area of study, and checked the methods used by the authors for useful ideas on strategies.

The selection of material to be included in Chapter 3 was therefore determined by the researcher and so depended on personal opinion as to what was relevant or valuable or authentic (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). In attempting to judge whether this was reasonable, bibliographies of published work from reliable sources were checked to see whether different authorities tended to use similar or different literature sources themselves. In searching for a wider range of articles, one purpose was to see whether any kind of author bias would emerge in material investigated, or whether funding sources were possibly influencing the selection, presentation and interpretation of data. Another was to try to ascertain that possible relevant work was not missed. The kind of validity and reliability critiques used were those recommended for the whole research process (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

2.4.3 The LEA survey

While the literature survey would provide evidence of what was known about TAs in general, each education authority had developed its own practice with regards to employment of ancillary staff before LMS. Subsequent to LMS, practice in different schools varied according to the local management, historical employment practice within each LEA, and the current delegation practice of the LEA. It was known, both as an ex-headteacher within the authority and then an officer, that schools in the particular area of the researcher, Essex, had all had their SEN funding delegated to them as well as their general school budget. It was necessary therefore to find out what was happening to TAs in the locality. The DfEE annual figures, collected on Form 7, for the authority were ambiguous, and no other LEA source was able to inform the advisory service, even how many people were employed in the capacity of TAs in the authority, let alone what kind of jobs they did or

how they were managed. The first task then was to establish some kind of investigation to determine the background in which the researcher worked.

A descriptive survey was proposed (Oppenheim, 1992). As Cohen and Manion (1994) point out:

"Three prerequisites to the design of any survey are the specification of the exact purpose of the inquiry; the population on which it is to focus; and the resources that are available" (p. 85).

The purpose was to ascertain:

- some basic information about numbers of TAs employed within the authority
- what age and gender they were
- what they did, in contractual terms, practically and voluntarily
- what cost was involved to the school and what sort of pay they received
- what qualifications and experience they had already
- what kind of management or support mechanisms the school already operated
- what kind of professional development they needed, particularly what the authority could provide
- any information about themselves which they could offer voluntarily in which the authority might be interested.

A detailed statistical analysis was not required, nor was any causal relationship sought. It was not possible to determine variables beforehand other than by informed presumptions.

Constraints and practical considerations

The population involved were the schools in the authority. At that time, Essex authority was about to lose two areas as unitary authorities, and so the area involved would be the new county of Essex. It was not known whether all schools had TAs, or what the distribution would be, so the question of sampling needed to be addressed. Questioning attendees at open meetings and initial piloting of possible questions that needed to be asked about TAs early in 1996, suggested a total coverage of schools would be preferable to sampling. There was also considerable agreement about what questions needed to be asked. Headteachers and TAs themselves were considered the appropriate recipients of any questionnaires.

The resources of the authority were available to help in the practicalities. This meant no personal cost to the researcher and access to:

- advice on timing and access to schools from senior officers of the authority and the headteacher organisations
- advice on questionnaire design and analysis
- existing data about education support staff for schools
- use of LEA materials, photocopying and distribution services

- use of administrative staff to log enquiries, collect returned questionnaires, enter data into a selected computer database
- use of official headings and logo, bringing a credibility not usually given to independent researchers
- confidence by respondents in the confidentiality and reliability of the systems operating the survey.

A survey of this type would have been impossible without the interest, co-operation and funding of the authority. However this access also brought with it limitations, which meant that some of the recommendations of survey design (Oppenheim, 1992; Cohen and Manion, 1994) were not accessible. It meant a postal questionnaire was feasible, using the schools' internal system, whereas interviewing, either face to face or by telephone, was not. The choice of computer programme and database was limited to that used for similar data by the authority.

The actual analysis of the data after its entry onto a database was to be done by the researcher, as well as any reporting. As a detailed statistical analysis was not required, replies were counted, and converted to percentages. Some comparison of subsamples might have proved possible, but averages and standard deviations were not feasible on a survey of this kind. Not all respondents would answer all the questions, so cumulative responses might not be directly comparable anyway (Oppenheim, 1992). Measurements were not being sought so any question of the reliability of respondents' equipment or processes was not involved. Attitude questions would not be accessible to counting with any factor of reliability, but could possibly be coded and tallied. Even the truth of any replies would have to be assumed and could not be checked. As it could not be foreseen that any advantage would accrue to the respondent through telling a falsehood, it would be taken as understood, that replies represented the truth as the respondents saw it. Misinterpretation of questions could occur, but these should be minimised by piloting. Narrative responses would elicit mainly qualitative data. The possibility of using an 'item pool' or formulating an 'attitude scale' did not arise; free responses were required (Oppenheim, 1992).

Ethical considerations were discussed with the more senior staff in the authority, individual headteachers and TAs, and the Essex Primary Headteacher Association (EPHA) prior to the process. Incoming paperwork was seen by schools as a diversion and intrusion, so the timing of the distribution and return of questionnaires would be crucial. However, all those consulted agreed that the answers were needed to the questions posed in the purposes outlined above.

Respondents needed to be assured that returns would be made voluntarily, the purposes made clear, that individual returns would be kept confidential, respondents would not be identified either by school or individual, and the results would be reported to all those who participated.

It was also recognised that a high level of returns would be needed to get useful information, but interest in the results would be likely to ensure goodwill. "A well planned postal survey should obtain at least a 40 percent response rate and with judicious use of reminders, a 70 to 80 per cent response level should be possible" (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 98). No incentives were proposed. De Vaus (1996) considered 60 to 75% response as acceptable and it was hoped that this target would be reached. De Vaus indicated that even where homogenous groups are surveyed or the information being requested is more directly relevant to the questioned, the response is not higher than when the general public responds. There are often categories of people who are ineligible or unreachable but neither should be incurred in this instance. It had to be assumed that all the schools had some sort of ancillary staff, and all schools in the LEA were reachable. Certainly some would have other priorities, an inspection or a flood, and some could have an abhorrence of questionnaires. The LEA Information Service (IS) considered it difficult to gain a 100% response from schools, even to the legally required Form 7. The response rate for the known TA survey (LGMB, 1996) was only 33.7%, 1,477 schools out of the 4,381 sampled, but still a large number to be able to gain reliable data. Moyles and Suschitzky's (1997a) questionnaire had a 47% response rate from the teachers and a 53% response rate from the classroom assistants, but only 151 questionnaires were completed in total. A high response rate was anticipated, being an official and potentially useful document. However the climate of consultation prevalent at the time, and perceived paper overload, had created in some headteachers a response of destroying all non-essential in-coming post.

Methods used

Helpful comments about length and design were received and used in consultation with IS. The most important questions came first, with the subsequent pages avoidable by those with little time or interest. The plan was that the pathway through would be clear, with "*contingency*" questions (de Vaus, 1996, p. 93) following yes/no responses making for ease of response. The more factual questions were early on the form, with data already sent to the LEA from the individual school set out on the front page to prompt and show the willingness to be helpful, yet make it clear there was not enough data for policy decisions. The more abstract questions, those that needed thought or comment, were placed later on. The request for future involvement was to be last, prior to the 'Thank you for giving your time' comments. The pagination was set to allow the reader to skip or concentrate on particular areas as they wished. The questions were checked against de Vaus' suggestions (pp. 83-86), to try to prevent mistakes in wording.

The length was much greater than originally anticipated, two sides of A4 being the original aim. IS, de Vaus (1996) and Oppenheim (1992) all stated that layout, simple questions, interest and flow were more likely to influence response than length. Anything over 12 pages was not believed to be helpful and 12 pages were considered the optimum length. Interest apparently flags after 125 items (de Vaus, 1996).

Pre-coding was considered, but the decision was made to categorise replies when some replies were seen, in collaboration with the operative typing the data into the database. Readability was addressed with a mixture of 'tick-boxes' and open-ended questions. This mixture is advised by Cohen and Manion (1994) as being able to "*relieve boredom and frustration as well as providing valuable information in the process*" (p. 96). Space was deemed less prescriptive than deliberate lines for the narrative answers. Allowing space for respondents to add comments, meant that opinions and value judgements would be collected, but also meant that confidentiality was more important in dealing with the material.

Piloting, recognised as particularly important in order to get the format and flavour right, was planned into the process. Comments were needed on what were the current sensitive issues, what was ambiguous or unclear, whether the layout and space given was helpful or enough, how long it took to complete, what was superfluous and what had been omitted. Questions were asked about the logical flow for the reader, interest level and the friendliness to the reader. The piloting process increases reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire (Oppenheim, 1992).

As it would not be possible to follow up the questionnaires with interviews as recommended by Cohen and Manion, (1994), there would be bias towards those respondents who were interested enough to reply. For the purposes of the LEA, these would be the schools and TAs interested in further professional development anyway and so were the ones who needed questioning. From the point of view of the research study, the survey designed as above would not be representative, or elicit a complete account of the range of TA activity in all schools, and this had to be borne in mind throughout.

The details of the pathways taken to achieve each step in the process, the questionnaire design, the results and conclusions of the survey are described in Chapter 4.

2.4.4 Case studies in two schools

In order to understand the role of the TAs in greater depth and ascertain what influences impinged upon them, an ethnographic study of the work of TAs was undertaken. This method of study was used to explore more deeply what TAs actually do with children to enhance learning. Southworth (1995) showed in his ethnographic study what a headteacher "*actually did ... looking into, as against looking at ... not ... concerned just with the surface appearance*", an interpretation of what he "*witnessed and noted*" (p. 2). In order to try to explore the variety of events and reasons for actions a case study approach was used, following Cohen and Manion's (1994) precept that a case study can "*probe deeply and (to) analyse intensely the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalisations about the wider population to which that unit belongs*" (p. 106).

It was envisaged that the study would be similar to that described by Hammersley (1998). It would describe behaviour in an everyday context; consist of conversations and observations; be unstructured; have a limited focus on a small number of cases or even one case; and where the analysis would give an interpretation of meaning and the function of actions. It was not going to be arranged on purpose, it was going to lack precision, and it would not identify causal relationships. It would have a small sample size compared with the survey, but this would be 'traded off' against depth. Replication might be difficult. However, "*A case study approach is often the best methodology for addressing these problems in which understanding is sought in order to improve practice*" (Merriam, 1988, p. xiii).

This was designed to be a structured enquiry within the practical limitations posed by the nature of school life and the constraints of time and position upon the researcher. It was a personal interpretative approach, although the researcher had never been a TA, she had worked for 30 years with TAs, parents, volunteers and other adults as colleagues and partners, and as a headteacher/employer and adviser/trainer. It could not be an exhaustive ethnology of a TA or even a group of TAs in a school, but could take "*an ethnographical approach*" (Southworth, 1995, p. 30) being exploratory and descriptive. It would give the "*what*" they are doing and the "*how and why*", the interpretive dimension (Yin, 1994, pp. 5,6). It sought to be an enquiry that "*comprises an all encompassing method*" (Yin, 1994, p. 13).

The method of analysis would await the outcome of the observations and interviews. It was recognised that "*until recently there were virtually no cannon, decision rules, algorithms, or even any agreed upon heuristics for the conduct of qualitative research*" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 198), although there were "*procedural commonalities*". The process was to be as systematic and documented as possible, and, using field notes and a process of returning all data to the study participants, allow a continued process of data collection, verification and interpretation. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) see it as a sequential process, shifting "*between inductive data collection and analysis to deductive cycles of testing and verification*" (p. 198). Multiple sources of evidence such as the observations and interviews can be integrated (Yin, 1994). Yin also describes how multiple-case design, using replication logic can lead to greater certainty. This study design was to be holistic, both for each school and the final analysis, looking at the way in which the use, deployment and management of the TAs affected their performance with children.

The methods used were made as transparent as possible to the schools, they had copies of all the raw data collected. This was carefully typed up and kept in chronological order, so that it could be revisited at anytime. The detailed description given in Chapter 5 should enable replication if desired. There was "*regular, ongoing, self-conscious documentation. All changes in analytical frameworks were recorded, as were the reasons for them*" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 200).

This process repeats in miniature the idea of triangulation put forward for the whole study (Cohen and Manion, 1994). It provided data “*strong on reality*” (p. 123). The multiple sources of evidence were observations and interviews, backed up by what documentary evidence was available. An attempt was made at obtaining some basic data through questionnaires, and pupil outcome data. The use of several types and sets of data obtained at differing times and places enabled separate and comparative analyses to be completed which resulted in the convergence of the multiple sources (Yin, 1994).

Hubermann and Miles (1998) speak of triangulation sources that have “*different bases, different strengths, so they can complement one another*” (p. 199). Tactics suggested (p. 200) were built in to check for representativeness and researcher effects by cross checking the data and the preliminary analyses with the schools used. The viability of the pattern deduced was finally cross checked with data from other schools as recorded in the reflective diary. Contact with the schools was maintained beyond the original collection of data, so that continued feedback was possible.

Multi-case study – the use of two schools

The original intention had been to study the work and background of TAs in one school, and to seek a primary school because of researcher expertise. It was also intended to study TAs working in a generalist capacity as more research had been carried out on TAs supporting pupils with SEN or the early years (EY), and there was some lack of researcher expertise in both fields. Early on in the contact with the first school approached, it was discovered that the TAs were used primarily in supporting children with SEN. As it was established from the survey data, and observations of the introduction of the NLS and NNS in schools, that there was increasing use of TAs across the ability range for specific curriculum purposes, particularly primary schools, it was decided to widen the research base. Yin (1994) actually mentions the study of teacher aides as an example where multiple case design as he calls it, is used. Each site is the subject of a separate case study (Yin, 1994, p. 44). The overall study is considered more robust. Yin goes on later to show how each case study gets an individual report and then cross-case conclusions are drawn.

A second school was chosen, with many similar characteristics to the first school visited, but using their TAs across the ability and curriculum spectra. Using the flexible approach posed at the beginning, it was possible to include not only the two schools, but also a second set of visits to the first school.

Constraints and practical considerations

The needs of the children were paramount at all times, to reduce any risk of intrusion. Extra adults observing are a common occurrence in schools, particularly in the chosen ones, and were largely

ignored, but the intrusions had to be considered. The aim was to be as open as a researcher as possible, to gain the confidence of the participants, given the sensitivities of the researcher's role, yet honour confidentiality for individual people. Entry, sometimes regarded as difficult (Fetterman, 1989) was made easy by the existing relationship of the observer with the headteachers concerned. Nor did it seem necessary *"to over compensate or prove (my) self worthy to gain the communities' trust and respect"* (p. 44).

Yin (1994) warns of the problem of the nature of the study shifting with time. Changes in personnel, the nature of the role of the TAs because of external or internal demands, the changes in political climate all had to be recognised, but the research questions remained a strong lead throughout.

Methods used

Various methods of investigation were planned, as well as the use of field notes with reflection. The aspects to be covered in each school were defined with the headteachers to ensure the bounding of territory (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Yin (1994) describes the various strengths and weaknesses of the different sources of evidence, noting that no single source has a complete advantage over all the others, and a good case study uses as many sources as possible. Comments were made as field notes on the observations and interviews as they proceeded, maintaining that *"dialectic between the immediate and the reflective"* (Southworth, 1995) aids the ethnographer's endeavour. *"Balance ... is an important principle"* ensuring participation does not over-ride more objective methods (pp. 42, 43).

Frameworks were constructed aiming at clarity, and to enable planning and replication. These consisted of observation schedules and prompt sheets used for the interviews. There was also a flexibility of approach to enable individuality of response where it presented itself (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

Similarly, the smaller scale but in-depth investigation of the classroom practices of TAs done by Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a), also provided useful tools and data against which results could be compared.

Observations

The aim of the researcher in the classroom was to be more of a mirror and less of a participant observer, always understanding that the very act of observation changes the parameters of the situation. Gold's typology (1958), quoted in Scott and Usher (1999), shows where either the participant is an observer or the observer is a participant (p. 102). Other authors (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Scott, 1996; Yin, 1994) also talk of participant or non-participant observation, but the reality for this study was neither. It is not possible to be a fly on the wall in a busy classroom. Pupils will notice a visitor and some will talk to them or their behaviour changes as a result of the

presence of the visitor. A participant cannot be fully engaged in watching or they are not participating. In this case, the researcher could be neither a teacher nor a TA and so could not participate anyway. Spradley (1980) gives a range of options of involvement when observing. It depends on the level of 'doing' from complete through to none. The aim was to be passive, not oblivious to the effect of being in class, talking to children when they spoke, or to the TA or teacher if relevant, but otherwise to stand back and be as insignificant as possible. Spradley (1980) also gives useful advice for such a stance, taking note of the culture of the room, although taking care when making cultural inference. He talks about finding an observation post. While passive in observing, there was still participation in the lives of the observed, through the interviews, which Fetterman (1989) believes to be crucial.

Scott and Usher (1999) also describe the use of various observation schedules, some of which were tried out and the most useful method then adhered to, that of recording differences or changes in behaviour, to ascertain the range of what was taking place. Coding took place after the event. Thus a flexibility of approach was retained. Practice in a variety of schedules was made possible by using video recordings of the TAs observed in the first school. One of the pre-coded schedules tried out was taken from Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a).

Fetterman (1989) describes the use of the video as having "*the ability to stop time*" (p. 85). Altrichter et al., (1993) discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using video. Improvements in video technology meant the use of a hand-held camcorder was able to counteract some of their reservations.

Interviews

Interviews with prompts and opportunities for free dialogue were planned. Davies et al., (1984) describe the semi-structured interview as enabling "*the relationship between researcher and respondents, while not meeting the extensive time involvement of classical participant observation, extends beyond the immediate parameters of the interview*" (p. 94). This means the "*relationship goes beyond simply what is said*" (p. 95).

Fetterman (1989) describes interviews as verbal approximations to a questionnaire, serving comparative and representative purposes. Responses can be compared and put into the context of a common belief. Informal interviews, even seemingly casual conversations can be used to discover categories of meaning and help identify shared values. This was the process used to illuminate the more passive observations, to 'get under the skin' of the people being investigated. While the interviews were not structured or even semi-structured, each one was undertaken with a prepared prompt sheet, ensuring that the points of interest to the researcher had been covered. This meant that because the interview was relaxed and conversational, questions could be asked naturally and in a non-threatening way, but remain systematic. Fetterman also distinguishes

between structural questions – to obtain basic information, and attribute questions which clarify understanding. Most of the interviews were tape recorded, and while such a procedure can be intrusive, this did not appear to be the case.

Meetings were held with the TAs which were taped, or notes were made. These were held at the start and at the end of the series of visits to the school, the latter being after the analyses had been returned to the schools, so that comment could be received. These were seen as a variation on the individual interviews.

Documentary evidence

There were few school documents relating to TAs available in either school. The school development plans had little about TAs in them, job descriptions were in the process of being developed beyond a basic one, and one of the schools was in the process of writing a school policy. The construction of this policy formed part of one of the school dialogues that was not recorded. The main documents available on each school were their Ofsted reports which were downloaded from the Internet. These, being publicly available, were scrutinised for information about both schools. Most of the background information on the schools was given verbally in interviews. A short questionnaire for each member of staff was prepared.

Outcome data

While the current political thrust is to relate efficacy to outcome data on pupils involved in schools, the timescale, and circumstances of the research meant this area had to be treated with sensitivity. The tools used in projects like ORACLE (Galton and Simon, 1980) or *School Matters* (Mortimore et al., 1988) could not be replicated in a small study like this, but the principles and methods of looking at pupils' progress could be examined. The case study schools were keen to look at this aspect and agreed to see what they could provide in terms of test or other data about the pupils who would be observed. As this strategy depended on the schools providing data, it could not be planned into the study. For the purpose of this study, the main source of outcome data had to be that obtained from the observations.

The practical details of the methods used, the results obtained, their analysis and the conclusions reached from this part of the study are described in Chapter 5.

2.4.5 The reflective diary

It was important to track the “*constant tensions and contradictions over the project itself, including its methods and the forms its findings and interpretations take*” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 7). Spradley (1980) points out that the passage of time is actually important to the elucidation of the problem being researched. This research took place over several years.

“As you go through the ethnographic research cycle, you will discover new questions to ask, these will guide your data collection, then when you analyse your data new ethnographic questions will come to light leading you to repeat the cycle” (Spradley, 1980, p. 32).

Cohen and Manion (1994) describe the use of *“personal records of the events we experience in our day-to-day lives ... our entries in diaries ... (which) serve to explain our past, present and future oriented actions”* (p. 206). The diary also served to enhance perceptions of the role played by the researcher in the whole process, a way of tracking how ideas were influencing questions and actions taking place throughout the research period. It was a *“development of the moral reasoning of the researcher”*, one of the purposes of biographical methods (Erben, 1996, p. 159). The tracking would clarify any influence the researcher role may have on the study interpretations.

Originally, it had been thought that this thesis would contain a chapter using the diary entries after the literature survey, merely to set the local context of the studies. However, the changes in the national scene and the recognition that the very nature of the role of the TAs was in a state of flux reinforced the need for tracking events. The climate of change in schools was clearly going to impinge on the study and the opportunities of the researcher to visit many schools, would provide added material to set against the conclusions being reached from more local studies. While such evidence does not provide any statistical or scientific generalisability, it would enable less ‘fuzzy’ generalisations to be made (Bassey, 1999, pp. 12,44). It approaches the possibility of meta-analysis described by Cohen and Manion (1994).

In the event, the change of government, major centrally directed changes in teaching strategies, and in the funding and management of schools, along with political recognition of the role of the TA, made considerable impact on the general conclusions reached.

Methods used

The diary was not a conventional regular recounting of events, but was a collection of reflections after particular events, or ‘jottings’ of new thoughts. Altrichter et al., (1993) describe different kinds of diary. This was not just a traditional research diary (Burgess, 1983). It was a memory bank of events, containing memos, descriptive sequences, interpretive sequences, and references to events recorded elsewhere, such as minutes of meetings. Planning notes and developmental ideas were all kept in a chronological sequence in a loose-leaf folder. The pieces were dated as they were written. Altrichter et al., (1993) also refer to the ethical issues surrounding such a diary. This diary was for personal consumption, not to be made public, except where the contents were already in the public domain or the subjects were aware of the recording of the material. For instance, evaluations from courses were kept, but students on courses were made aware that while what they wrote was anonymous, the text may be quoted or used to inform future action. The fieldworker’s reflective activity and commentary on issues that emerge is seen as a useful part of a research study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The reflective diary was used as a tool in a study made by

advisers in Essex, led by staff from the Cambridge University Institute of Education when tracking the work of the advisers in 25 Essex schools (Essex Primary Schools' Improvement – Research Project). Reflexivity (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Woods, 1996), the action of ensuring the role of the researcher is accounted for, was not the intention of this particular exercise.

Towards the conclusion of the study period, it became evident that more published material was available than when the study was commenced. When the material in the diary was re-read and categorised, it was done so alongside a further literature survey. In this way a picture of the changes during the study period, and reflections on some of the effects of the changes in schools was traceable.

The analysis of the notes is described in Chapter 6, following the advice of Miles and Huberman (1994), "*logging and describing our procedures clearly enough so that others can understand them, reconstruct them and subject them to scrutiny*" (p. 281).

2.5 Interpretation and presentation

2.5.1 Analyses

These were done at various stages of the study and then put together to ascertain whether any commonalities came through, or where there were significant differences. The analysis of the study data was to be the researcher's. The data from the LEA survey were entered into a computer programme by LEA assistant staff, giving a range of fields which could be interrogated in a variety of ways. The observation data were tallied, counted and analysed by the researcher. The interview data were coded and exemplified, seeking for patterns and themes. The diary and literature surveys undertaken at the start and the conclusion of the study period were categorised. Each type of data was analysed separately and also the schools' data, and a final analysis of the case studies was made before tackling the outcomes of the study as a whole. Various coding, tallying, matrices, and spreadsheets from Miles and Huberman (1994) were tried out and the phenomenon of '*outcropping*' (Fetterman, 1989, p. 68), "*the light dawning ... something standing up and 'shouting' at the researcher for notice*" (p.103) were recognised. Patterns and categories were developed and reworked until a satisfactorily representative picture was obtained. This was fed back to the schools. Computer analysis of word-processed data was not attempted, as this was deemed likely to be counterproductive. The search for patterns and categories was based on interpreting behaviour and nuance, not by counting the words. While the crystallisation could give a counter intuitive insight, the reflection by the school was used to ensure a truer reflection of reality.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe cross-case analyses, and how researchers look for themes across cases. This increases the generalisability, developing more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations. The overall aim was to seek patterns and categories enabling further

dialogue and work to be done on the role of the TA, and ideas of how to develop them as effective practitioners. The process is akin to that of Strauss and Corbin (1998) where they describe “*conceptual ordering ... according to the properties and dimensions and then using description to elucidate those categories*” (p. 19). Miles and Huberman (1994) and Huberman and Miles (1998) show a cyclical process where data collection, reduction and display iterate with conclusion, verification and interpretation. The process is dynamic and continues through the study, not just a concluding or even a linear process.

2.5.2. Conclusions and generalisations

There were several revised drafts of each chapter, particularly in the light of the progress of the study. The initial literature search was done at the commencement of the study, then the survey was completed to gain background data. This was followed by the in-depth case studies. The diary was kept for the length of time of the study, during which the national and local scene changed. The final drafts, looking at the various strands of the study with a retrospective eye also put further perceptions and perspectives on each part of the study. The conclusions of each chapter accompany that chapter, but the final conclusions are gathered into Chapter 7.

Fetterman (1989) pointed out the importance of the revised drafts, in providing a balance and closer approximation of the original to the written report. The final results of the study are recommendations for further study and possible ways forward, “*to say something ... connect with reality ... provide insights that help us organise our own observation ... resonate with our image of the world ... provide such a personal incursion on the latter that we feel compelled to re-examine what we have long felt to be true about our life world*” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 44).

A mixture of qualitative and quantitative data were anticipated with some reporting of the narratives obtained from the investigations being used in the final report. “Words ... have a concrete vivid meaningful flavour that often proves far more convincing to the reader ... than pages of summarised numbers” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 1).

In representing “*lived experience*” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 21), it was important that the study should be as valid, generalisable and reliable as possible. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe theorising as “*the act of constructing from data an explanatory scheme ... (which) enables users to explain and predict events, thereby providing guides to action*” (p. 25). The reflective diary noted that a methodology for studying TAs and classification headings for looking at their work might be the most important outcome of the study.

2.5.3 Validity, reliability and reproducibility

The opportunity for responses from participants was built in at many levels, to provide stimuli for action and ensure confirmability. Each time a set of observations was made or the conclusions were drawn, the results were returned to the participants. In the case of the survey this was in an anonymised and collated form (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). The researcher was conscious at all times of her role both in the authority and as a presence in the case study schools and tried to ensure this was accounted for. Altheide (1998) lists criteria for assessing validity, for defining the situation and context of the study and the location of the researcher. Fetterman (1989) points out that "*no one can be completely sure of validity of research conclusions*" (p 20), but should gather sufficient and sufficiently accurate data to feel confident about the findings and to convince others of their accuracy.

Being able to reflect conclusions as well as accuracy of data with participants, colleagues with the authority and later the Teaching Assistant Working Group (TAWG) at the DfEE, and over ULIE tutorials also provided a check on possible 'flights of fancy'. The sharing of conclusions with others in the field as the study progressed, and being open to question and criticism from colleagues and participants provided some safeguard. However, this still does not preclude the persuasive voice from overwhelming the gullible.

The multi-dimensional approach of the study also provided a check. Multiple data sources providing triangulation, peer examination, member checks and clarifying biases in a long term study should enable a study to be "*valid, believed and trusted*" (Merriam, 1988, p. 169). The use of several methods confirming findings where they overlapped, provided evidence of reproducibility and consistency, reinforcing the investigator's assumptions. Merriam (1988) recognised this as an opportunity for an audit trail which should make the study reproducible and reliable.

The rich description provided by the survey open questions and the interviews gave recognisable statements and scenarios. This was confirmed by the readers giving an external validity. Miles and Huberman (1994) have lists of queries to ask of a study to ensure "objectivity/confirmability ... reliability/dependability/auditability ... internal validity/credibility/authenticity ... external validity/transferability/fittingness ... utilisation/application/action orientation" (pp. 278-230), which were applied throughout the study, and which will be revisited in the final analyses and conclusions in Chapter 7.

Chapter 3: The background literature to the study

“Resources matter. They are the means upon which schools draw in order to achieve their aims and objectives and of all the resources upon which schools call, it is people who are of the greatest importance. Whether they are teachers ... or non-teaching staff such as classroom assistants ... they are the key to effective and cost-effective education.”

(Mortimore et al., 1992, p. 19)

This chapter sets the scene and raises issues for the study by exploring the literature and other materials published about TAs. It shows how perceptions of the role have changed from a more domestic and caring one, to one which directly supports the teaching and learning of pupils in the classroom. Their deployment in classrooms and management by the school is examined and the involvement of local and national bodies is investigated. The complexity of the issues raised reinforced the need for using a mixed methodological approach.

Chapter sections:

(based on the categories of context defined in Chapter 1, Diagram 1 [p. 8].)

- 3.1 Working with learners: Identification of role
- 3.2 Working with teachers: Deployment in classrooms
- 3.3 Working in the school: The role of management
- 3.4 Working in a locality
- 3.5 The national context
- 3.6 The mixed approach

3.1 Working with learners: Identification of role

3.1.1 Supporting the teacher

A major step forward towards the recognition that TAs have a significant role to play came with the Plowden Report (Plowden, 1967). This report was made by a large committee directing the activities of many researchers, with greater resources than seem possible today. The research element of the report, published separately, has the considerable details and statistics on which the report was based. One hundred and 58 authorities participated, questionnaires were sent to 3,000 teachers and a massive literature search was undertaken. Other areas of this report have been more publicised such as the importance of parent participation and the need for increased nursery provision, but it was uncompromising about *ancillary* staff. It saw the way forward as including

expansion of such a category of staff, the then current developments not going far enough in their judgement - *"not every where and not comprehensive enough"* (p. 318).

The report quotes statistics from the National Union of Teachers (NUT) report of 1962, and a 1966 report of the Association of Education Committees. Only 22% of schools had welfare assistants to *"relieve teachers in caring for the needs of young children"* (p. 318). By 1965 all but seven counties and seven county boroughs employed school secretaries, and all but three, school meals supervisors, and there had been a considerable increase in the number of welfare assistants, although not as many as for the school office or for helping with meals. Some of these however were employed to work only outside the classroom. Of the 158 authorities represented by the survey, five out of 115 employed assistants in the nursery, 50 out of 108 infant and 13 out of 30 junior schools were only employing TAs outside the classroom. The classroom was, and still is seen by many, as special and personal to the teacher. There was 'little logical pattern' in the employment of assistants. For some, class size was the rationale, some the experience (or lack of it) of the class teacher, and for some a definition of function. The term 'quasi-educational' used by Plowden (1967), conjures up a variety of pictures.

In the chapter on deployment of staff, Plowden (1967) describes various kinds of ancillary help and helpers, having given most serious thought to the amount and kind of help that can be given in schools by those who are not qualified teachers. It quotes the teachers' unions as wanting the secretaries and school meals help, but only wanting welfare help if it was not in the classroom. The survey, that was part of the Plowden review, showed 49% of headteachers and 37% of assistant teachers (ordinary mainscale teachers other than headteachers) felt there was a place for help - outside the classroom. It seems the fear was, that the informal relationships and teaching would become the sphere of the aide and the teacher be relegated to a straight instructional role. These comments are particularly interesting in the light of the current strategies required in the Literacy hour and mathematics lesson, indicating that better teaching means increased overt instruction.

The help given by assistants at that time was seen as generally of a welfare-care nature.

"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. The combination of role with the school secretary is seen as helpful, although the 'all rounders' are unlikely to be able to also help with musical or mechanical equipment" (Plowden, 1967, p. 329).

The development of technological aids was foreseen and so was the development of technical staff to service it. Many primary schools still see it as the job of the teacher to be an expert technician for the now widespread distribution of audio, visual and computing equipment rather than the job of a technical assistant.

The roles defined in the report were an extra pair of hands, skill tuition for example in sewing, and possible supervision after school.

An article appeared about the same time referring to SEN aides. Blessing (1967) suggested that such aides could not only relieve the teaching burden but also facilitate the instructor's task. He made the suggestion as a result of what he saw as a shortage of qualified workers, and likened his suggestion to that of the introduction of nurses' aides in hospitals.

A major semi-experimental investigation in Scotland took place in the early 1970's (Kennedy and Duthie, 1975) to look at the role of the TA. It cannot be described as a 'true' experimental design (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 167). It was a feasibility study undertaken in Scottish schools where the authors, Kennedy and Duthie, were able to compare experimental schools with control schools. The experimental schools were ones who were willing to employ a small number of auxiliaries in their schools, on the basis of one to three teachers. This figure was arrived at from an estimate proposed in their primary schools' survey *A study of the teacher's day*. However, the researchers did not investigate parallel conditions in schools without auxiliaries. The results depended on the schools involved not having this kind of help before, the respondents and researchers comparing their previous experiences to those which prevailed during the presence of the auxiliaries. The respondents' replies were invaluable in informing recommendations, but the comparisons depended on the respondents' memories of pre-test conditions.

Sixty teachers agreed to have such assistants in a total of 9 schools. Nineteen auxiliaries were advertised for, interviewed and trained for the posts. The teachers were also trained in their use. The auxiliaries were then tracked, using a regularly completed proforma, interviewed and observed in action. Teachers, auxiliaries and parents of children involved were sent questionnaires, as were a control group of teachers and headteachers. The study showed "*that auxiliaries can be fruitfully employed at all levels of the primary school*" (p. 104).

While this study is the nearest to a comparative study of effect that exists, it only looked at the perceived role of the auxiliary, and did not measure the direct effect upon the learning of the pupil, other than through the eyes of the adults involved. It did, however, take into account views of pupils and parents, of headteachers and teachers as well as the auxiliaries as to the best use that can be made of them as a resource. It is a useful form of triangulation, using strategies that are both 'space', that is across the various sub cultures of the schools, and 'methodological', that is using questionnaires and interviews with diary accounts and direct observations (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 236).

The perception of the role as relatively menial is reflected by the papers that gradually began to appear, giving evidence of a wider role. Woolf and Bassett (1987) reported that the 27 assistants

surveyed, spent 75% of their time on educational activities as opposed to clearing up, although most of them believed they were employed to help with the child's basic social needs.

Balshaw (1991a) attempted a categorisation of TA work into:

- "educational
- pastoral
- liaison
- ancillary
- physical" (p. 8).

Articles about TAs have titles like *How can we use an extra pair of hands* (Fletcher-Campbell, 1992), *A study of auxiliary support in some primary classrooms: extra hands and extra eyes* (McGarvey et al., 1996) and *More than an extra pair of hands* (Nolan and Gersch, 1996). Wallace (1997), in *Helping hands* refers to the more academic possibilities of the people employed for menial tasks. Rees (1995) took teacher opinions of what they saw as a TA's role. The teachers saw them as people, while employed to support the teacher and the children, onto whom they could off-load tasks. They were positive about the role and valued the assistance given, but saw TAs as reactive not proactive. The TAs were not to be autonomous, and teachers could not conceive that TAs could operate independently or show any initiative. The teachers' planning revolved round the presence of TAs, as they could not be in two places at once. The teachers showed no recognition of the skills of a TA, or any sense of joint ownership of the work of the class. The TAs' actual role in the classroom was ill-defined. The headteachers who responded said the TAs could do anything but teach, but their perceptions of what actually went on in terms of time spent on various tasks did not correspond with the picture given by the teachers.

Haigh's (1996) article caught the mood of the time with *To boldly go beyond washing paint-pots*, a phrase that has stuck with them. In the interviews conducted by the Open University (OU) (Loxley and Swann, 1997a) to evaluate their Specialist Teacher Assistant Certificate (STAC) course, the TAs refer to washing paintpots, and the authors describe the role as polymorphic. Loxley and Swann (1997b) went on to write a whole article entitled *Beyond the paint pots*, where they describe the changes taking place in schools, and particularly some which are a result of TAs undertaking their course.

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) emphasise the importance of this role in the ATL introductory pamphlet to the report '*Jills of all trades?...*' (Moyle and Suschitzky, 1997a). They say (ATL, 1997) there is a continuing "**need (of teachers) of assistants undertaking the ancillary role of supporting teachers' work, albeit mundane and domestic in nature. Such tasks must not fall back on the qualified teacher**" (their bold font, p. 3). The title of the main report itself shows the continued ambivalence over the role.

The role was clearly changing from the time of Plowden (1967). Clayton's (1993) article *From domestic helper to 'assistant teacher' – the changing role of the British classroom assistant* tracked some of the changes. He rank ordered 238 different activities found in Wiltshire classes in attempting a role definition. He then reported concerns about the quality of people being employed in the newer, more wide ranging roles. They were older women, generally untrained, with few relevant qualifications and little experience of SEN. LEAs had few considered policies about recruitment, variable appointment procedures and rarely provided training. The conditions of service and pay prospects were generally poor. He dated the major changes as coming from the time of TAs becoming involved particularly with children with SEN.

3.1.2 Supporting children

The NUT (1978) recognised this SEN role, at least in special schools with a small booklet of advice. There developed a recognition that TAs could help children directly, not just be teachers' aides. Another national committee investigated the special needs of children, and produced what became known as the Warnock report (DES, 1978). In 1981 this resulted in a major Education Act which has radically changed the educational possibilities for children with SEN. It paved the way for the subsequent 1993 Act with its introduction of the Code of Practice. The support of SEN children with help paid for by the LEA was the beginning of the national recognition of the role of assistants in the classroom. Much of the research on assistants since then has focused on those providing SEN support.

Thomas (1986), interested in the inclusion of children with SEN, described the integration of SEN children in Oxfordshire by integrating personnel, both TAs and peripatetic teachers. He described this area as powerful but neglected, with untapped possibilities, the issue being people management. He later sent questionnaires to headteachers and teachers, and analysed the nature of support and the activities by the age of the children helped (Thomas, 1987). When he defined the role in the classroom, he examined the tensions and defences that the people involved sometimes use, interviewing eight people in unstructured interviews (Thomas, 1991). He picked up the way in which teachers have a tacit expectation of TAs, that they will know what needs doing without help, and that in fact, often the helper does sense what and when things are needed.

Goacher et al., (1988) researched the effects of the 1981 Act. They detailed a move towards placing children with SEN in mainstream schools with support and ascertained that there was a 77% increase in the number of assistants employed for this purpose. This was to be set against 17% of authorities still having no special needs teachers in mainstream schools. Burnham (1988) commented "*that our special schools could not function without these staff*" (p. 31).

Moyles (1992) considered that the benefit to the children of employing assistants was largely in the affective domain:

- better contact with adults
- meeting children's social needs
- having a variety of adult/child relationships
- improving self-esteem

although she admitted there were increases in opportunities for basic skills activities and an increase in the variety of tasks available in the classroom. She saw assistants as being the people who could deal with medical incidents in the classroom.

Clayton (1993), looking at the changing role of the classroom assistant, also found a significant increase in the number of hours allocated to SEN pupils in Wiltshire. Baskind and Thompson (1995) were worried about this growth of TA support. In *Using assistants to support the educational needs of pupils with learning difficulties: the sublime or the ridiculous?*, they pointed out that TAs are generally welcomed, but may be mis-matched to the role in their knowledge and skills required to complete the tasks with the children, due to variations in their personal experience and training. They found a diversity of role from school to school and classroom to classroom due to their management by the class teachers or SEN co-ordinators (SENCOs), and/or their deployment in the school. They worked with secondary SEN children and looked at the research available to reflect on the implications for their own work with Coalford LEA, which employed 400 SEN assistants itself, this being supplemented by the schools' own financed staff.

The increase in SEN funding for assistants had thus also raised the issue of possibly creating a dependency culture in children, and increased awareness by the child of his/her differences.

"Thus, from a policy that was intended to facilitate the integration of pupils experiencing difficulties in learning, we have effectively seen an increase in the proportion of the pupils labelled and segregated, at least in the sense they are perceived by their teachers as different" (Ainscow and Muncey, 1989, p. 13).

The Audit Commission (1992a), publishing the official report on the 1981 Act, was clear that support in class in ordinary schools was preferable to withdrawal. Planning in detail by the teacher affected the practice beneficially, unplanned work was criticised as being *"not fully effective in raising the quality of pupils' experience in spite of schools' heavy investment in both withdrawal and support in class"* (p. 37). They recommended that *"extra help is not used simply to coax children through a lesson"* (p. 37). In their partner advisory document (Audit Commission, 1992b) they have a whole section on managing extra adults in the classroom.

Here, they reiterated the need for:

- planning and communication

- not isolating the child with SEN from their peers
- the supporting adult to be aware of the class teacher's objectives
- TAs to work consistently.

They also raised the possible problem of having more than one supporting adult in a room.

3.1.3 Supporting learning and support for the curriculum

By 1992 the Ofsted inspection process was beginning, but Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) were still able to publish one of their last pamphlets in the Education Observed series, *Non-teaching staff in schools* (HMI, 1992). It was based on evidence from visits to schools in 1989-90 and summarises the findings. It included five case studies in all, one about an NNEB assistant, also a school secretary and a science technician, as well as general assistants in primary and secondary schools. This was a summary of the type of work all kinds of support staff do in schools, and it raised issues such as their best deployment to be effective. It predicted a likely increase in numbers, and pointed to an increasing diversity of role. They also repeated the point made above, that is the need to take care that assistance does not become an alternative to a child doing things for themselves. *"If they are deployed to best effect then both schools and pupils have much to gain"* (p. 20).

Ofsted have taken a continuing and increasing interest in the work of TAs, with mainly positive comments. After the HMI (1992) pamphlet, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) has referred to support staff in his Annual reports for 1994/5, 1995/6 and 1996/7 (HMCI 1996, 1997 and 1998). In the first of these, he said:

*"The use of **non-teaching support staff** is increasing in both primary and secondary schools. ... In addition to providing practical help with the organisation of teaching materials and equipment, assistants can, when trained and working under the supervision of teachers, make a direct contribution to developing pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills"* (HMCI, 1996, p. 51).

Mention of TAs appeared in special reports. In *Primary Matters* (Ofsted, 1994), HMI give *"the effective use of other adults in the classroom"* as one of the factors associated with high achievement (p. 14). In the report on class size (Ofsted, 1996a) they state, *"One factor in the debate about effective teaching strategies is the contribution made by classroom assistants in primary schools"* (p. 41), and *"The contribution of adult support was almost universally positive"* (p. 42). Ofsted (1996b) also reported on the usefulness of paid teaching assistants especially to support reading in Year 2, in their report on 45 Inner London Schools. They referred to TAs having useful insights when hearing children read and when supervising group reading with written instructions from the teacher on the purpose of the activity. They suggested intervention strategies.

Few have attempted actually measuring any increase in learning progress that might take place in the presence of a TA, and those only on small groups of pupils in limited areas of learning. Farrell (1997) referred to the difficulty in finding matched groups when trying to compare progress in children with severe learning difficulties. The findings reported were largely positive if small. Baskind and Thompson (1995) attempted to measure the learning of secondary pupils, testing statemented pupils in maths and reading, and questioning about self-esteem and bullying, before and after courses run for TAs in five secondary schools. Clifford and Miles (1993) reported on how TAs using word processors could produce improvements in children with literacy difficulties. They measured spelling and reading ages before and after programmes spread over ten weeks with a six-month follow-up. They also became interested in the more affective domain outcomes such as enthusiasm, motivation, concentration and self-esteem, more frequently commented on by observers. They believed that the children they observed were being encouraged to become more reflective learners, more aware of what was involved in the learning process. However, they gave no indication of the numbers of children tested or followed up. Layton and Upton (1997) reported on increases in rhyme awareness using a pre-reading skill programme with assistants where they concentrated on phonological awareness. They tested and retested 14 children after a 15 minutes a day programme which ran for half a term. They also commented on benefits outside the strictly academic one they were measuring, citing an increasingly informed feedback process from assistants to teachers.

3.1.4 Other reasons for employment

While supporting the teacher, or individual children, the reasons given for employing TAs were sometimes more general.

Class sizes

The concern over class sizes, and the possibility of STA qualified TAs being used instead of teachers persisted in the residual concern about the 'Mums Army'. This led the ATL into funding the major research project into the effect of teaching assistants, '*Jills of all trades?....*' (Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997a). It focuses on the CAs as they call them, of KS1 and particularly those undertaking the STA course. The aims defined in the report seem relatively bias free and worthy, and a multi-methodological approach was followed, but the class size issue, and its concomitant apparent threat to qualified teachers, is foremost in their minds. Their fear is expressed in the commentary "*the quality of children's learning can be affected when the result is that children have less time with their qualified teacher*". They suggest that the development of TAs is driven by "**pressures towards increased class sizes and not an analysis of high quality learning**" (ATL, 1997, their bold font, p. 1). They use the research to justify the claim that TAs are employed because of the increase in class sizes, and not for educational reasons.

Barber and Brighouse (1992) are clear in their pamphlet about *Partners for change*, that their

“proposal is not that teaching associates or assistants should replace teachers but that they should be an additional resource. Their use as a substitute for teachers would be a wholly negative development resulting in a further de-professionalisation of teaching” (p. 7).

The class size issue was made a political target by the new government in 1997, who aimed to get all class sizes of KS 1 classes below 30 per teacher. There was some indication that there is a realisation that pupil to adult ratio rather than pupil to teacher ratio may be important, but that the quality of that adult provision will have to be ascertained to make realistic comparisons. Sebba (1998) indicated that the DfEE intended to conduct *“a brief research review ... on how the number and type of adults influence the outcomes in terms of learning”*. However, the bill to ensure classes of 30 or less in KS 1 classes became law in 1998, (Rafferty, 1998) without reference to other adults.

When the bill was published, correspondence in the TES indicated that teachers did not always see the class size issue in a simplified form, backing up comments made informally. Aldridge (1997), a class teacher wrote: *“ratios are not the real issues. What’s more important is how much support teachers get in the classroom. The only way to raise standards is to employ professionally trained teacher support”* (p. 9). Thornton (1998) found: *“Some heads concede they could reduce class sizes to 30, but are reluctant to if it means losing additional classroom assistants”* (p. 2). Burstall (1997) reported that parents do not always see small classes as the most important factor in attaining teaching quality.

The issues of class size and TAs is not clear-cut (Blatchford and Mortimore, 1997). It depends on the quality of the provision, both of TAs and their use. The Tennessee Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) research quoted by the Ofsted report on class size (Ofsted, 1996a) says *“Children in regular classes with teacher aides did not perform any better than those without teacher aides”* (p. 10), although they themselves reported positive work done by TAs. *“This is the case in larger classes as well as smaller ones and it suggests that some schools have made good use of classroom assistants to counter adverse effects of increases in class size”* (p. 43). Some of the STAR research looked at teacher perceptions of changes when teachers had aides as well as when they had a small class (Johnston, 1989). The teachers interviewed indicated three responses:

- increased time
- increased ability to individualise instruction where the aide *“had contributed to an improved instructional match ... a roving tutor ... supervise and monitor the class, allowed the teacher to work one-to-one ... provided more detailed knowledge of each child’s ability level”* (p. 115)
- and the increased quality use of learning centres in EY classes. In this latter, aides could *“help provision, monitor, supervise, and clean up”* (p. 115).

Prais (1996), reviewing the Tennessee STAR research, had a major section on teaching assistants, and queries the validity of the evidence in this area.

“While there may be genuine doubts as to any positive net value of a teaching assistant in the same classroom as the main teachers - and the Tennessee experiment might be taken to support the view - I tend to favour the possibility that two samples of pupils, following their regrouping at the end of the kindergarten year were not of equal ability; there I suspect that the teaching assistants did much good in helping classes with an undue proportion of difficult pupils - rather than the harm ostensibly shown by the project” (Prais, 1996, p. 406).

Behaviour management and exclusions

Swann and Loxley (1997) also cited the increased fear of exclusions as a reason for employing more TAs. Schools could see exclusions as another ‘visible marker’, and increase the employment of people to look after those who cannot conform. So, as the number of exclusions has risen, the numbers of near exclusions with supporting TAs could also be higher. However, it is doubtful that these numbers are significant for this reason, although it would recognise the increased use of TAs for behaviour management purposes, as distinct from a prevention of exclusion *per se*. Children were being statemented for being emotionally and behaviourally disturbed. In Essex, the formation of the Behaviour Management Team as a separate part of the SEN Support Service became one of the only two teams still left in the county to employ TAs directly, the other being the Traveller Support Service. All other TAs were employed by schools, and money for SEN put into school budgets, whether for earmarked children or general support. The 1998 Behaviour Management for Schools handbook (ECC, 1998a) had a separate chapter called *A model of support for teacher assistants*, recognising their role in managing behaviour.

Cost effectiveness

One fear raised by the increase in numbers of TAs was that they would be seen as a cheap version of teachers. Kennedy and Duthie (1975) found few teachers who felt that with a given sum of money auxiliaries should be employed instead of a teacher. Merrick (1994) even calls his article *Classroom Trade-offs*. However, Moyles and Suschitzky (1997b) stated that *“Heads freely admitted to choosing to employ full-time CAs (classroom assistants) where the budget would otherwise have allowed the employment of only a part-time qualified teacher” (p. 21).*

The Grant Maintained (GM) sector was more aware than other sectors of getting value for money, yet this did not result in a move to employ TAs as cheap labour. Their Value for Money Unit interviewed 59 schools senior managers by telephone, interviewed face-to-face 24 senior managers, and 51 support staff and collected job descriptions and other documentation on support staff. They were reluctant to show clear patterns, as there were diversities of staffing in the schools investigated, recognising that *“Costs may be influenced by factors such as: location, qualifications and levels of staff ... In considering costs schools should take into account a full range of factors,*

not just salary costs” (FAS, undated, ?1998, p. 31). They added, “If the use of support staff, which form a major staffing resource in schools is unplanned and unrelated to the school aims and objectives it may inhibit development” (p. 32).

One of the reasons for the commissioning of the DFE report (Mortimore et al., 1992) was the concern about TAs’ involvement in ‘teaching’ and being used as a cheap alternative to teachers. Greater financial independence, and a growing emphasis on cost effectiveness had raised the profile of support staff in schools. They were still seen as non-people (the ‘non-teaching staff’ part of the title of the report) although one of the recommendations of the report was the need for more positive nomenclature, suggesting *associate staff*. The purposes of the research were to

- examine the different roles of various categories of staff and the boundaries between them
- identify the benefits of making more use of support staff
- look at 25 case studies of innovative practice.

The authors’ background was the school effectiveness field and they approached the subject in that context. The report covered the whole field of staff other than teachers in both secondary and primary schools (but not nursery or special). Using a questionnaire, they selected 25 schools for study from the 150 replies to a national advertisement requesting information on innovations. With these they carried out interviews with relevant staff. They found it relatively easy to identify the purposes of jobs and benefits, but not so easy to collect information on cost effectiveness. While it was possible to obtain information as to salary cost, and other costs incurred or prevented by the provision of these posts, the analysis in terms of educational value was much less clear cut. They said:

“These assessments of the benefits of the innovation would appear to pass a curriculum ‘test’, in the sense that the change is having an impact upon the activity in the classroom. As with so many decisions in schools the assessment of its benefit for learning involves informed judgements and cannot be reduced to an objective calculation” (Mortimore et al., 1994, p. 24).

The study raised questions about the impact that TAs have on learning and curriculum as well as child support.

“Their enhanced role could actually be more challenging, with greater professional and pedagogical (rather than administrative) commitments. It may not be to everybody’s liking – but it may lead to more effective schooling and more efficient use of resources” (Mortimore et al., 1992, p. 178).

There was little research evidence to enable schools to make either a proper rationale for employing quality yet unqualified and cheap staff, or for them to evaluate their use. What there is shows, according to Loxley and Swann (1997a), *“two recurrent themes .. extreme variability and associated confusion in relation to the roles of CAs, and ... a strong sense that the role is changing.”* Their use *“depends more on the proclivity of individual teachers”* than any rationale

(p. 2). There emerged a need for systematic definition of role, responsibilities, qualifications and attention to formal status both within schools and by LEAs and the DfEE.

3.1.5 The dilemma of teaching

It is this issue that provides the main opposition to defining a suitable role for TAs. Plowden (1997) had stated that there were *“almost insoluble difficulties in defining what is and what is not teaching and what can and cannot be done by ancillary staff”* but the report also said:

“the effectiveness and status of teachers will eventually be improved by their having assistants who can be used as they judge best. The safeguard against ancillary assistants taking on responsibilities which ought to belong to teachers is the fact that these assistants are appointed for the specific purpose of helping teachers, that their duties lie within the discretion of headteachers and are carried out under the supervision of the head or class teacher” (p. 329).

This dilemma of ‘teaching’ created the strong feelings among the teacher unions in the 1960’s. They were strong and very suspicious of the development of a sub-grade of teachers. They were apparently being protective when the ‘good times’ were beginning to fade. The effects of the post-war bulge, welfare state and euphoria (Macmillan’s *“you have never had it so good”*) were not going to last. The beginning of the cycles of recession were going to hit the teaching profession, as well as the general population. The teachers were fighting for an all graduate profession. Primary teachers were still a non-graduate group, and unqualified teachers were still able to take charge of a class. It was a time of impending teacher shortage. *“The continuous shortage of teachers and the increasing range of their duties have made the department and the local education authorities anxious to use their services more efficiently”* (Plowden, 1967, p. 317). There was an *“anxiety of some teachers about ‘dilution’”* (p. 319), worry over cost and uncertainty about how to use them.

The NUT (1962) stated:

“We believe the educational arguments against the employment of so-called auxiliaries are complete and compelling throughout the age range, but we suggest that they are most compelling at that particular age range (5 to 8) where their use is most frequently advocated” (p. 8).

They delineated a policy limiting their role to school meals duties, clerical duties, welfare assistants and technical duties as found in secondary science and craft rooms. They spelt out what they considered were the possible duties of a welfare assistant, and asked all headteachers *“to insist on the strict interpretation of ancillary help”* (p. 9).

The NUT was not alone. The National Association of Schoolmasters (NAS) later to become the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), were also scathing. Their report (NAS, undated, ?1967) said:

"infant teaching is now a highly specialised process which calls for very special qualities in the teacher and cannot be entrusted to unqualified or partly trained persons ... It is profitless to try to establish a precise distinction between teaching and other duties inside the classroom" (p. 14).

They commented on the 'Plowden Aides' by saying the report said nothing new, the difficulty with vocabulary still prevents any movement on:

"discovering whether it is possible for a person with less than full teacher training to make any significant contribution to the education of young children without doing more harm than good in the process" (p. 18).

They set out their attitude, they warned:

"every teacher of the danger of accepting any assistance in the classroom which goes beyond the limit of non-teaching help. No teacher should allow any ancillary helper who may be provided, to carry out any task which contains any element of teaching. The teacher who delegates any part of the education process to a classroom helper is opening the door to the dilution of the profession which would not only damage his or her professional position, and that of every teacher there, but would lead to the impoverishment of the education given to his pupils" (p. 19).

Swann and Loxley (1998) explored the participation of TAs in the teaching and learning process in their STAC course evaluation. They were disappointed, considering the high level to which they believed their course was aiming (first year undergraduate), to find that in no area was there more than half the students saying there had been an increase in their participation in class. They listed 23 various areas of possible involvement in the processes of the classroom. Most increase had been in the area of informal assessment. There was no decrease in the level of domestic support given; the new roles were in addition to the more traditional tasks. They believed their results did undermine the notion of universally 'reserved areas' for teachers as some students declared a high level of participation in every area of their analysis. They requested that there should be a public debate about the boundaries between teachers and assistants.

Associated with the dilemma of whether TAs are teaching is the problem of boundaries. Hutchings (1997) reported that a minority of STAs experienced frustration

"centred on working alongside those teachers who handed over too much responsibility for large areas of children's learning, (especially reading) or else ignored what the STAs felt they could contribute" (p. 36).

Goodman (1990) in the USA, drew a useful diagram or model exploring these boundaries and in so doing also makes a summary of many of the roles of the TA, or paraprofessional as she calls the assistant. She described the paraprofessional as a support service for learners and teachers, largely carrying out tasks assigned by the teacher, reacting and responding to needs. The teacher

is the 'decisioner', identifying needs, determining methodology, interfacing with parents and other professionals, evaluating and delegating, carrying the responsibility.

3.1.6 The person of the TA

In the early reports, the TA is described rather as any other piece of equipment in the school. The TA as a person with desires, experiences, capacities or competencies which can be tapped or developed was largely ignored.

Barber and Brighouse (1992) did describe the qualities they considered TAs must have:

- *“good understanding of themselves and interpersonal relationships*
- *interest and concern for others*
- *some professional training and understanding of how children learn*
- *a sense of humour, and*
- *generosity of spirit” (p. 21).*

They also gave some additional characteristics, but added:

“It is not essential that they have infectious enthusiasm for what is taught nor the same intellectual curiosity, not degree of energy and imagination that teachers bring to their tasks. Certainly they will not, save under the direction of a teacher, need the ‘ability to plan a programme of learning appropriate to the particular groups of children and/or individual pupils’ nor ‘an understanding of their curriculum in the context of the school as a whole’ ... teaching assistants will require a less firm grasp, although a working knowledge, of most of the competencies. They will after all be working under the direction of a teacher” (p. 21 – the teacher competencies referred to are those outlined earlier in their booklet).

Personal growth in confidence has been a marked contribution observed by those investigating the effect of courses at all levels (Hutchings, 1997). Loxley and Swann (1997a) said *“Firstly, the training has had a positive impact on their personal and professional development”* (p. 20) and stated in their report of student interviews:

“In terms of their affective development, students unanimously stated that they had grown in confidence and self esteem, which in turn impacted upon the way in which they undertook their work” (p. 32).

3.2 Working with teachers: Deployment in classrooms

3.2.1 The supervisory role of the teacher

Plowden (1967), in referring to TAs as *teachers’ aides*, proposed that they should always work under the guidance of a qualified teacher. The authors believed then that teacher training institutions and in-service training programmes should train teachers to use assistants.

Kennedy and Duthie (1975) emphasised the supervisory role of the teacher, and the variety of roles that this kind of help can provide. The report concludes by estimating the cost of implementing such a policy - the one to three ratio of auxiliary to teacher that the study found appropriate. It is presumably because of this cost, £6.44 million in 1975, for Scottish schools alone, that the proposal was not followed up.

Authors increasingly referred to partnerships between teachers and their assistants, and Barber and Brighouse (1992) put forward a powerful argument for using the partnership as part of the change process in schools. The impact of the Education Reform Act 1988, which had resulted in the National Curriculum (NC), its associated assessment implications, LMS and Ofsted, had increased their public accountability and workload. Barber and Brighouse argue, not for a diluted teacher workforce, but an enhanced more professional one, with *“new grades of ‘teaching assistant’ and ‘teaching associate’ working alongside teachers and deployed by them as valued partners in the teaching process”* (p. 2).

3.2.2 Training teachers for the managerial role

Kennedy and Duthie (1975) emphasised the need for formal training schemes, suggesting a combination of teacher training establishments and schools as giving the best opportunities. Baskind and Thompson's (1995) main recommendation was that teachers and assistants need to be trained together – *“working in harness”* (p. 13). They set up a pilot training programme for the assistants working in five secondary schools, but unfortunately nothing is reported about the effects of the training on the children they had originally tested. The lack of opportunity to work closely as a team was reported by Hutchings (1997).

Lorenz (1992) had said how difficult it was to get teachers to attend courses aimed at *“role negotiation, room management and joint planning in a relaxed and supportive environment often lacking in schools”* (p. 32). Clegg and Billington (1994) point out that *“few teachers have received guidance”* (p. 121).

Ofsted (1996b) also remarked about the need for teacher briefing in TAs helping with reading:

“While these assistants represented a valuable resource for the schools there was a marked difference between those who were well briefed and had received even modest training and those who worked without guidance” (p. 39).

Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a) took this further. They believed that part of the problem in the classroom is that the focus of the teacher when dealing with a TA, is on activities rather than learning outcomes. This may be because of *“the teachers’ inability overtly to conceptualise their own knowledge and subsequently articulate their practice”* (p. 7). In a separate article, Moyles and Suschitzky (1997b) said that headteachers consider TAs contribute to school effectiveness by supporting teachers, reporting them saying *“teachers worked more efficiently with CAs support ... to*



teach more effectively ... teachers were less stressed" (p. 28). Moyles and Suschitzky (1998) suggested that teachers *"also require training in how to manage teams of support staff"* (p. 53).

Lorenz (1998) emphasised the role of the school as well as the teacher in the support of the TA. She pointed out that not only do newly qualified teachers need help in managing additional adults as a core skill but that *"it is vital that a similar programme of training be put in place for experienced staff, if schools are to be progressively more inclusive"* (p. 93).

3.2.3 Partnership

Lacey (1996a) emphasised the need for pupils to receive *"an integrated experience"* (p. 28). She described a continuum of terms used when classroom teams work together, from 'liaison', through 'co-operation', and 'co-ordination' to 'collaboration'. She recognised the difficulties faced by those who wish to collaborate, when there are differences in timetabling, status, historical customs, responsibility, autonomy, decision making and delegation. There was also the question of training and support from senior management. She gives some ideas to promote more effective teams, recognising that not everyone comes to team working naturally. Hutchings (1997) pointed to the *"discrepancy between the positive personal development of STAs, who undertake the course and the lack of similar opportunities for the teachers who manage the STAs' work in the classroom"* (p.39). Connell and Rennie (1997) produced a whole teaching pack to support teamwork for CAs working with children with SEN in schools.

Thomas (1986 and 1996) saw the teacher as a manager of the extra adults, parents, peripatetic teachers and TAs, that personnel needed to be integrated in order that children could also be integrated. By 1996, he felt it was the exception rather than the rule to find teachers working on their own in a primary classroom and categorised their problems as role ambiguity, diminishing returns, children's confusion, differentiation and communication. Teachers needed to consider classroom dynamics, organisation and room management. Thomas (1991) gave an account of detailed interviews of team participants including welfare assistants and reports problems encountered without clear role definitions, where two adults are just trying to get along with each other.

3.3 Working in the school: The role of management

3.3.1 The whole school team

Individual teachers may need to work in partnership with the assistant, but allocating a TA to a teacher is a management decision, as well as the placing of a child with SEN to whom an assistant is allocated. With this decision also comes the responsibility of an extra member of staff. The resulting employment procedures in a school, even prior to LMS, meant basic recruitment, induction and contractual obligations.

Woolf and Bassett (1987) looked at the response of 27 SEN assistants to a questionnaire. While the sample is small, the theme of the importance of management issues emerges even in the pre-LMS days. They emphasised the need for the assistants to be as fully informed as possible about the children with whom they work.

The second half of Balshaw's book (1991b) consisted of materials for school based training. These were offered as recommendations, and suggestions "*which will probably be very valuable*" (p. 265). The book was largely aimed at the work of SEN assistants. This was not a 'tips for teachers' or TAs' book, as she was firmly convinced that working effectively with TAs involves the whole school. Her conviction stemmed from her research, but this was difficult to track down, and not quoted in the book. She suggested the activities she proposes can be taken at two levels. One level is to look at the current practice in the school and formulate a policy, and the other is to reflect on a current policy and consider possible changes. The co-ordinator must consider "*How far reaching do you want these activities and implicit challenges to practice, and more fundamentally changes to practice to be?*" (Balshaw, 1991b, p. 22 - Balshaw's italics).

Balshaw (1992) gave six principles for reviewing practice, which seemed to her important:

- *roles and responsibilities*
- *communication*
- *consistency of approach*
- *working as a team*
- *using personal skills*
- *staff development needs*" (p. 264).

Mortimore et al., (1992) gave more direct evidence for the need for a holistic approach to staff development, raising issues such as line management and communication, pay and conditions of service, professional development and training. They raised the need for equivalent treatment to teachers, with appraisal, job descriptions, and career opportunities, and the necessity of involving governors, headteachers and teachers in the use and employment of support staff, especially when innovations are to be considered. They suggest auditing existing arrangements and skills, and the monitoring of innovations.

3.3.2 School policies and guidance

The guidance for managing TAs in the publications appeared to be centred around them having experience with children with SEN (Fletcher-Campbell, 1992; Balshaw, 1991b; Clayton, 1993; Lacey, 1996b) or in the EY field with nursery nurses (Blenkin and Kelly, 1997; Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997a).

Fox (1996) gave advice to SENCOs in *Seven steps to success*. She suggests clarity about roles and responsibilities, valuing LSAs as part of a team, regular planning opportunities, clarity about learning objectives, clarity about learning and emotional implications of a child's special needs, efficient, effective and flexible deployment, and opportunities for training and development. She provides checklists and recommendations about appraisal. Holmes (1995) produced a handbook for the appraisal of non-teaching staff, giving purpose, benefits, personnel to be involved, a cycle of action, policy and management schemes with suggested forms, but was operating personally and not as part of any recognised organisation.

The Secondary Headteachers' Association (SHA), however, surveyed their membership to produce a small booklet *Managing non-teaching staff* (Warrington, 1992). It gives useful detail on numbers, costing, conditions of service including job descriptions and appraisal recommended by its members.

Lorenz's book (1998) described the sort of information about school processes that TAs should have, based on her experience in the field, quoting her work at the end. She picked up some of the concerns that arise when working with children for whom English is an additional language, with parents, additional support teachers and therapists. She suggested practical ways in which schools can build more effective teams such as communication systems, guidelines for staff and regular meeting times. She said:

"Without the vision, there will be confusion as no-one will be sure where they are heading. Without the requisite skills, staff will be anxious and unable to implement new strategies. Without incentives, there will be resistance from individuals or groups blocking progress. Without resources, staff committed to change will experience frustration and may lose heart. Finally, without an action plan, those involved will go round and round on a treadmill achieving little" (p. 94).

3.4 Working in a locality

There is a considerable body of literature looking at the role of parents and governors in the effectiveness of schools, their support of the teaching and learning systems and influence on children themselves, but very little indeed about the community role of TAs. Yet TAs were seen by Plowden (1967) as likely to come from school leavers and older women working part time, people from the locality of the school - with possibly men for the more skills-based jobs. The report commented that the training of 50,000 women over five years would help produce mothers with higher mothering skills which would be beneficial to the community at large. These sexist statements would be unacceptable today.

It depended on where you lived whether training was available. Some LEAs did get involved in a variety of publications such as:

- Bedfordshire's series of guides for School Assistants (Optis, 1992)
- Cambridge (Balshaw, 1991a)
- Hampshire's Handbook for Special Needs Assistants (Fox, 1993)
- Kent (KCC, 1997) produced a video *Assistance in class*
- Oxford with Oxford Brookes University (Oxspec, 1995)
- Northumberland (Caswell and Pinner, undated, ?1998)
- Wiltshire collection called SAINTS (Clayton, 1990).

The OU linked their STAC training with LEAs so that the national initiative had a local flavour. Essex LEA was part of that pilot and successfully trained 28 in the first year, continuing the partnership every subsequent year.

Some HE colleges as well as the OU also got involved in training provision, and published materials or evaluations:

- Christchurch College, Canterbury produced some guides based on their local course materials, for EY practitioners in supporting NC subjects including the core subjects: literacy and language, numeracy, science and technology (Clipson-Boyles, 1997; Headington, 1997; Montague-Smith and Winstone, 1998)
- Sheffield Hallam University produced its own course for SENCOs (Connell and Rennie, 1997)
- The University of Brighton (Yearley et al., 1995)
- The University of Plymouth (Hutchings, 1997)
- Nene College Northampton (Dyer, 1996).

3.5 The national context

3.5.1 General developments

A national survey, done by the Local Government Management Board (LGMB, 1996) had responses from 1,477 schools in England and Wales, 33.7% of their sample from LEA, GM and independent schools with children in the 3 to 11 age range. Grossing up their figures to 100%, to avoid discrepancy of sample sizes with actual population sizes of the estimated school population, they considered there were 87,061 TAs employed in the autumn of 1995. The data about the TAs are then given numerically as well as in percentages, making it appear as though each TA had been questioned, but the results are clear. Of the total, which included nursery nurses, over half were in permanent posts, 99% were female, and 43% were between 25 and 39 years old. Most of the younger ones were nursery nurses, and most of the older ones worked solely with pupils with SEN. Fifty point four per cent were parents, 33.5% had Ordinary ('O') levels of the General Certificates of Education (GCEs), or General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) and

21% had an HE qualification. One hundred and fifteen had no formal qualifications. Issues raised by headteachers largely surrounded funding and course availability. No questions were asked of TAs about their needs.

The shift to recognising national priorities had really begun with Plowden (1967) although their recommendations had not been implemented. Along with recommending recruitment they had suggested:

- *entry qualifications*: some GCEs and Certificates of Secondary Education (CSEs) but the emphasis on personal qualities, and that this is not a 'soft option'
- *training*: should have a practical base similar to the NNEB, with a content of child development and maintenance of materials and equipment; that schools could become training bases as with NNEB to enable more parity of access; and be a two year course; that there should be a central examination body
- *status and salary*: should be on a par with the NNEB; and that there should be no responsibility for children or their safety
- *career prospects*: that they should always work under the guidance of a qualified teacher; and that because of this there would be no need for a probationary year.

The IIP initiatives and the links with school improvement made therein (DfEE, 1997a), emphasised the importance of **all** staff being involved in school life, but few schools undertook the process in the early 1990's.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) were developed from 1992 in Child Care and Education (O'Hagan and Smith, 1993; Calder, 1995; Bruce and Meggitt, 1996) but these were only for those working with children up to eight years of age, as was the older NNEB award. NVQs were also developed for science technicians, (Baird, 1996; 1997a; 1997b) but this was a very specialised area of work in schools, frequently not relating to working with pupils directly.

Other national accreditation developed as the demand increased. The City and Guilds (C&G) certificate in Learning Support (C&G, 1995) was seen as a level 2 (NVQ level equating to GCSEs), but was at least open to those working in all KSs and considered adaptable for working with children of all abilities. The Royal Society of Arts (RSA) Certificate for the Literacy and Numeracy Support Assistants (CLANSA) (RSA, 1996), was for those working in KS 1 and 2 with SEN children and at a level 3 (NVQ level equating with advanced ('A') level). Many other smaller awarding bodies also accredited awards such as the Northern College of FE and the Open College.

HMI (1992) and the DFE (Mortimore et al., 1992) had shown interest in TAs, but this did not result in action at a national level until 1994. John Patten, the then Education Secretary, suggested that the ranks of infant teachers could be swelled by allowing 'Mums', working frequently either as

volunteer helpers or teaching assistants in schools with EY children, to be recruited through an easy entry route to qualified teacher status. He suggested they would only be 'qualified' to teach at KS1. This caused a furore in the teaching profession. Primary teachers had worked for parity with secondary colleagues and an all graduate profession for many years before they achieved it. Infant teachers were outraged at the apparent denigration of their skills. The teaching unions, NUT and NASUWT made their feelings known. The phrase 'Mums' Army' was born. Patten later announced the provision of government money to train STAs to aid class teachers at KS1. Circular 14/93 (DFE, 1993) stated that:

"The National Curriculum and its associated assessment and testing arrangements have thrown into sharp relief the importance of teaching and learning basic skills. Therefore the Secretary of State would like to see urgent further work done to provide courses specifically designed to prepare classroom assistants in primary schools, especially at Key Stage 1, to offer greater support in these areas ... the Secretary of state will consult ... and will be ready to fund projects in this field in the academic year 1994-5" (p. 11).

Unfortunately, the link had been made in some people's minds between the Mum's Army and the STA initiative, and the NUT and NASUWT threatened to boycott the scheme when it was launched (press cutting date and source unknown). The teachers' union stance has had a great effect on this potential development of assistants, the NUT put an embargo on their members mentoring STA course students, in case it supported a move to introducing a Mums' Army of less qualified teachers into the infant classroom.

HMCI (1996) had reported on the work of TAs seen on inspection. Twenty six pilot courses for STAs were to cater for almost 1,000 students in the first year of the initiative (HMCI, 1997). A further 14 courses started in the second year, when the numbers increased to 1,600. The STA award was evaluated by Ofsted, at the end of its first year with an interim report (Ofsted, undated, ?1996) and a final report (Ofsted, 1996c). HMI visited schools undertaking the award and LEAs involved in the pilot. Fifty eight training sessions were observed. While the report was mainly positive they also found pointers for improvement. The need for effective school support through the course and appropriate deployment during and following the course being the main area of comment. These reports led to the publication of *Training Specialist Teacher Assistants* by Ofsted (Ofsted, 1997) which has guidance on recruitment, mentoring, deployment and assessment of competence. They conclude *"The support for teaching and learning given by trained STAs is helping teachers to give the children in school improved learning experiences and to raise standards"* (p. 10). This was reiterated by HMCI (1998) where he stated:

"In most cases non-teaching staff are effectively deployed and have a positive impact on the work, especially in classes with younger children. Where Specialist Teacher Assistants have been properly trained and suitably deployed they contribute significantly to raising standards in numeracy and literacy" (p. 28).

"In such circumstances, assistants save teachers' time and enable more flexible use to be made of trained staff within the classroom" (p. 64).

"They (LSAs) make a valuable contribution in all subjects by supporting individual pupils and by working with groups. They are successful when they are involved with planning pupils' work, and the most successful LSAs contribute to assessment and recording" (p. 50).

The OU made their own evaluations of their STAC course (Loxley, 1997; Loxley and Pontefract, 1997; Loxley and Swann, 1997a; 1997b; Swann and Loxley, 1997; 1998). Their research was clearly biased firmly toward their STAC qualification.

3.5.2 Unions

The only teachers' union publicly to support TAs was the Professional Association of Teachers which also developed a subset of membership for nursery nurses – the Professional Association of Nursery Nurses. UNISON, the local government union, also served to represent them. The NUT as well as SHA produced advice for those working with children with special needs, recognising the role of ancillaries for special care work. Warrington (1992), while recommending best practice procedures for employment, recognised *"the difference between intentions and practice"* (p. 7) when it came to what actually happens. SHA members saw assistants as giving support with technical, clerical or physical tasks.

3.6 The mixed approach

The complexity of the picture surrounding TAs did not lend itself to single research projects or initiatives at one level. *'Jills of all trades....?'* (Moyle and Suschitzky, 1997a) which attempted a mixed approach, provided a helpful triangulation model for tackling the complexity of the TA problem for this study. It also gave some useful exemplar material in observation proforma and questionnaires which provided starting points for tools for this study.

The authors recognised that one single method could not address the multiplicity of questions that understanding the work of TAs demands. Their research looked at the roles and relationships as they existed, as the teachers and TAs perceived them and the difference between the reality and the perceptions. It aimed to look at: the effectiveness of TAs and their effect on learning, both perceived and actual; the impact of the STA training on perceptions of role; workload implications for a teacher of organising a TA; headteacher rationales for employment and deployment; and children's perceptions. Also, by taking several different approaches in the one investigation, they were able to look at a variety of facets of the problem, and compare the results, before reaching their final conclusions. They recognised that each of the methods had drawbacks. The research survey used 300 questionnaires for teachers and TAs, with a response rate of 53%. They observed

30 teachers and TAs in 15 schools using direct observation, videotaping and time sampling them. In the same schools, they performed semi-structured interviews of teachers, TAs and headteachers. While observing in classrooms, they used a method of tracking with a schedule to find out what TAs actually did in a set time, observing at 20-minute intervals, 20 observations per school. They used a frequency chart based on the Ofsted (1995) framework for responses of children to teaching. Sixty children were interviewed. It was particularly interesting to see children being interviewed as part of the project as it is found in the School Improvement Value Added (SIVA) research in Essex (Dudley, 1996) into standards in schools, that children's perceptions of their learning, progress and attitudes to work are very helpful indicators of school effectiveness and improvement. Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a) produced numerical data with background material to add colour - for example quotations from the interviews.

Their investigation was also really an attempt to see the effect the presence of a TA has on children's learning as it takes place, along with an approach enabling cross-referencing of conclusions. It used Cohen and Manion's triangulation in "space" across the various culture levels of the school, in "methodology", and also tried to obtain a view of the TAs role at the level of the individual, class and school (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 236).

Their findings were categorised against the various levels of the contextual Diagram 1 [p. 8].

- At the learners' level, TAs were:
 - showing differences in perception of roles when working with SEN children
 - being used for the increasing number of statemented children
 - directly supporting children,
 - rather than supporting teacher in the more traditional ancillary tasks
 - more involved in product or outcome than process, particularly important in play
 - mainly reactive
 - operating in disparate and diverse roles

- At classroom level, they found:
 - the importance of the relationship TAs have with the teachers
 - the dilemmas of boundaries and role definitions
 - where does supporting teachers, teaching, learning and children start and stop?
 - lack of time for planning together and feedback
 - communication difficulties, especially about responsibilities
 - there was a need for explicit rather than implicit expectations

- Whole school issues were that:
 - TAs were being used to compensate for increasing sizes of class

- teachers and TAs finding time and opportunity for planning together
- Local or national issues included the observation that:
 - training is needed for TAs and teachers to work with other adults particularly in leading teams.

Moyles (1997) wrote

"We were, are still mainly concerned, with untrained CAs employed in primary schools and their perceived and actual roles ... Our main concern is that increasing numbers of CAs are employed. What are their roles? Who decides? Do they know how they benefit teachers and children? What does it mean to 'teach' if you are not qualified as a teacher? What does it mean to be professional? ... what competencies can we expect of untrained and differentially trained personnel and is there a continuum which moves into the 'inexpert' end of the teachers' role dimensions?"

Conclusion

The literature survey did not show clearly what TAs do. Papers from individuals investigating conditions in their workplaces, largely based their work on small numbers in a limited locality. The few larger, funded projects raised concerns but had become shelved. Much advice given was based on experience with little evidence of systematic investigation of outcomes or effectiveness.

There formed a picture of TAs with diverse, complex and ill-defined roles. Surveys showed increasing numbers of TAs allied to a trend for them to be less involved in care and domestic tasks and more involved with pupils and the teaching and learning processes, across all key stages. It was still necessary to find out what actually went on in classrooms at the interface of TA and pupil, to understand how TAs enhance the learning of pupils.

Authors had raised issues of professional boundaries, supervision and management, with the need for more explicit expectations and rationale for employment. Whole school structures and systems were increasingly implicated as important and the need for national recognition, training and policies was becoming more imperative.

The disparate picture across the country reinforced the need to clarify the local scene and its needs before pursuing any LEA policy for development. The process for investigating this is described in the next chapter. The need for case study work was also reinforced, a process described in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: The Local Education Authority Survey

“The purpose of a descriptive survey is to count ... tells us how many (what proportion of) a certain population have a certain opinion or characteristic or how often events occur together ... they are not designed ‘to explain anything or to show causal relationships between one variable and another ... essentially fact finding”.

(Oppenheim, 1992, p. 12).

This chapter outlines the production and results of a survey on TAs in Essex primary schools undertaken in 1998, to set the scene for the later in-depth research. While the response was not representative, sufficient replies were received to give interesting and helpful data for the formulation of policies, and provision of contacts with interested and interesting schools. The results were published as a county research paper.

Chapter sections:

4.1 The history of the development of the survey

4.2 Questionnaire design

4.3 The response

4.4 The headteacher responses

4.5 The teaching assistant responses

4.6 Initial conclusions, issues raised and subsequent action

4.7 Conclusions for the purpose of this study

4.1 The history of the development of the survey

Apart from wanting to understand the local context of the TAs for this study, there was a need for data as to numbers of staff working in the assistant capacity in the county, and some description of their professional development needs, as an adviser for TA work. The methodology is described in Chapter 2 [pp. 21-25].

When the first bid to the DfEE for funding for STA training under GEST was made in Spring 1996, the adviser in charge of professional development and INSET management, and the researcher tried to find out how many TAs existed in Essex at that time, particularly working at KS1. Essex IS, who administered Form 7, were only able to supply the number of hours worked by TAs in schools. Neither County Personnel nor County Treasurers' Payroll department could say how many people were employed in the category of assistant, as they provided and paid out on individual contracts. Many people had two or more contracts, this being the method of financing TAs within the school.

The constant fluctuation of the scene within schools owing to movement of pupils, and changing budget situations, restricted the acquisition of reliable information unless a fixed point was taken. In order to complete the bid, a rough guess was made in 1996, resulting in an estimate of more than 2000 people being employed in Essex in primary or infants schools, for 14,523 hours, in addition to more than 275 Nursery nurses and 750 SEN support staff for the relevant year.

Obtaining more accurate numbers would help in planning ahead.

- EAIS needed to know the training requirements and likely demands, being the training providers for the County, and in order to start some long term strategic planning.
- LEA Members needed to have an informed view of the needs of this category of staff especially if it was to be a large and growing band of employees.
- LEA Officers, producing the new LEA development plan (a Government requirement in the 1997 Education Bill) for the improvement of learning, needed information about a group of people believed to support learning directly, and who were seen by some as part of the learning culture of the school.

While ascertaining this numerical data by a survey, the opportunity was there to obtain some detailed information on the background of the TAs, their needs, and issues affecting them. The purposes outlined in Chapter 2 [p. 22] could be fulfilled. In addition, there might be opportunity to see significant patterns of development or need, or find examples of particularly successful or innovative practice, or where particular interests might be. The objectives were to give pointers for practice, not necessarily indicate definitive management methods. Using these data, the county would be in a better position to advise, train and support these assistants, and advise schools on their use, management and deployment. The two questionnaires, one to headteachers and one to TAs could provide some numerical data, open to counting, and some contextual and narrative detail.

The head of EAIS decided that primary schools were to be circulated initially. Secondary and special schools would be considered later. He thought this was the major area of need and development. The questionnaire was to be sent to all 488 primary schools in new Essex, not to a sample of them. Essex could not be seen as representative of English schools. It has a predominantly white population, although it also has its share of urban deprivation, pockets of high unemployment, along with small rural isolated schools and middle class 'leafy suburb' schools, to use broad, rather pejorative but understood categories. It has two universities, and a large garrison town, areas of outstanding natural beauty (Constable country), Greater London Council new towns and 'sailing' villages. It is still the third largest LEA, even after reorganisation. At that time, it had a higher percentage of GM schools than many authorities. However, information about such a sample was considered to have possible relevance to the wider population, and any generalisations made from the data could be of possible interest to national policy makers.

A first draft of a questionnaire designed by the researcher and containing many of the proposed questions, was tried out with a few colleagues in the January of 1996. After the agreement of EAIS management, and the help of IS, two forms were devised, one for the headteachers to collect the school based data, and one to be photocopied by the schools for TAs working in the school. IS offered the use of their Form 7 database provided the timing was right with the workloads of their department, and their statistician who was already familiar to EAIS through the SIVA project. IS suggested the provision of pre-printed material on each school showing the data already submitted by the school, to link the school's responses to the DfEE Form 7 survey figures. This would increase reliability, and ease responses from the school. As the precursor to any questions asked, these data would prevent the headteacher spending time having to search out their own data. It would show an understanding of the workload of the recipient, and a willingness to be as helpful as possible. It would also give a legitimacy to the data required, as it would be immediately associated with the data already supplied to the LEA and the DfEE for regular official uses. Unfortunately the LEA did not have similar access to data for all GM schools and so a modified form and letter had to be sent to those schools.

The original intention had been to send the questionnaire out in the summer of 1997, using January 1997 Form 7 data and ask for a response fixed on number employed on a date in September. Headteachers had reported that budget settlement for 1997/8 had been difficult, and the perception was that TAs had been in the front line of budget cuts. The comparison of January data with September would have the added dimension of picking up the real effect of budget cuts, or other factors in the employment of TAs in the County. Circumstances within the authority meant that finally January 1998 figures were used on a questionnaire sent out early in the summer of 1998 asking for details of April employment figures and projected September figures.

4.2 Questionnaire design

Two questionnaires were sent, one on green paper to the headteacher of the school and one on white paper to be photocopied by the school for all their TAs. There were therefore two sets of questions, similar in content, but the Form 7 data was to be attached only to the headteacher form. This was to provide an interesting variation in points of view about needs, although the factual data should tally where similar questions were asked. The nature of some of the questions, for example the age range of TAs, followed that in the existing national survey (LGMB, 1996, p. 34). Copies are to be found in Appendices 1 and 2 [pp. 197,205].

A covering letter was written for each form, one for TAs and one for headteachers, copies of which appear in Appendices 3 and 4 [pp. 210,212]. The respondents were promised confidentiality in terms of specific information that they were asked to give about their staff and school, but informed

that the collated information may well go to the Education Committee. Any quote made from the comments would be anonymised. The results would thus be publicly available without any individual school being identifiable. The forms were to be numerically coded in order to check who had returned them and to enable follow up for the non-returners. The wording was chosen carefully, particularly that of the TA form and letter. While the headteacher would be familiar with educational jargon, this could be less true of the TAs. Every effort was made for the TAs' material to be jargon free.

It was recognised that there might have been sensitive issues for some respondents, whether they consider themselves still a parent when estranged from their families, or whether they were willing to give their age or experiences. In order to get a higher total response, respondents were free not to answer one or two questions if they had reservations. It was hoped that as most of the data requested was factual and as piloting would take place to ascertain potential sensitivities, there would not be too much of a problem. Some headteachers could be sensitive about their staff filling in forms about aspects of their school, but it was hoped that this would not be a significant number.

Redrafted versions were shown both to colleagues and a senior member of staff of ULIE. The idea was then presented to EPHA to seek their opinion as to feasibility and timing. The suggestion was positively received at an EPHA committee meeting in March 1998, which the researcher attended, the committee members even offering to pilot the material. Piloting took place with these headteachers and schools during March and April 1998. Southend and Thurrock became unitary authorities in April 1998, cutting the number of schools to be surveyed by about 20%, leaving nearly 500 schools to be circulated. Very little indeed had to be changed on the forms as a result of the pilot, and suggestions as to purpose were included in the final letter sent to schools. Pilot headteachers and TAs estimated it took about 30 minutes to complete the forms, some a little less and one or two taking up to 40 minutes. This seemed a reasonable demand for a worthwhile task, and the estimate was also included in the covering letters.

The forms finally went to schools with covering letters in early June 1998. Practical problems prevented the sending of a reminder for returns: the new county boundaries; an atmosphere in schools of anxiety and overload; some antagonism towards the LEA at the start of the NLS; and target setting. The exercise in respect of secondary and special schools in the authority was postponed indefinitely.

4.3 The response

While responses of 60 to 75% are generally considered acceptable, see Chapter 2 [p. 24], a 40% response without reminders seemed more likely. No complaints about the questionnaire were received, or even adverse comments on the forms returned.

By the end of July 1998, despite the various initiatives and priorities of primary schools during the summer term, headteachers from 174 of our 488 infant, junior and primary schools sent their replies back, and 635 TAs sent in their responses. This was a 36% response from headteachers and a 60% response from their TAs. No responses were returned from schools that did not have any TAs. No reports were received from colleagues that any schools did not appoint any TAs, but the survey did not show this conclusively. No TAs responded from schools where the headteacher had not responded. The number of TAs in the responding group of schools as indicated by the headteachers was 1,060. This indicates the possible number of TAs in the primary sector alone in the new county of Essex was over 2,800. The TA responses could be seen as a possible 21% sample of primary TAs in the county. With 79 Secondary schools containing 2,991 classes, and 26 special schools, not questioned, the total numbers of TAs was much greater. Given that colleagues reported about between five and ten TAs/LSAs to a secondary school at that time and special schools likely to have ten to 20 TAs each, a tentative estimate would give about 600 TAs/LSAs in secondary school and 200 to 300 in the special schools. This gave the LEA a working estimate of 3,600 TAs/LSAs in Essex.

LEA staff entered the data into a Microsoft Access database over the summer break, a database chosen to enable both the numerical and narrative data to be interrogated by the researcher. Analysis was done over the autumn and winter 1998/1999. Items mentioned in the tables and narrative below were coded as they were mentioned, then tallied and the counts entered on an Excel spreadsheet. If respondents gave two or more answers to a question, for example working in several areas of the curriculum, each was tallied. The numbers given below correspond to the proportion of respondents who mentioned working in that particular area to the total number of respondents, expressed as a percentage.

4.4 The headteacher responses

4.4.1 The numbers employed

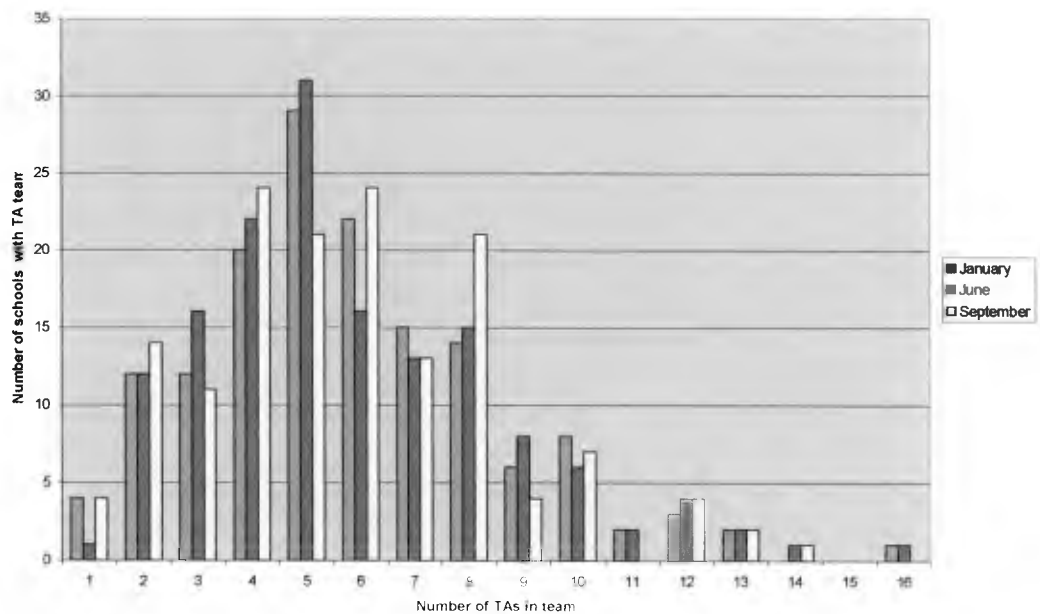
One hundred and fifty headteachers out of the 174 responses gave data about the number of TAs employed in their schools for all of the three terms requested. These data can be seen in Table 2 [p. 64] and graphically displayed in Chart 2 [p. 64].

Few schools had a team of only one person or more than ten people, most having four, five or six. The number in the team possibly reflected the numbers on roll of the schools but these data were not gathered. These teams were often as big as the teaching teams within the schools where these were known to the researcher, but these data also were not gathered.

Table 2: The variation in TA team size over three terms of 1998 for 150 primary schools

Number of TAs in team	Number of schools with a TA team of this size		
	Corresponding to January 1998 Form 7 data	As returned on the survey in June 1998	Predicted for September 1998
1	4	1	4
2	12	12	14
3	12	16	11
4	20	22	24
5	29	31	21
6	22	16	24
7	15	13	13
8	14	15	21
9	6	8	4
10	8	6	7
11	2	2	0
12	3	4	4
13	2	2	2
14	0	1	1
15	0	0	0
16	1	1	0

Chart 2: Graphical display of Table 2 showing the variation in TA team size over three terms of 1998 for 150 primary schools



There did not appear to be a great overall variation in numbers for each of the three terms, so changes were analysed more closely. Despite claims that budgetary changes caused changes in team numbers between January and June, only 48 of the 150 schools changed their overall number of people employed with 34 added in 29 schools and 21 lost from 19 schools. For the individual people and schools concerned the changes were difficult, but 13 more people overall were employed.

The September predictions indicated that there would be an overall loss of 14 people from the June figures. Again, for some schools the changes were significant, three headteachers predicting the loss of four from their team over the summer break. Fifteen headteachers indicated in their replies that there would be changes to their TA numbers due to changes in earmarked funding for SEN or supporting pupils for whom English was an Additional Language (EAL). Only six indicated they would be decreasing the team because of general budgetary constraints, while 13 proposed to increase the size of their team from the general budget. The indicated uses were for literacy support, EY classes or increased support for their teachers.

In addition, the headteacher responses showed:

- The TAs were generally employed for ten to 25 hours with little variation between the school types when correlation was attempted.
- Only three of the 977 TAs described were said to have a full time (37 hours a week) contract, and only 5% were employed for 30 or more hours
- In the primary schools 19% were employed in the junior phases only, 19% worked across the full five to 11 age range and 32% were employed solely in the infant phase.
- 22% of schools paid for their TAs from separate special needs funding, 18% from the SEN part of the main budget allocation, 58% from the main budget and 2% from EAL funding sources
- 46% of the schools had an induction procedure; 83% had a school handbook to which the TAs have access, but not a personal copy; in 68% TAs had access to school policies
- 75% of the schools got supply cover in for their TAs' absences; 21% had TA representation on their Governing Bodies
- Most TAs were welcomed at various staff meetings but only 19% of schools paid for TA time at them, 20% expected attendance at some INSET days; 13% had TAs attend SEN review meetings.
- Only 3% mentioned time spent by TAs planning with teachers

4.4.2 Headteachers' comments and suggestions

Training and course provision

Thirty headteachers gave details of the courses they wished the LEA to provide, which informed the planning for the programme for 1999-2000. These were largely for literacy and numeracy support,

but also for behaviour management, learning difficulties, planning and assessing with teachers and child development. Eight wanted courses more locally provided, often recognising that TAs did not possess transport. Forty per cent suggested training for teachers, including those newly qualified, in planning for TAs, and their use and management, especially during the literacy hour. One suggested that headteachers themselves would welcome training sessions.

Pay scales and contracts

Many headteachers included the need for better funding for schools to allow for appropriate provision. They said: *"Rates of pay do not credit the work they do. However schools are not helped financially to be able to pay"; "Be careful not to push TAs into what they are not, they are not trained teachers and often have no educational qualifications. Formalising their role may backfire on a school"*. One suggested earmarked funding for TAs, another using the unqualified teacher scales.

Increasing the use of TAs in curriculum development

Twenty-five headteachers mentioned literacy particularly. Some mentioned information technology (IT), others quoted skills, such as questioning.

The need for a coherent career and qualification structure

Professional accreditation was proposed by one headteacher, and focussed or specialised training by a few others. One suggested: *"transition from class helper to professional support staff"*, and another that: *" They need professional association status and a say in the development of Essex education"*.

Involvement in in-service days

Headteachers desired an increased involvement in staff INSET days, and whole school training and staff meetings. Ten suggested local cluster groups.

Guidelines and advice

Headteachers requested LEA guidance and advice on deployment or training needs. Several suggested an LEA adviser for TAs, and two that TAs should be on the agenda of the regular visits from the School Development Adviser. Headteachers also requested help for teachers in using TAs. One warned:

"Their relative cheapness could lead to accommodating larger classes with more TAs. Ensuring the TA works well with all the class and does not become an SEN teacher always working with SEN group. Striking the correct balance between being a TA and having real responsibilities within the class".

Another pointed out:

"How they are deployed – TA seems to mean different things in different schools – no common purpose. Effective, i.e. useful and manageable, training offered to

them. A recognition that most are mums, so after hours time is limited but also they have a lot to offer from previous experience”.

Induction and evaluation procedures

Some headteachers commented that they were using some form of procedure to help their management of this group of staff. Those methods given were largely informal, with few people indicating any rigorous monitoring or formal appraisal. Several mentioned using professional dialogues or development interviews, and one the use of professional portfolios. They talked of the desire for more formal appraisal systems. One mentioned comments from their Ofsted report, and one that their governors did an annual monitoring of their TAs. One headteacher indicated they did an annual evaluation of the contribution to children’s learning, using interviews and teacher observations. Some mentioned the need for SENCO or team meetings, and often this was followed by comments on the problems of finding time and opportunity for these.

4.5 The teaching assistant responses

4.5.1 Numbers and characteristics

Table 3 gives the age distribution of the TAs responding to this question, the percentage of the total response to which that number related and a comparison with the figures given in the national survey (LGMB, 1996). It must be remembered that this national survey included those employed as nursery nurses. The local survey did not.

Only six, 1% of the total number of respondents were male, a similar figure to the national response.

Table 3: The age profile of the responding TAs compared to a national survey

Age of respondents	Number responding	Percentage of total	National figures
Under 25	9	1%	7.9%
25 to 39	214	34%	43.9%
40 to 49	300	47%	34.2%
50 to 59	94	15%	12.4%
Over 60	7	1%	1.3%
Not given	11		

4.5.2 Qualifications of all the TAs

Table 4 [p. 68] shows the type of qualifications given by respondents. Of all the 635 respondents 68% had some sort of recognised qualification at level 2 or above, and a significant proportion had higher qualifications. One had a post-graduate qualification.

Table 4: The qualifications given by the responding TAs

Level	Number of respondents	Type of qualification	Percentage of respondents
4	19	degrees	6.7 %
	11	qualified teachers	
	13	higher national qualification or part of a degree	
	5	OU STAC	
	4	State Registered Nurse	
3	60	at least 2 'A' levels	21.4%
	20	Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA) diploma	
	51	CACHE (Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education), NNEB, NVQ3, BTEC (Business and Technical Education Council)	
	5	State Enrolled Nurse	
2	222	at least 1 'O' level, most had 3 or more	40%
	29	PLA certificate	
1	28	CSEs	4.4%

Other relevant experience described by respondents

Some respondents mentioned more than one category, thus these figures are not mutually exclusive.

- 94% had experience as parents with 27% currently still having children at school
- 86% had voluntary work experience often with children or young people
- 19% had had paid child care experience
- 4% had worked in a medical field
- 12% had had other paid work before becoming a TA

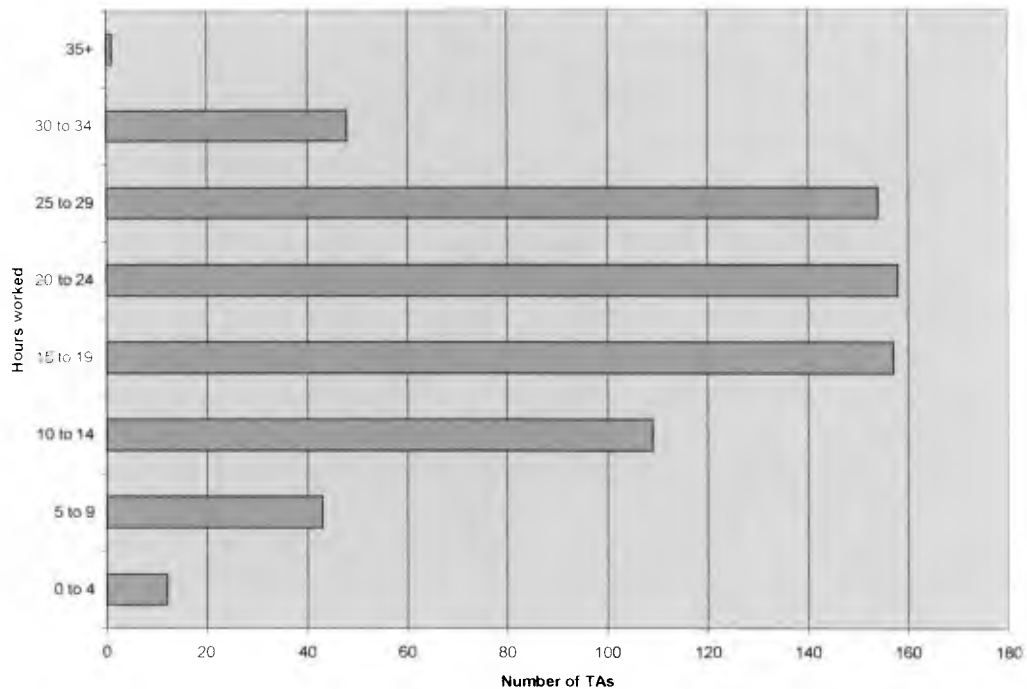
4.5.3 Hours worked and pay scales

Most TAs were paid to work between 15 and 30 hours a week. Only one worked more than 35 hours a week. Table 5 [p. 69] shows the distribution in the responding sample.

Table 5: Paid hours worked by the responding TAs per week in term time

Paid hours	Number of TAs working those hours
0 to 4	12
5 to 9	43
10 to 14	109
15 to 19	157
20 to 24	158
25 to 29	154
30 to 34	48
35+	1

Chart 3: Graphical display of Table 5 showing the distribution of paid hours worked by responding TAs in term time



Fifty percent had been in post for less than five years

Thirteen percent worked only in KS2; 40% in KS1 and 28% in both key stages. Only 3% worked with one age group, and 2% solely with the under fives.

Nearly all TAs also worked at least an hour a week voluntarily and 49% worked unpaid for three or more hours a week. Table 6 shows the distribution of unpaid hours worked by responding TAs.

Table 6: Voluntary hours worked by responding TAs

Unpaid hours	Number of TAs working these hours
1	249
2	199
3	121
4	79
5	51
6	23
7	17
8	14
10+	8

Chart 4: Graphical display of Table 6 showing the voluntary hours worked by responding TAs

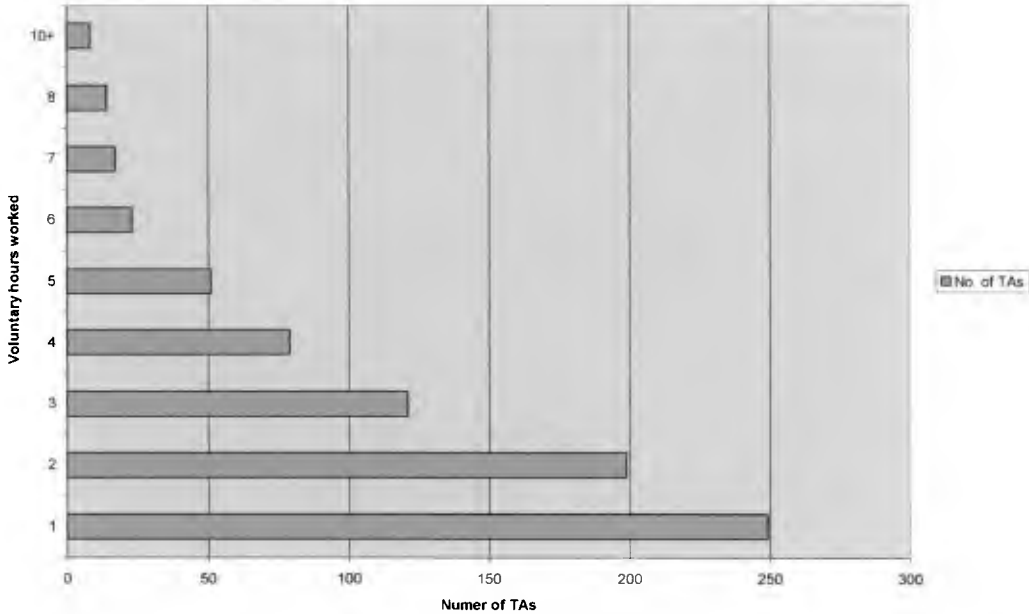


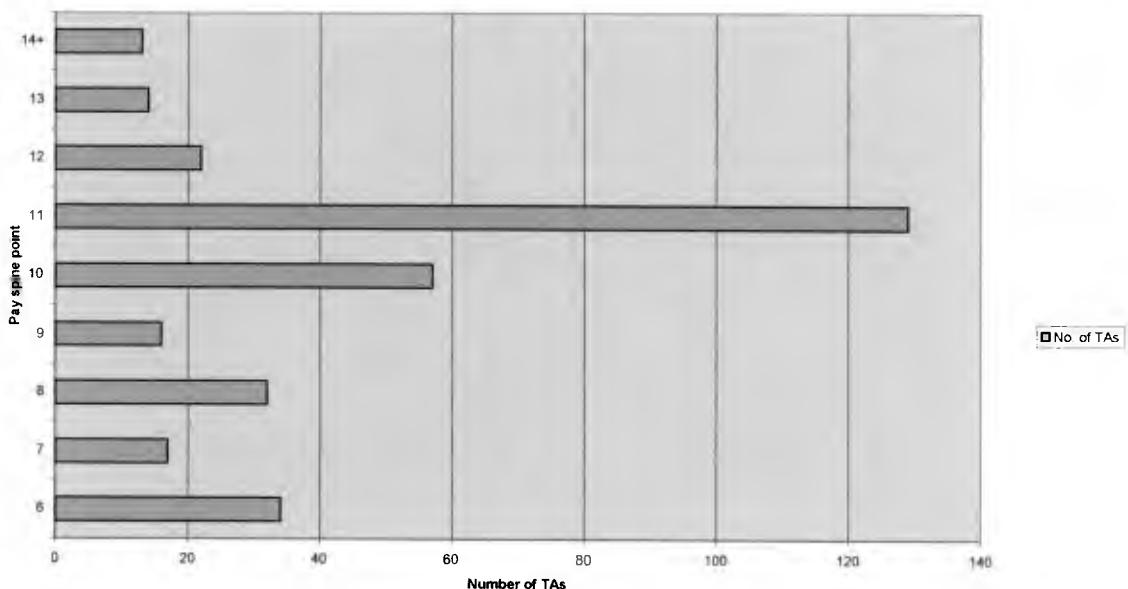
Table 7 [p. 71] shows the pay scale range given by respondents. The majority were paid on points 7 to 11 of Scale 1, only 11% being paid on any higher scale. At the time of the survey, points 7 to

11 were on a range of £9,285 to £10,761 per annum, if the assistant worked 37 hours a week for 48 weeks a year. TAs' hours a week were for 38 or 39 weeks a year only. Most did not appear to get holiday pay or retainers as the mid-day staff did. Thus their hourly rate could be less than £5.00 and their annual salary for so called full time (25 hours) could be meagre. As one TA put it: "I could get more stacking shelves in Tesco". Most administrative staff were on Scale 2, and most finance staff were on Scale 3 or 4. (Information from researcher contacts with school headteachers and Personnel Department at the time.)

Table 7: The pay scales of the responding TAs

Pay scale	Spine point	Number of TAs
1	6	34
1	7	17
1	8	32
1	9	16
1	10	57
1	11	129
2	12	22
2	13	14
2-3	14+	13

Chart 5: Graphical display of Table 7 showing the pay scales of the responding TAs



4.5.4 Names or titles

Their titles were diverse, the majority being *teaching* or *teachers' assistant* or *SEN assistant*. Several were combinations of these. Table 8 shows the names given by respondents. They were not mutually exclusive as some claimed to have several names, The one tallied was the first given.

Table 8: Numbers of responding TAs being called by a particular name

Names	Number of TAs responding
TA or teaching assistant	116
Teachers' assistant	81
Learning assistant	5
LSA	27
CA	27
Non Teaching Assistant	27
SEN support	14
SEN assistant	110
STA	4
Welfare	42

4.5.5 The TAs' description of their role

TAs gave very rich descriptions of the work they did. The emphasis was clearly away from the care aspects of TA work and domestic support or resource management to curriculum support – particularly in literacy and numeracy. One said "*The role of the TA and LSA has evolved over the years from being an assistant to the teacher to being a teaching assistant. They have more responsibility and work with children with learning and behavioural difficulties to variable degrees. It is known that the support is appreciated within the school but the pay does not reflect the change in duties*".

These categories are therefore not mutually exclusive, but displayed in Tables 9 to 12 give some indication of the kind of work TAs were doing at the time of the survey. The NLS and NNS had not started. Table 9 [p. 73] shows the areas of the curriculum they supported, Table 10 [p. 74] shows aspects of classroom activity or type of children they supported, and Table 11 [p. 75] shows the support they gave outside the classroom. Table 12 [p. 76] gives the maximum size of group with which they worked.

Table 9: Areas of the curriculum supported by the responding TAs

Curriculum area mentioned	Percentage of respondents giving this reply
Supporting all curriculum subjects	8.4
Reading	33.9
English or literacy	33.9
Maths or numeracy	29.3
Science	8.8
ICT	5.4
Craft, sewing, cooking	8.0
Technology	2.7
Topic	2.5
History and geography	1.9
Music	2.4
Art	14.5
Physical Education (PE)	2.4

Chart 6: Graphical display of Table 9 showing the curriculum areas supported by the responding TAs

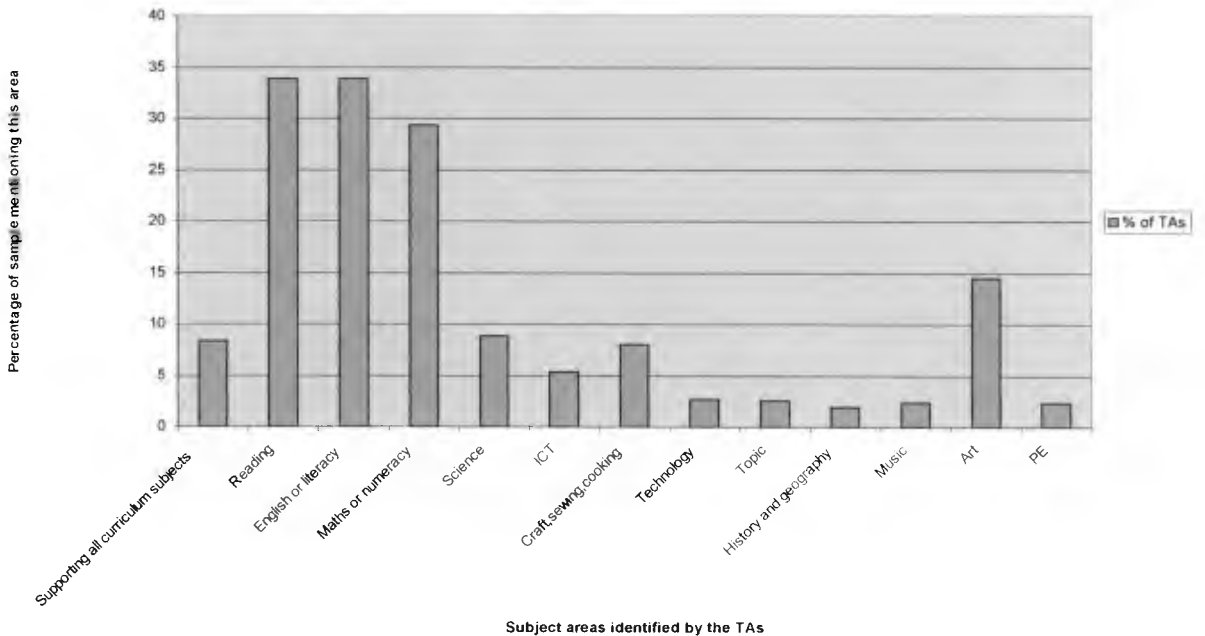


Table 10: Aspects of classroom support given by the responding TAs

Aspect supported	Percentage of respondents giving this reply
Teacher	25.3
Learning or children	30.7
Self esteem	2.7
Care/welfare	6.6
Supporting SEN or ESA or Individual Education Plans (IEPs)	36.2
Statemented SEN	15.4
EAL	2
Hearing impaired	1.6
Visually impaired	1.3
Physically impaired	3.5
Able children	0.6
Behaviour management	6.6
EY general/snack/play	6.8
Occupational therapy	0.6
Physiotherapy/physical matters	0.9
Speech and language	3.5
Using a particular scheme	3.9
Classroom organisation/tidying	5.8
Administration	4.4

Chart 7: Graphical display of Table 10 showing aspects of classroom support given by the responding TAs

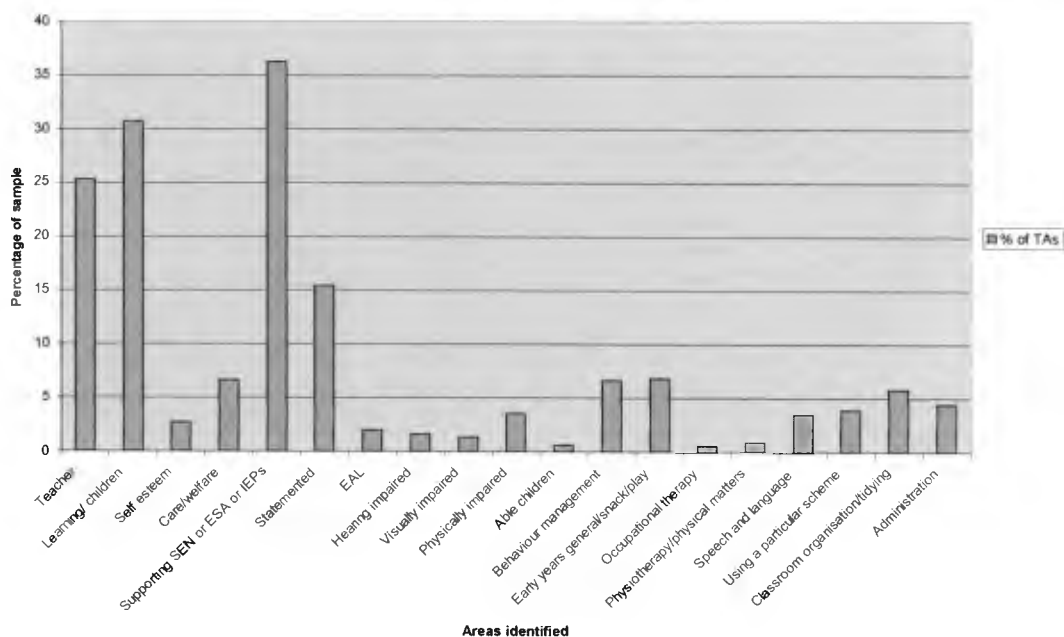


Table 11: Aspects of support given to the school by responding TAs outside the classroom

Aspects supported	Percentage of respondents giving this reply
Display and presentation	10.4
Planning	3
Assessment, recording, observing	9.3
Resource preparation, photocopying	11.3
Tea making and washing up	1.7
Liaison with parents	2.2
Escort duty	5.5
Break and lunchbreak duty	14.8
First aid or medical duty	7.9
Equipment organisation	1.3
Swimming instruction	1.6

Chart 8: Graphical display of Table 11 showing the aspects of support given by responding TAs outside the classroom

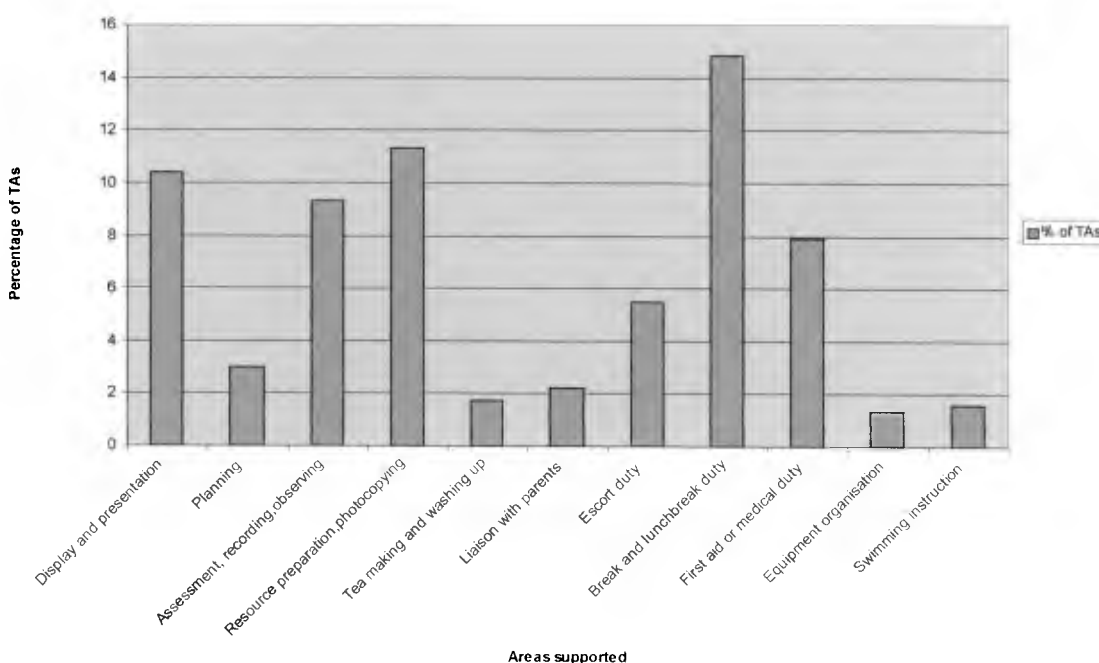
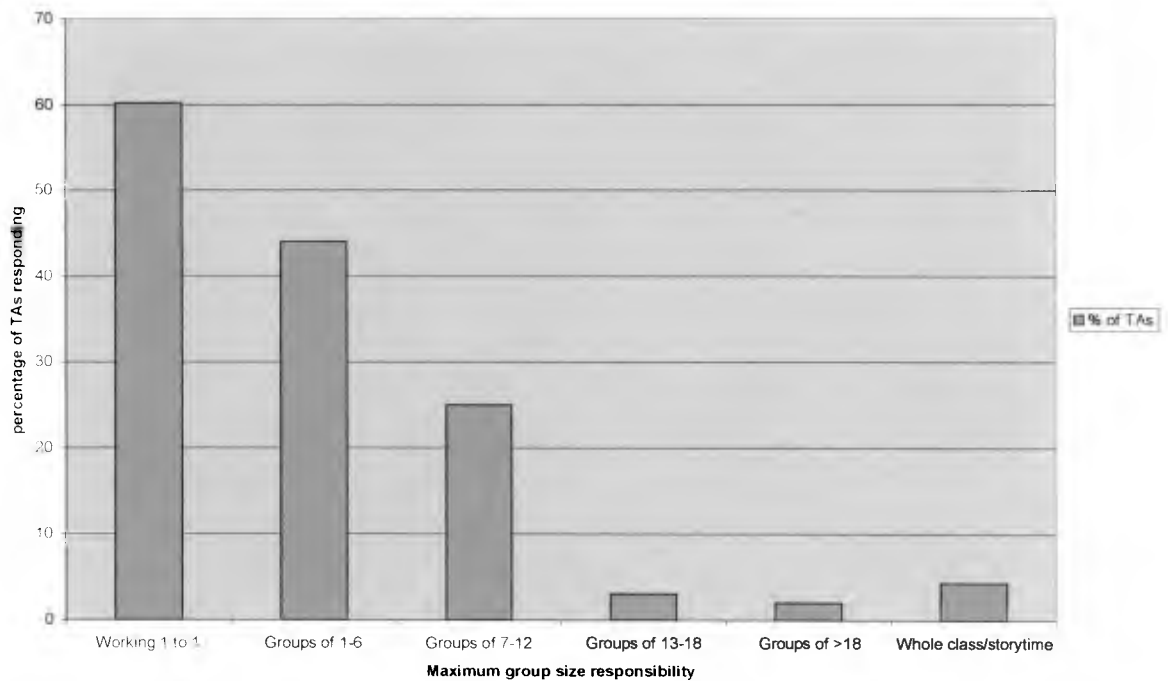


Table 12: Size of groups of children with which the responding TAs worked

Size of groups	Percentage of respondents giving this reply
Working 1 to 1	60.2
Groups of 1-6	44
Groups of 7-12	25
Groups of 13-18	3
Groups of >18	2
Whole class/storytime	4.3

Chart 9: Graphical display of Table 12 showing the size of groups of children with which the responding TAs worked



4.5.6 Changes the TAs would like to make or suggestions they made

Table 13 shows the various suggestions made by the TAs and the numbers making the suggestions.

Table 13: The responding TAs' suggestions for change

Number responding	Status and Pay
16	Permanent status, arrangements, better job security
18	More pay, progression, career path
5	Clearer job description
29	Hours, time, non-contact time
10	To become full time
21	Recognition, standard name, raise profile
	Management
5	Clearer understanding of what is required of me
3	Teachers to agree how I use my time
33	Be involved in planning, closer liaison with teachers, be more informed
19	More involved with all staff decisions, part of the team, staff meetings, <i>"to be treated as full team players"</i>
6	More responsibility
2	Appraisal, <i>"guaranteed annual assessment and professional development guidance"</i>
3	Work with wider range of ability
5	Resource room, resources, area to display children's work, somewhere to keep things, <i>"an adult size chair for the TA in the classroom"</i>
9	Use computers more
	External support
11	More training, understanding of teaching, behaviour management, learning; for a few TAs, training in science, IT and sport
8	Meet other TAs
3	Work with other agencies

They also made suggestions about the kind of courses they would like and when and how they would wish to access them. Fifty two were happy for courses after school, 37 wanted local long courses and 62 were in favour of distance learning courses.

Of the 40 who felt they could contribute to cost, only two could manage £500 to £600, most mentioned around the £200 to £300 mark or less. Existing known courses of any stature cost over £1500 unfunded at the time of the survey.

Of the 101 respondents who wanted courses:

1 had a post graduate qualification

9 had degrees

9 had parts of a degree, or a Higher National qualification

23 had 1 or more 'A' levels

65 had 2 or more 'O' levels

for 10 this was their only qualification

13 had something additional e.g. a clerical qualification

1 was a State Enrolled Nurse

8 had a PPA diploma of which 3 had O levels

7 had an NNEB/CACHE/BTEC award – 2 with 'O' levels and 2 with 'O' and 'A' levels

3 had the OU STAC award, 1 having 'O' levels and 1 'A' levels

6 had a PLA certificate, 3 with 'O' levels

10% had degrees, although possibly not in an appropriate subject

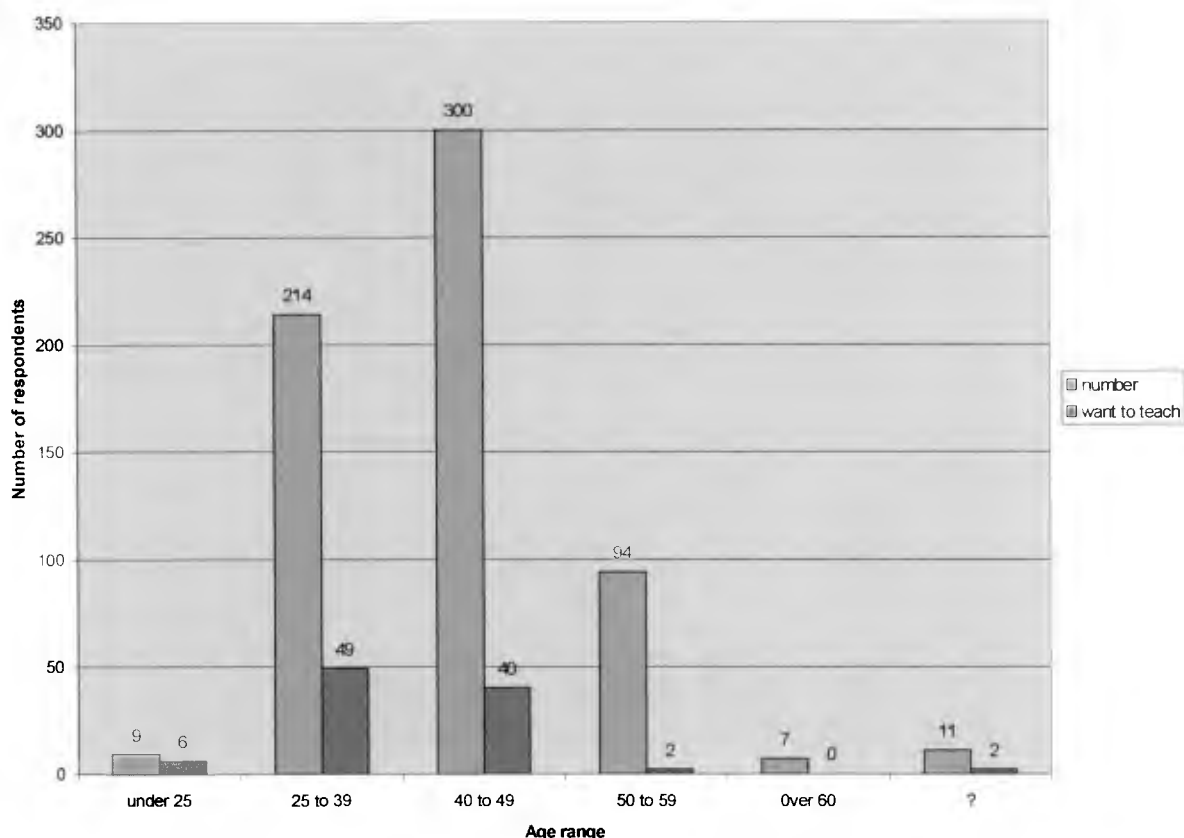
19% had experience of Higher Education.

Some TAs wanted to go on to become qualified teachers. Of the 101 (16%) who wanted to teach 95 were under 50, and 55 under 40 years of age. Thus there could be more than 500 TAs in Essex, at various stages of their career, wishing to teach. Table 14 shows the age profile of all the respondents and those who wished to teach.

Table 14: The age profile of responding TAs and the distribution of those who expressed a wish to become teachers

Age of respondents	Total number of respondents	Want to teach
under 25	9	6
25 to 39	214	49
40 to 49	300	40
50 to 59	94	2
Over 60	7	0
Not given	11	2

Chart 10: Graphical display of Table 14 showing the age of responding TAs and the distribution of those who expressed a wish to become teachers



TAs also made some general comments, including the following.

One raised a particular issue: *"I do believe that TAs should be better advised as to their relationship with children in the context of any claims of abuse or malpractice, obviously common sense prevails but unfortunately in the current climate problems could arise"*. As several had mentioned the need for induction training, perhaps there is a link here. One mentioned a concern about being shared between four classes, preferring to work with one or two, *"so I could build better relationships with both children and staff"*.

Many said how lucky they felt to be doing the job, how happy they were and commented on the excellent relationships within their schools. Comments were nearly all in the style: *"All is OK"*; *"I feel lucky"*; *"The job is wonderful"*; *"I am very happy in my work"*. One added to her comment: *"I absolutely love the job I do and have given 100% time and effort to it. Unfortunately this is frowned upon by some members of staff who, I feel, think TAs should be there to sharpen pencils and wash paintbrushes. I feel the opinion of TAs needs to be raised so that they are of more benefit to the children, staff and school"*. Another put: *"to be employed full time would be bliss"*.

After describing some of the innovations they would like in their school, one TA put: *"I like to feel that instead of being used as another resource like pens and pencils we could be looked upon as professional in our field and paid and respected as such"*. Another wrote she would like to be one of a *"a recognised profession not just an 'army of mums muddling through'"*.

4.6 Initial conclusions, issues raised and subsequent action

These replies gave the LEA a working estimate of 3600 TAs/LSAs in new Essex, and an age profile somewhat higher than that determined nationally. The number indicating a desire to teach was also higher than that expected by colleagues, being 16% of those who replied. If this was a representative sample, it could have meant that there would be more than 500 TAs in Essex, at various stages of their career, wishing to teach of whom about half were still under 40 years of age. This came as some surprise to the officers of the LEA interested in recruitment of teachers.

Sixty eight percent had some kind of recognised qualification at level 2 or above, and a significant proportion had higher qualifications. It has sometimes been assumed that people in this role were school 'drop outs', and needing significant access to further education before being seen as having any basic qualifications for this job. Many respondents had seen a need for grades or levels, the STA course providing a 'top' level qualification, not suitable for all TAs. Almost without exception headteachers and TAs recognised their role as more than a domestic one, requiring induction and training, and a career route recognised with appropriate pay grades.

It was clear that Essex had a large, well-motivated, articulate team of people who were supporting teaching and learning in a significant way. The data were finally published in an LEA report (Watkinson, 1999a). All primary schools received a copy. Support for their professional development was subsequently included in the Educational Development Plan. TAs became an agenda item on the Professional Development Strategy Group, and training courses retained a proportion of the whole course provision for the county. The course programme of EAIS for 1999-2000 was formulated as a direct response to the requests for courses indicated in the survey replies. One school even requested copies of the survey report for all members of their governing body.

While the LEA no longer retained its role as an assessment centre for NVQs in Early Years Care and Education, nor for the City and Guilds awards, there were further outcomes from this survey. Representatives from Essex, Suffolk, Kent and Cambridgeshire went on to assist in writing the units for BTEC accreditation at levels 2, 3 and 4 for TAs, recognising the need for levelled awards for TAs working in all phases of education. The Community and Adult Education section of the LEA worked with the Advisory Services to deliver courses at a more local level than the Advisory Services alone could provide. Anglia Polytechnic University (APU) ran a level 4 course for TAs with the LEA, using

part of the grant funding for STA courses available from central government funds. In addition the LEA continued to support the OU STAC course. This meant that two major courses would be run, one would provide a distance learning option, favoured by some respondents, and one a weekly, people and centre based course favoured by others. There was continuing liaison with the EY Partnership.

Later, a group from the Advisory Service, the Special Needs Support Service and the Psychological and Assessment Service went on to write a quality assurance document for the LEA, based on their Quality Framework. It was called *Good practice in the deployment and management of Learning Assistants in terms of the Essex Quality Framework*, and was used by advisers in the authority although not published or circulated to schools.

The information gained from this exercise informed the LEA response to the TTA consultation about pathways to teaching, the LEA Green paper response, and was sent to representatives from the DfEE and the LGMB. It later formed a substantial part of a paper in a European Union conference on Human Resource Management (Watkinson, 2001a; 2001b).

The compilation of data coincided with the appearance of the UNISON Survey of classroom assistants (Lee and Mawson, 1998) which showed similar results nationally and the NUT study Associate staff - Support for teachers (NUT, 1998) which had similar recommendations. The latest survey commissioned by the DfEE (LGNT0 et al., 2000) showed an increase in TAs of 39.4% from 1995 to 1999 in schools with children at KS 1 and KS 2, excluding middle schools. This survey calculated that 121,500 people were working in infant, junior and primary schools in England in 1999. Their figures included the independent sector.

The DfEE commissioned national survey (LGNT0 et al., 2000) also showed:

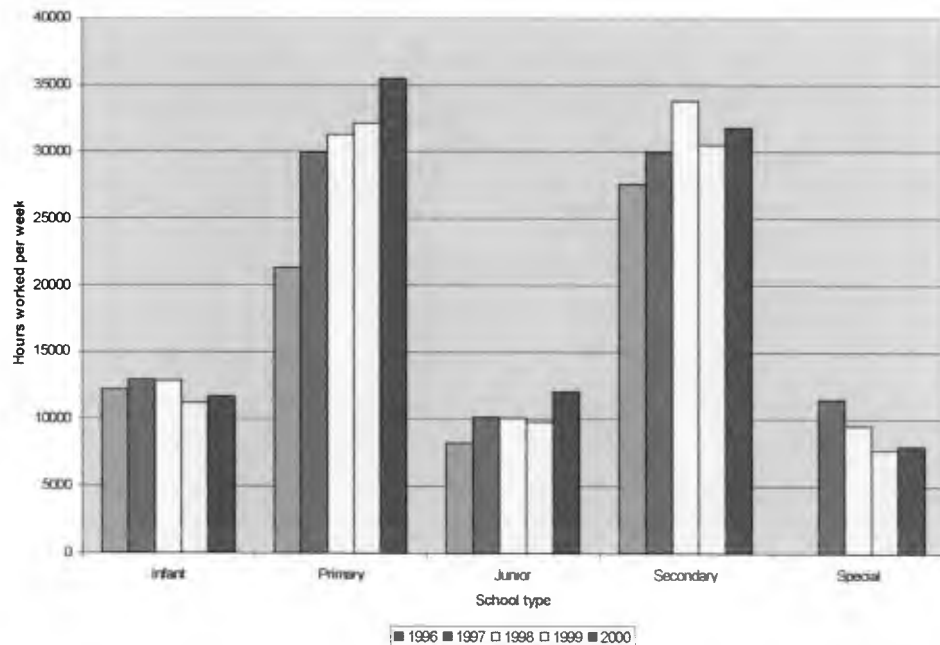
- little difficulty in recruitment
- 86.0 % had received some kind of non-qualification training, an increase from 76.4% four years previously. Over half the staff held five or more GCSEs or 'O' levels and one in seven held two or more 'A' levels
- still less than 1% were male
- only 3.6% were under 25, with almost a half between 25 and 39, and a third more over 40 years old, and an eighth over 60
- main duties were named, the duties carried out by any one individual being likely to be multiple:
 - 41.8% worked in subject specific support
 - 14% listened to reading
 - 39.1% supported SEN
 - 20.7% undertook more mundane housekeeping tasks
 - 14.7% managed challenging behaviour.

Continued tracking in Essex after the local survey also indicated a continued rise in the numbers of people employed as education support staff. Essex figures shown in Table 15 are from Form 7 figures collated prior to sending them to the DfEE. They indicated the major increase had been in primary and junior schools, with a decrease in special schools. Their figures are given in hours worked in a week not FTE as the DfEE ones are.

Table 15: The hours worked by education support staff in 'new' Essex from 1996 to 2000 for all categories of school except nursery schools

School type	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Infant	12175	12870	12796	11153	11633
Primary	21275	29924	31278	32121	35456
Junior	8222	10091	10031	9762	12030
Secondary	27547	29908	33766.5	30497.4	31759
Special		11464.5	9483	7663	7951
TOTAL	69103	94257.5	97354.5	91196.4	98829

Chart 11: Graphical display of Table 15 showing the hours worked by education support staff in 'new' Essex from 1996 to 2000 for all categories of school except nursery schools



4.7 Conclusions for the purpose of this study

The survey had provided a wealth of opinion and data about what TAs do. It confirmed the presumption that TAs were being used to support teaching and learning in a far greater way than had been originally intended by the appointment of ancillary staff. It showed that many schools had been moved, despite their workload, to spend time answering a detailed questionnaire, raising issues and offering ideas about their role, management and deployment. No school offered themselves for further detailed study and no school sent any documentation such as policies or job descriptions. Replies showed a great valuing of the work done by the assistants and also concern that their extra role in the classroom was not rewarded appropriately. Headteachers saw the need for increased pay, but considered they did not have sufficient flexibility in their budgets to achieve it.

In order to find out what the TAs actually do to support teaching and learning it was necessary to create opportunities to watch them in action. This process is described in the following chapter, Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: The case studies of teaching assistants working in two primary schools

“The purpose of such observations is to probe deeply and to analyse intensely the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider population to which that unit belongs.”

(Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 106)

This chapter describes the role of TAs in the classrooms of two schools whose ostensible reasons for employing them are different: one employing them to support particular children with special needs and the other to support curriculum development throughout the school. TAs were observed working with children and interviewed. Their class teachers and headteachers were interviewed, as were a few pupils. The resulting data were coded, categorised and analysed, and certain interpretations placed upon the findings elicited from the data.

Chapter contents:

5.1 Introduction

5.2 A description of the two schools

5.3 The observations

5.4 The interviews

5.5 The questionnaires and meetings

5.6 Outcome data

5.7 Conclusions from this chapter

5.1 Introduction

The rationale for an ethnographic approach, and the use of observations and interviews, has been described in Chapter 2, [pp. 25 - 30].

The first school selected for study proved to use its TAs in a very specific way: with individual children with SEN. As the interest was particularly in the more generic use of TAs, and the specialisms of the researcher were not in SEN, it was decided to do a second set of observations and interviews in a similar school, but one which used TAs more with children across the ability range, supporting curriculum areas and classes, as well as groups of children at the lower end of the ability range. An opportunity to revisit the first school, also added to the richness of the data obtained, and provided further opportunities to refine the processes of obtaining and analysing data. The timetable for the visits, observations, interviews and meetings, including the codings for the people concerned, is given in Appendix 5 [p. 213].

5.1.1 Protocols

It was negotiated with the headteachers that the TAs would be observed in the classroom, and the staff – and children where possible - would be told of the presence and purpose of the researcher. Interviews with the TAs and those relevant to the TAs were agreed, as well as some meetings and opportunities for circulating brief questionnaires. Protocols for both schools were established before starting work in the schools and are in Appendix 6 [p 215]. Anonymity was to be built into any reporting using coding.

There was a tacit understanding by the staff and headteachers of the schools that any problem such as a TA dealing with a recalcitrant child in a way deemed inappropriate by the observer, would be referred to them. There was a confidence that any such issues would be small – the headteachers knew their staff. Similarly, the staff trusted their headteachers to deal with any problems if they were not able to do so directly, if the researcher 'overstepped the mark'. In the event, a couple of minor situations did arise, and a few quiet words between the respective headteacher and the researcher resolved the issues immediately.

5.1.2 Initial meetings

On September 14th 1998, there was a meeting with the SENCO and the TAs in School 1 to set the scene. A set of protocols and procedures were discussed. Those present seemed very agreeable to the proposals, but they were invited to comment at any stage, and to be sure that any discomforts at any stage were voiced. The purpose was to find how the TAs actually worked with children, and how the school context and processes supported that work or not.

On March 21st 1999, the headteacher of School 2 was written to, to confirm agreement to this study and enclosed was a copy of the suggested protocols. A meeting with the TAs was agreed to take place on the first day in the school but owing to a confusion of the time of arrival at the school, this meeting was missed. While this could have created all kinds of problems, it did not then, nor at any subsequent time.

5.1.3 Video filming

When negotiating the original protocols, the desirability of videotaping was mentioned, but rejected as causing too much work in obtaining prior permission from the parents of all the children in the school likely to appear in the film. It was recognised that any of them could appear in such an exercise and that in the current climate, such permission was needed. However, the headteacher of the first school approached, felt such a film could be of great use in the life of the school, for their own study, or to share some of the school's practice with parents. He undertook to gain the necessary permission, which he did, so a video camera was used on all the classroom observations in his school and a full copy of the resulting film given to the school. This formed another facet in the trust partnership being built up over the research process, as the school – and thus those

observed - would see what the observer saw for themselves, as well as the written observations. Reflective comment on such material was also welcomed.

5.2 A description of the two schools

There proved to be many characteristics of the two schools which were common, although their mode of using the TAs differed. The two schools were different in the locality of the schools, one being in a large village and the other on the edge of a large town. One was a relatively recently established school (1974) and the other was still partially housed in the original Victorian buildings. The following comparison (Section 5.2.2 [pp. 87-91]) shows where the main differences and similarities lay.

5.2.1 Selecting the schools

The criteria for choice were clear. The school(s) to be used had to have known good practice, good results in terms of Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs – originally Standard Assessment Tasks, but now refers to both tests and tasks) and be welcoming to outside investigators. As the researcher would come into contact with staff such as teachers, TAs and other support staff for example, administrative staff and Mid-day Assistants (MDAs), they would need to understand why an outsider was asking questions, in principle if not in detail. Thus the climate, the relationships in any such school would have to be good. The trust of the headteachers would be needed, and particularly that they would see such an exercise as useful, while not directly assisting them. It would take up their time and effort, and that of some of their senior staff. This was not an easy request in such a period of overload in schools.

The choice was serendipitous in the end. In both cases these schools were known to be ones that put themselves forward for county projects. The headteachers were approached by the researcher, and staff agreement was obtained prior to any visits. School 1 had participated in the Essex Primary Schools Initiative - Research Project with the Cambridge Institute of Education and School 2 had been part of the National Literacy Project (NLP), after which they had continually opened their doors to visitors to share their practice. They were both, in Sammons et al's terms "*learning schools*" (Sammons et al., 1995).

The additional criteria for the second school, was that the use of TAs would be more generic than the first school, and enable similar observations and interviews to take place to confirm, or not, the findings from the first.

In order to preserve the anonymity of the two schools, the bibliography references including page numbers, to the Ofsted reports mentioned below are omitted. The information was correct at the

time of the work in the schools. The differing dates of numbers on roll are because of the timing of the visits to the schools.

5.2.2 The settings

	School 1	School 2
Basic description, catchment, size and structure.	<p>The school is a one and a half form entry church primary school, in a sufficiently large village or small town to support several primary schools. It is in mixed age buildings, having been twice extended. Some classes are in the original Victorian building, some in open plan classes, in an extension built in 1993 and some in demountables.</p> <p>There is the usual range of administration offices and resource areas, with adequate hard and green play space. There were 280 on roll in the summer of 1998, 11 classes, with ten in autumn and spring terms. As this is a one and a half form entry many classes had mixed age groups.</p>	<p>The school is a one-form entry primary school, on the edge of a housing development bordering a large village, now absorbed into the conurbation of the county town. Its children come largely from the locality, which is of mixed housing. It has no defined catchment area, sharing the locality with two other schools, both consisting of infant and junior schools on the same site. The school is open plan with the classrooms opening off the central hall, and opened in 1974.</p> <p>There is the usual range of administration offices and resource areas, with adequate hard and green play space. There were 206 on roll in the summer of 1999, seven classes, with the reception class taking in the children at the beginning of the academic year – called 'early entry' in Essex. However at the time of the study, the children all being of reception age, the class operated in the same way as other classes. There was one class base to each year group.</p>
Free meals, SEN etc.	<p>The school was inspected in April 1996. According to the report, most children come from the catchment area, and have had pre-school experience before attending. Thirty percent of children were eligible for free school meals, higher than national average, but the level of attainment on entry was regarded as average or above and coming from supportive families. The recently published league tables showed the level of the results obtained by the school in the 1998 SATs at KS 2 to be well above both county and national averages. Children enter classes in the autumn and spring.</p>	<p>The 1998 Ofsted report states "<i>Compared with national averages, the eligibility of pupils for free school meals is average. There are 36 pupils identified as having special educational needs. Twelve pupils come from different ethnic backgrounds</i>".</p>

5.2.3 The OFSTED reports

School 1 – April 1996

The report described the school as a “good school”, where standards were “consistently sound or better in all areas of the curriculum”.

“A high standard of behaviour” and “excellent learning attitudes shown by pupils” “Some of the school’s documentation shows a deep understanding of the pupils’ learning needs”. “Sensitive relationships exist at all levels of the school”.

“The quality of teaching is sound overall with some good features. In nearly nine-tenths of the lessons teaching is sound or better and it is either good or very good in just over two fifths”

“Two pupils have a statement of special educational need and classroom assistants work very effectively alongside the teachers responsible for these pupils” – later described as “particularly effective”. “The quality of teaching support staff with pupils who have special needs is effective”. “The progress of children with statements of special educational need is carefully followed and decisions made by teachers, classroom assistants and parents positively support the pupils in their learning”.

“Support staff work well under the direction of the teachers”. “A high level of educational discussion, including the seeking of parental views, takes place to ensure that the quality of education provided by the school is good. The positive working relationship between all who are involved in the school enables the successful pursuit and achievement of common goals”.

School 2 - June 1998

The report says it “provides a good education for its pupils. It has strengths in pupils’ attitudes and relationships ... a proportion of very good teaching ... extra-curricular activities ... procedures for promoting pupils’ well-being, health and safety”.

“The attitudes pupils have to work and relationships between pupils are very good and are a strength of the school. They are hard working, well behaved, enthusiastic and they concentrate well. Pupils work well in groups or in pairs. Pupils’ very good attitudes enhance their standards of work and their personal development is good. Pupils help to establish the codes of conduct in classrooms. They co-operate well together” “Relationships are very good throughout the school”.

“The teaching is good. Virtually all lessons are satisfactory or better. Just over three-quarters are good and one-fifth are very good”. “Pupils are well managed at both key stages”.

“Curriculum planning for pupils with special education needs is effective in all areas of the curriculum. Pupils are fully integrated into classes and they benefit from some small group teaching. The blend of whole class teaching and group activities is well suited to their needs. Support staff implement pupils’ individual education plans well”.

“Good use is made of staff and the recent decisions to employ an extra class teacher in September and deploy teaching assistants to support pupils with special needs during literacy hours are effective”.

“Support staff have a positive influence on pupils’ standards of work and the progress they make. They work closely and effectively with teaching staff”. “The use of teaching and support staff is good and resources are used well”. “Support staff, students and volunteers are effectively deployed in lessons and they have a positive impact on pupils’ attainment and progress” “Trained support staff are used to good effect, they contribute positively to pupils’ learning. The staff, under the leadership of the headteacher, work well together as a team”.

5.2.4 General background information gained from working in the schools and from the various interviews.

	School 1	School 2
The TA team	In School 1, there were seven TAs (all called LSAs in this school) at the time of the study, the autumn term 1998, and all but one were responsible for specific children, although some children related to more than one LSA/TA. The SENCO had full time class responsibility, but also arranged the TAs' work schedules. The TAs were technically line managed by the deputy head. There was a visiting Learning Support teacher to help with the statemented children of whom there were six. About 60 or 70 children at any one time were on the Essex Stages register under the Code of Practice. The IEPs were written by the teacher and the SENCO together, often with the TAs present. All TAs except one worked a full pupil contact day. One only worked two days a week. One also worked as an MDA.	There were six TAs (called TAs in this school) at the time of the study, although one was away on compassionate leave at the time of the visits. They were mainly employed for mornings to support the literacy hour and the mathematics lessons. One TA was employed solely in the EY class. Essex policy for admitting children in any term before the one in which their fifth birthday occurs, requires that there be an additional adult, (not necessarily NNEB qualified, but preferably trained in some way) for the time in which these younger children are present. Other requirements apply to these classes, such as an approved curriculum, a fenced outside playspace and toilets readily accessible to the classroom, a snack time and appropriate equipment resourcing. This study taking place in the summer term, meant the regulations need not apply, as all the children would be five before the end of August, but the TA was still employed for this class. This class also had a teacher job-share, but the three adults involved worked as a team and met together outside school hours.
Budgetary matters re financing TAs	The six statemented children brought £9,000 to the school budget, the school SEN budget contributed another £9,000 and the school general budget contributed another £6,000 as the Headteacher and Governors put this high on their priorities for supporting children. Of this some went to pay for a support teacher working 0.4 FTE and the rest paid for 78.5 hours of TA time. One of the governors was also a TA, but was not on the Governing Body as a support staff member. All TAs were paid on the same scale, but some worked for longer hours than others did.	The school paid for 83 hours teaching assistance a week, the special needs 'pot' contributed only a part of the costs. This indicated a total cost of about £20,000 a year for TAs alone. The school did not employ a special needs teacher. One of the teachers was married to the Chair of finance on the Governing Body and was believed to make strong representations on the TAs' behalf. There were no support staff on the Governing body. The two STAC TAs were paid on Scale 2.

	School 1	School 2
Management	<p>The headteacher had been in post since the late 1980's, the SENCO came to the school in 1992 as a mainscale teacher and became SENCO in 1997. Some of the TAs started as parent helpers and some as MDAs or office staff. This has resulted in a team of people of quality and personality that fitted in with the existing school philosophy and practice. Most were appointed after the SENCO was appointed, as that was when the children with statements entered the school</p>	<p>The headteacher had been in post for a year, this was her first headship. She was also the SENCO. The Deputy head (DH) was the line manager of the TAs – a recent change for the DH who had been in the school for three years. This line management itself was also of recent origin, being seen as a professional development opportunity for the DH as well as a link for the TAs.</p>
Appointment	<p>The main route to appointment was for people to be observed in positions such as these and their observed expertise taken into account at interview. Their approaches to other adults and children, their ability to hold confidentiality, and the quality of their intervention skills all formed part of the picture.</p>	<p>All but one of the TAs were appointed before the current headteacher took office. She instituted a formal appointment system, and looked for some kind of qualification as part of the criteria. The existing team were asked to rearrange their personal programmes to fit in with the morning programme of literacy and numeracy lessons, and that all should be in school together at least one morning a week in order that meetings could take place.</p>
Organisation	<p>Regular meetings of the TA team were held when the team was new, but these had fallen into abeyance. The line manager was responsible for the meetings, but the SENCO co-ordinated their work through the IEP and review process. Discussions tended to revolve round particular children rather than school based policies and practice. When problems arose, however, the TAs tended to go directly to the headteacher. It depended on the nature of the problem.</p>	<p>The TAs did not have a special base, although there was an SEN learning resources area. If children were withdrawn, it was usually to an area close to the classroom, but on the whole they worked with children in the class base. Half an hour was allocated to two TAs for planning on a Monday. A regular Wednesday morning meeting took place, also of fairly recent origin. The timetabling of the TAs had been specifically arranged to ensure that all the TAs were on the premises in an employed category for that time.</p>

	School 1	School 2
Training	<p>There was no regular in house training for the assistants. All the staff spoken to put considerable emphasis on relationships, team working and happiness. External courses for the TAs had not been used much, except the major input for two staff on the OU STAC course. They had attended INSET days, particularly on literacy and the National Grid for Learning. They had had some in house sessions, for instance watching a video of John Feinnes teaching history, where they explored techniques of questioning. However by the second visit, regular meetings with the SEN teacher, (not the SENCO) were taking place to share practice.</p>	<p>The newly set up regular Wednesday meetings were beginning to be training sessions. The development of a recording format for the 'target groups' was going on at the time of the visits. The possible activities for these target groups had been discussed. Two TAs had the OU STAC qualification and one the Chelmsford FE college introductory course. They all took part in the in-house training for the literacy project.</p>
Formalities	<p>Formal job descriptions and a policy for the TAs were in the pipeline; the SENCO and researcher took time before the first interview to discuss what each might contain. At the start of the study there was no formal appraisal system. The job descriptions were in place by the second visit, as was the policy, and the start of PDRs had taken place.</p>	<p>Formal job descriptions existed, PDRs took place but mainly as a group activity, three at a time, to encourage confidence in the process. TAs were also encouraged to talk among themselves and report back or go individually to the headteacher if they needed.</p>
Practice	<p>There are clear practices within the school, some based on formal policies and others on tradition. Professional yet friendly working relationships, based on an unwritten code of trust and shared values underpinned all that went on. All staff, whatever their status, called each other by their family name and title in public, not their given names. A sense of humour was obvious, with banter, but there was also a sense of respect. Children and staff were clear about boundaries and behaviour codes, issues of confidentiality and responsibility. All staff spoken to, put these matters high on their priorities.</p>	<p>A recent development had been the setting up of 'target groups'. Children were selected by the teaching staff on their performance, both in class and in various tests as being of less than average ability, but not on high stages of assessment or statemented; children who could do with a boost. Groups of up to six in each class were formed both for literacy and numeracy. They met once or twice a week during assembly time with a TA. The TAs were given a fairly free hand in what they did in the time, although their line manager, the DH, made suggestions.</p>

5.3 The observations

5.3.1 The methods used

It was not the intention to see TAs perform all their tasks, only to focus on teaching and learning support in the classroom. It was evident that some of this work depended on their volunteer time – preparation of materials and systems to help their work in class, times for meeting and planning outside classroom hours. The informal and social times, the fleeting, seemingly transient encounters in playgrounds or even the street, all serve to facilitate relationships – which underpin the TAs' work. These were not directly observed.

The first set of visits to School 1: records coded 1.1

Subsequent to the introductory September meeting in School 1, the headteacher rang to say he had written to all parents of the children in the classes in which the TAs worked, in order to enable videotaping of the TAs working with the children. He wished to use scenes of TAs supporting reading in particular, to facilitate the sharing of school procedures with the parents. He had had no adverse replies.

Formal timed observation sheets were prepared for the first set of visits, but as the videotaping proved very easy and relatively non-intrusive, they were abandoned on site and observations were made largely with the video camera in School 1 on the first visits. The camera was hand held, no lights were used, most children were uninterested, being used to outsiders watching them, and having been briefed by their teachers as to the visit's purpose. The lack of extra lighting or pre-ordained script may have resulted in some lack of visual quality but the lack of apparent interference in the work of the classroom was a better outcome for the researcher. Some children talked to the researcher, who responded as naturally as possible, as if an ordinary visitor to the classroom, relaxing them, showing interest in their comments. Lapsed time was recorded on the film, from the camera's internal clock.

The main observation evidence for this set of visits came from detailed study of the videotapes after all of them had been transferred to VHS from the High 8 tapes used by the camcorder. The quality of the film was excellent, although the soundtrack at times difficult to hear, being in a classroom situation. An attempt was made on two occasions to use a more directional microphone, but the results did not justify the additional effort. The sound track on these tapes was not therefore accurately transcribed to a paper copy.

An attempt was made to put a two-minute observational framework on the film, similar to that used by Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a). It was a useful practice for the researcher, being able to rehearse what could be done in a classroom, but in itself, it did not offer useful data. As the TAs were working so idiosyncratically, responding to the needs of the particular children, using coding

and a timed framework did not provide helpful additional insight. The very responses to individual children and the interactions were interesting as they occurred. The time had been recorded on the film, so an accurate time frame was possible, and the length of time concentrating could be ascertained without the imposition of fixed milestones.

Variations on the original observation schedule were tried out on the video material, the resulting grid [Appendix 7, p. 218] was subsequently used throughout, and all the video observations completed on the same grid. The hand-written notes were typed up, with any comments made after those made on site typed up in italics.

The videotape, observations, and comments were sent to School 1 at the end of the set of visits for comment. No comment on the material was made, nor concerns voiced as to content, including the comments.

The visits to School 2: records coded 2

The headteacher arranged a rough timetable for the observations over three mornings in May 1999. All TAs present were observed in full class time at some time. A few were also observed with withdrawn groups. At this second set of visits, the developed observation schedule was used in the field, and the hand-written notes typed up afterwards, again with post site visit comments typed in italics. A copy of these was also returned to the school. There was no response from the school.

The return visits to School 1: records coded 1.2

The TAs in School 1 were keen to repeat the exercise. They felt the process of understanding their work would be incomplete without a return visit. They felt that not all that of which they were capable had been observed. The SENCO arranged two further dates for the process to be repeated as at the first visits. These were recorded, typed up and sent back to the school, as in the first set. Again, no comment was forthcoming.

Final meetings

Meetings were held in both schools after all the data had been collated, analysed and the report written, which contained the contents of the first full draft of this chapter, Sections 5.1 to 5.6. The TAs and senior teaching staff were all satisfied that the data and analysis represented as true a picture as possible given the constraints of time. Procedures and policies had moved on in these schools in the meantime, partially as a response to the raising of the profile of the TAs by the investigation itself.

5.3.2 Brief descriptions of the observational data obtained

Despite the original intention to be as systematic as possible, the constraints of researcher time combined with the unpredictability of human endeavours meant that all observations and interviews were done as and when it was possible. One stated child was absent on one day. Another was not observed on the advice of the teacher and TA as his behaviour had become unpredictable. One TA had had a bereavement but had returned to work, another was absent through a family bereavement, another felt unwell but insisted the planned observation should go ahead. While this does not give a structured approach, it reflects the realities of life in school, however pre-planned or apparently stable a time in the life of the school.

The effect of the video camera

It was clear from the film that the children were aware of being filmed, but apart from one or two comments and smiles, they were quickly able to take the process in their stride. At one point a TA said to a child *"You are not being filmed, but I am!"* Child B seemed unaware of the camera but her stubborn behaviour could have been, in the later comment of her TA, her reaction to being watched. The TAs and teachers were extremely professional and had clearly prepared themselves and their children well for the intrusion. The researcher was able to move around the classroom freely, and usually sit within hearing distance of conversations between TA and children. Given the general working level of sound found in a primary classroom, and the inquisitive nature of children, this was in itself a reflection of the children's good attitudes to work, and the acceptance of the presence of adults.

What was observed

Altogether 31 different observations were recorded, some with the same TA changing role within a minute, and others quite separate. Two observations coincided, one TA arriving in the middle of the class where the other was working and separate running notes were made. No tea making, resource preparation or display work was observed. One home time was seen and briefly the end of a registration early in the morning.

The curriculum areas

The range of curriculum areas that were covered was fairly wide, although the function of the TAs in School 2 was to support literacy and mathematics. Even during these apparently more formal lessons, Art as part of topic writing, and Play as part of literacy were observed. An informal time was also recorded in one school.

Children were seen in English, Mathematics and Science, some Technology and Physical Education (PE), and in assembly. The assembly observation was written up immediately after the occasion, as field notes, to avoid writing during the assembly time. The Rector was taking

assembly. No TAs working with ICT or with music were observed, but both have been seen in other schools. The influence of the current climate, with its emphasis on whole class lessons, literacy and numeracy was obvious. In School 2, the NLS was well established, as the school had been part of the NLP the previous year. A daily mathematics lesson was also the norm in both schools, anticipating the NNS.

Several structured programmes were underway. In School 1, the Early Reading Research (ERR) approach to early reading was in place. This was a method of teaching reading in Year R and 1 whereby three structured, teacher directed sessions of ten minutes were held every day, children learning words and sounds. Each session built on the last, the remaining reading strategies and materials being as the school directs. It was a joint research project between Warwick University and Essex County Council, and its progress during the NLS introduction was being observed by HMI.

Organisation

Children were seen in whole class sessions, in groups in class, in groups out of class, in pairs and on their own. Direct observations of their progress or attainment in learning were minimal, although their activities were recorded. An attempt to record their responses in Ofsted style as Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a), proved ineffective as the concentration on regular observations and comments about the TAs prevented any in depth observations of the children. Even when attempted by revisiting the videos, it was felt that any evaluation of learning would be seriously flawed by the lack of additional information about the children. In an Ofsted observation, the learning objective of the teacher and the background work and records of the class, the school and the children would be available to support any judgements. Even on inspection, the judgement of learning, and particularly progress within the time observed is problematic and creates much debate with professionals.

Children

Children of various ages and stages were observed, from reception class to Year 6. This influenced the nature of the tasks being undertaken by the TAs as did the ability range and special needs of the children involved. Things like curriculum input or behaviour management on the part of the TA was determined by the needs of the children as well as age and stage.

Children were observed with severe special needs.

Child A was six; his statement refers to complex learning difficulties, his behaviour having many characteristics well along the autistic spectrum. Two TAs and an MDA cover his needs. A Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped CHildren (TEACCH) programme for organising autistic children had been started and was observed in process on the second set of visits. This system of cards with associated activities is set up for the child, firstly with

pictures and then with words. The child is drilled in going from card to card and carrying out the instructions. Each sequence of cards ends with something he or she likes doing and the threat of withdrawal of this privilege is held against the completion of each task.

Child B had Downs Syndrome and was also six.

Child C was a statemented girl, with global learning delay. The speech therapist was involved in her support. She had poor motor skills, and sequencing and memory problems.

Child D had come to the school in Reception, but his speech and language problems were such that he had to go to a specialist unit in a nearby town for two years. At the school with the unit, he was gradually reintegrated into the mainstream and had now rejoined his catchment area school, statemented.

Child E was statemented for global learning delay.

Child F was a statemented child with Attention Deficit Disorder, who had been excluded from his catchment area school and came about five miles by car to this school. During the second set of visits, it became known to him that he would be leaving at the end of term to go to a residential special school. This not only upset him, but also his TA, whose job hours partly depended on the allocation of money for his support.

No severely physically impaired child was observed.

No specific support for very able children was observed in either school.

Teachers

No teachers were directly observed, several classes had supply teachers while the visits took place, but this did not seem to affect the work of the TAs.

5.3.3 The observation data

The descriptions given below are intended as brief vignettes to convey the kind of situations on which the analysis and conclusions are based. They are written in the present tense to indicate the immediacy of the description, and include some comment on the observations made. These were made at the time in the final column of the observation proforma or soon after in field notes.

Observation 1.1.1

This is in a Year 2 class, where the TA is working with child B. It is a literacy hour, with a supply teacher. No formal observation was done during the teacher input session at the beginning. The TA is also observed supporting two children in a class reading session after the literacy hour finishes. The concentration and sensitivity of the TA are impressive. She is sensitive to the needs of the child, able to act mild anger, to comfort or sit back as appropriate and in doing so enable the child to complete a simple task. She is firm, the boundaries of the situation are clear for both, she repeats phrases to ensure they go in such as 'birthday – b'. She challenges using "quickly", "no", "you do know", "come on – don't show off" along with "I'm pleased", "well done". She bends to the

child's level, she maintains close physical contact, hand and eye movements are particularly significant. She is not static, she supports other children when she can, and in doing so enables the child she is with to have space and time to perform. She is sensitive to the fidgets, offers to change chairs at one point to get round them, but persists, not letting the child get away with not completing a task she feels the child is capable of.

The TA support of other children in the class ensures B is not totally dependent on her. Her body language during this support of other children is important, ensuring the children's attention, as is her concentration on the task. Her questioning is varied and skilful. She uses 'what' and 'why' questions.

Observation 1.1.2

This is a Year 3 class, where the TA works with C and others in a group. This is a general catch-up session with the TA helping to complete work started at another time. The children have been on a walk round the school, looking at the architecture, seeing the differences in various parts of the school which were built at different times. The TA also has a short session hearing readers. The TA shows sensitivity and concentration, but within a supportive and positive climate does not hesitate to challenge. The challenges are small and enable the children to have success. The hand and eye movements, the gesture and physical comfort are apparent. The TA chooses deliberately to role model behaviour for the children.

Observation 1.1.3

This is in a Year 1 class with child A. The TA's sensitive understanding of his needs clearly supports the child, in her timing, operating constraint in allowing him to try and succeed. She is able to do this in an unobtrusive way, using her own initiative which enables the class and the teacher to get on with their own work appropriately. The pair are seen in an ERR session, a Design Technology lesson and assembly. The children in the class are aware of A's differences, including the support he has, and are also able to ignore or support. The close body contact of the TA is important, but the strategies for control without it are also set up. A red line at the classroom door and the smiley face/sad face in assembly enable the school boundaries to be clear and maintained. The TA's total concentration on the task, with constant repetition of a few significant words contributes to the success of the child. A has his own tools, and working space, and is able to proceed at a pace suitable for him, but is continually encouraged to do more. This close supervision could lead to total dependency, although the lack of communication characterised in autism makes it unlikely. The TA takes as many opportunities as possible to stand back – in cutting and sticking, in writing, in play and in assembly.

Observation 1.1.4

This is in a Year 5 class with D. The TA and D are observed in a wet area annex to D's classroom, during a practical science session, and then during a setted, formal book work maths session under the direction of a teacher other than D's class teacher. D finds it difficult to concentrate and is more openly conscious of the camera than other children. The TA had done part of the practical task on a previous occasion, and had felt the children had not understood. She had tried some things out on her own children before bringing them in for this session. She had prepared a series of prompt questions and strategies. She gives the children thinking time and values their contributions. She is able to use language the children understand, and interprets the concepts of halves and quarters at a level they require. She shows an appropriate understanding of the curriculum. She gets them to clear up and has high expectations. She has a friendly manner with questioning strategies, using 'how' and 'why' as well as 'what', developing the children's confidence and self-esteem.

Observation 1.1.5

This observation is in the same classroom as 1.1.2. The TA is doing an assessment for reading with her charge, E. She is using a highlighter to mark the appropriate line in the Essex/Birmingham levelled assessment lists as E reads from her reading book. Other children follow E through this process. The TA has been shown how to use the Essex/Birmingham assessment tool, enabling the teacher to leave this time consuming task to her. Her questioning goes beyond the 'what' and 'who', to 'why'. She is mobile, taking her own decisions as to when to stop a task, when to move and what to do to fill in short gaps. She works under the teacher, as when the teacher stops the class – they all stop. Her gestures are well emphasised, eyebrows up and so on to clearly show interest. She runs her fingers under words to help the child see particular words. She is committed to listening to an individual child when appropriate, or to supporting the named child, but able to work with a group enabling all to join in. She knows about school strategies, using a 'look, cover, write, check' approach and later uses the line guides for handwriting.

Observation 1.1.6

This does not take place as planned, as the child F, in Year 4 is having a disturbed afternoon. His TA is coping well, but the teacher rightly feels any other adult, or particular attention given to F would upset the precarious balance being maintained in the classroom. The child is able to remain in the classroom.

Observation 2.1

This is a literacy hour in an EY class. The teacher is half of a job share. The introduction to the lesson was not observed. The TA is working with a group of six lower ability children organising a handwriting session. The TA helps the children with instructions and keeps them on task. She is constantly on the move, suggesting, questioning, and extending the ideas of the children. She acts as a role model in terms of keeping the table tidy and organised. All the time the pace of the session is kept up. The group would certainly not complete the work set without her interventions,

but she does more than just keep them busy. She extends their ideas beyond that of the set task by her questions and suggestions.

Observation 2.2

A Year 1 class, just in from play, settles to the group work of a literacy lesson. The teacher introduction was not observed. The TA deals with a child who has bumped his head in the playground and comforts him physically. Once he is settled at the computer, she moves between him and a group of four children on the carpet who are doing a jigsaw puzzle. She challenges children not on task, moves between the carpet and children working with simple non-fiction texts at a table. She goes at one point to a different group on the carpet and makes sure when a jigsaw is finished it is packed away correctly. The situation is different from a normal literacy hour as a test is to take place at the end. The school is in the middle of SATs week and Year 1 are to do a teacher-set test. The TA helps the children tidy away their books and gets out materials for the test.

The TA acts as a role model and a challenge to the children she works with. In all she was in contact with 16 children, over half the class. The teacher on her own would not have been able to assist, let alone effectively increase the learning of these children on her own. The TA shows an understanding of the different structure of the day, without having to refer to the teacher at the time.

Observation 2.3

This is done in a Year 5 classroom, but with the small group of target children. The rest of the class is in assembly. The group starts with three children but another one joins soon after the start. The TA has prepared some dictionary work, but chats with the group at first about their weekend and the forthcoming school trip. She quickly settles the children laughingly with the comment "*Come on, this is playground talk*". Her easy manner keeps the children with the task, which is familiar to them, and she models the task by using a dictionary herself. She manages the group appropriately, despite the lengthy assembly (it is a special charity one). She is sensitive to the children's needs allowing time for thought and yet intervening when she sees a child not progressing sufficiently. She is critical of inaccuracies, but does not provide correct answers. Her empathy and challenge characterise the session.

Observation 2.4

This takes place in the adjoining Year 6 room, the children returning from assembly settling to quiet reading until the mathematics lesson starts. The teacher quickly briefs the TA who then quietly tells the researcher what she is going to do. She is unobtrusively moving about the classroom to certain children for the first part of the lesson. She appears to have clear parameters for those to whom she talks, maintains their pace and uses correct mathematical language appropriately – dealing with negative numbers, decimals and fractions at different times. She is consistently polite and

caring yet challenging and questioning. She offers the children different strategies, and gives a practical example to help at one point – dividing up a cake. She gives praise where it is due, getting work completed where possible.

Observation 2.5

This is another early morning target group, the TA is with Year 2 children. Prior to the start of school she had get things ready in the classroom while the teacher was on playground duty. The class have just completed a 'look, cover, write, check' spelling task in class during registration during which the TA has accompanied a child who needed exercise around the hall. She now helps children who come in late with their lunch boxes. She rules pages for one or two and signifies with a non-verbal gesture for them not to chat. It is a scene of constant change, yet there is clear understanding of what is required of her with no spoken communication with the teacher. She is ready for the group of four children who sit with her during assembly in the classroom.

The children and the TA play a simple addition game with a pack of playing cards. The TA instructs, questions, reminds, encourages, continually keeping them concentrating. She helps and challenges, discourages giggling and reinforces success. She rephrases her questions and ensures the children follow the simple rules, like taking turns. She uses phrases like "*That was another of your number bonds*" to enable the children to see the links between this game and their class learning. She differentiates her responses to the children, clearly understanding different needs.

Observation 2.6

This is a mathematics lesson with the same Year 2 class, teacher and TA as Observation 2.5. . The teacher had been on duty before school. The TA sits through the plenary, to understand the context and purpose of the lesson. This time is so often seen by visitors as wasted TA time, but in situations like this it is essential if the subsequent work of the TA is to be relevant and contribute to the teacher's intended learning outcome. During the group work the TA takes a series of pairs of children outside to use a trundle wheel. Without the TA these children would have taken longer to complete the task, possibly misunderstood the working of the wheel, and thus the intended outcome, and gained little from the experience beyond a chance to be off task. The TA ensures accuracy and understanding. She is physically on the move all the time, alert to the children's needs and the intention of the task. She takes every opportunity to teach, for instance questioning which month when the children write the date. While active, she allows children space to write or checks their answers when appropriate. She keeps the children to the expected standards of presentation and work commitment.

Observation 2.7

This is of a TA in a Year 3 literacy lesson. She is rather unwell with a headache, but has insisted that the observation go ahead. She sits at the back during the teacher input, marking spellings and checking then stapling some books. This use of TAs during the teacher part of the lesson means that the TA can listen yet do some of the more 'domestic' tasks of the classroom. In this case the TA is also marking, considered by some to be the role of a qualified teacher, but the teacher here is confident that the TA is competent to do this for her, another task that would otherwise occupy the teacher's time. As the children separate out into groups the teacher gives the TA some last minute instructions. The children have to search through an art text, a book on Van Gogh, to answer questions about their responses to certain pictures. They have to try to express their feelings in words. The TA facilitates this exercise by ensuring the children have the correct pages and tools to do the task and also by enabling a discussion to take place. It is a difficult exercise for children with a limited vocabulary and needs a high level of one to one support to succeed. The group talk is about the meaning of parables, as well as completing some simple writing about the pictures.

After this has finished the TA hears two children read until lunchtime. She has to keep encouraging these reluctant readers who pause, yawn, flick things – anything but wanting to read. The TA persists, varying her strategies, sensitive to the level of sound in the classroom, concentrating and praising where she can. She records the achievements and praises the second child to the teacher. Her patience and persistence are marked.

Observation 1.2.1

This takes place in the same classroom, same TA and child as 1.1.1, but with the normal class teacher. An ERR session is observed and then after assembly, a literacy hour. The TA is part of the lesson, and although not part of the activities, or doing any other task, she is alert to possibilities, ready for intervention. Her presence enables the child to sit with and be part of the class. She encourages B to respond in the class session, and later in literacy gets down to B's level. She then reminds B to sit properly to help her writing. She questions, prompts, encourages, and adds some dimensions to the group's memories of the previous day's visit to a field centre. She role models manners, and reinforces the school's behaviour ethics. She shows understanding of curriculum content and finishes with genuine appreciation of B's efforts.

Observation 1.2.2

This is in a Year 3 class with F and his TA who had not been observed on the previous set of visits. The TA is absorbed in working with the child, trying to keep him on task. His concentration is very low and she constantly changes the nature of the task to keep him from distracting and even disrupting others in the class. A supply teacher is in charge. The TA keeps physically close to the child, and changes his seating position away from his peers eventually, to enable them to continue work set. She has clear expectations of his behaviour but he is restless. The tasks she requires of

him are part of a resource set she has prepared, their content of low academic level, and not related to the teacher set task which he has been unable to complete. The TA finishes working with him to go to take up her other role of Mid-day assistant. The observation is stopped and an interview with the child by the researcher takes its place.

Observation 1.2.3.

This is with the TA and child previously seen in 1.1.3. This time they are observed in class on two different occasions separated by a PE lesson on the field and concluded with home time. The child is again heavily shadowed by the TA particularly in the PE lesson, but during the second session in class spends a considerable period without her support. During this time he is self-managed by the TEACCH programme, all the materials for which the TA has prepared previously. She normally takes this time of standing back to prepare the next set, but is able to sit with the researcher at the side of the classroom and make a running commentary on his activities. Her support enables him to participate in the class PE lesson, and the preparation of the programme using the teacher's objectives, means he is able to follow some of the progress of the rest of the class. The TA has set up routines which make the child independent of her, and allows other TAs or teachers access to support him.

Observation 1.2.4

Four different activities are observed in the one classroom with the same TA. She sits close to her identified children during an ERR session and then supervises the follow up work set for the little group. She keeps up their pace, questions, challenges and maintains the standards she knows are expected. When it is complete she uses a changeover time to assist a group in the maintenance of their cress seedlings. She asserts discipline with gesture, indicating displeasure. She then supervises a group in an activity called by the class 'speedy maths', giving encouragement, with humour and promoting self-esteem and confidence so that the children can read out answers when required. In her final session before play, she teaches a group of seven children some handwriting skills, while the rest of the class go to assembly. The teacher is present in the room for this, but doing recording and preparation. The TA's style, and skill, particularly in differentiating questions appropriate to the different children are impressive. This is so 'teacherlike' that an Ofsted style observation was later attempted on the video made at the time. The TA showed very good knowledge of the subject matter, preparation and presentation skills, the children were attentive, on task contributing and challenging each other.

Observation 1.2.5

This is done outside the classroom where the TA is in counselling mode with child F. She has to cope with his emotional stress and gives her undivided attention to him. She tries to distract him with some simple tasks but he easily gives up. In the circumstances, that of learning he is to

undergo a major change in his lifestyle, it is essential that there is someone to provide a listening ear for him. He is to go to a boarding school in the next term.

5.3.4 The analysis of the observations

The material was sorted and sifted to identify similar phrases, relationships, patterns, themes, distinct differences and common sequences. The ideas from the first set of visits were taken out into the field on the subsequent sets of school visits. Some of the “*fairly classic*” analytical methods were used on the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 9).

Items observed were tallied onto an old-fashioned cash analysis sheet, and then entered into an Excel spreadsheet. This enabled a graphical display of the data to be obtained. However, this quasi-quantitative data display has to be treated carefully. No regular timescales of the observations had been used, the items were recorded as seen and the comments were susceptible to a variety of influences. Thus any detailed quantitative comparisons of frequency were inappropriate. Various categories and matrices for analysis were tried out at different stages. The summarising and formatting of data for each of the two schools provided opportunities for continued reflection on what had actually been going on, and what was of importance to the teaching and learning of the children.

Observations 1.1 in School 1

This first set of observations were not coded or counted in any way but strands of comments and field notes were collected together. The resulting strands were classified to see what were the initial insights into what was going on when TAs worked with children. Certain things had stood out, the importance of the dynamic personalities of the TAs seen and their relationships with children, teachers and the senior management of the school. Their common sense, use of initiative, and dedication to the task in hand in class was allied to their knowledge and understanding of what they were doing and the curriculum. A list was made of possible categories for the observations and the comments made both on site and after the event.

This list was compiled at the end of the first set of visits:

Personality traits, included:

- sensitivity and timing
- using initiative within structure and demands of class, under class teacher
- physical contact for children who need it, with caring restraint or guidance where needed
- concentration of TA on task in hand, commitment, professionalism
- personality of TA: someone who shares, co-operates, can make friends, easy to work with, yet with high standards, high expectations of self and others

- constructively critical

Relationships and school policies

- clear boundaries, consistent use of them by all staff and children, appropriate control strategies
- respect of children and adults for each other
- knowing appropriate strategies for support – e.g. breaking a word into syllables for reading, not giving all the sounds in spelling, 'use your 2X table'
- relationship with teacher

Knowledge and understanding of curriculum or child development

- not accepting a child's second best, therefore of knowing what the child can do
- self esteem of children in their learning
- thinking time for children
- pre-knowledge of what the learning objective is
- understanding of aspects of the curriculum
- giving time to prepare materials and strategies

Evidence of training including self-training through using common-sense and observation

- mobility, flexibility, responsibility to act/respond appropriately
- non-verbal gesture – even to be over emphasised at times, smiles, nods, fingers pointing direct and held eye contact
- role modelling
- positive reinforcement with appropriate challenge
- active listening
- questioning strategies of adults – varied and challenging, using why as well as what
- individual and group work balanced, developing self-reliance and social attitudes
- no one strategy or style to fit all children, groups or situations
- accepting help from agencies, but allowing the TA's contribution to matter

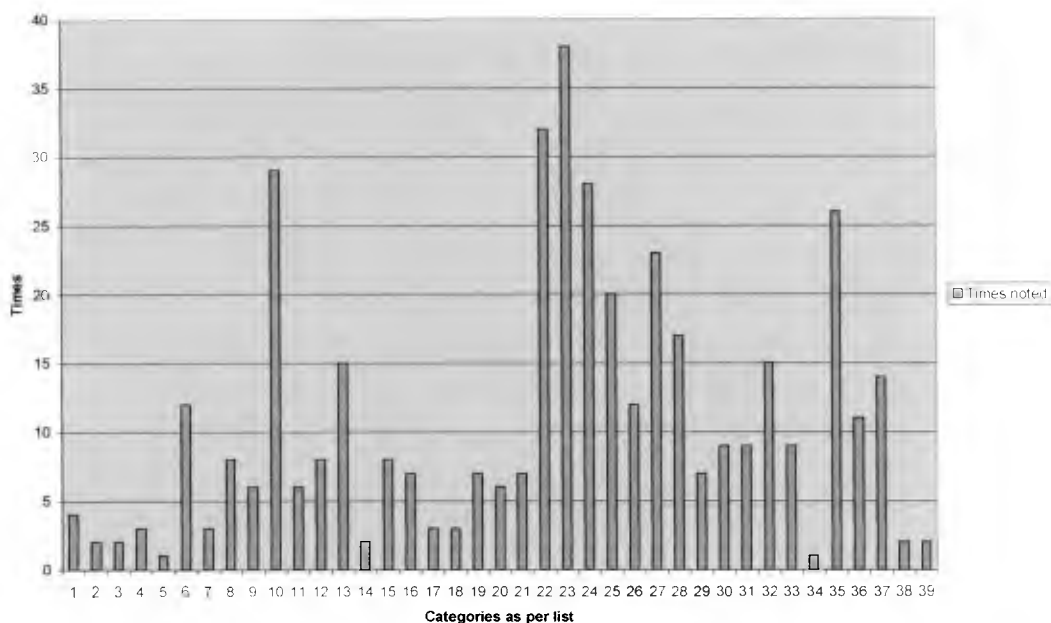
Observations 2 in School 2

Using the above list, and adding where needed, the observation sheets from School 2, with their comments were tallied and are shown on Table 16 [p. 105]. Each time a type of activity or behaviour was noted counted as one.

Table 16: The activities and behaviour of TAs observed in School 2

Category	Observation	Times noted
1	Intrapersonal traits sensitivity	4
2	concentration, commitment, professionalism	2
3	using initiative, own responsibility	2
4	Interpersonal traits showing empathy, sharing, respect ,humour	3
5	understanding children's needs	1
6	Activity role-model: concentration, manners	12
7	" " physical task – showing how	3
8	mobility, multitasking	8
9	communication with teacher	6
10	physical contact: alongside	29
11	" " closeness	6
12	active listening	8
13	standing back	15
14	maintaining eye contact	2
15	relevant gesture	8
16	Understanding curriculum: En - spelling	7
17	" En - handwriting	3
18	" En - reading programme, ERR etc	3
19	" Ma – counting, number	7
20	" learning objective	6
21	Teaching skills repeating, reinforcing, providing an audience	7
22	giving instructions, directions	32
23	keeping control, managing	38
24	keeping on task – finger pointing	28
25	keeping up pace – increasing amount	20
26	challenging	12
27	organising - doing it for child	23
28	encouraging: self reliance	17
29	" self esteem	7
30	" to think, imagine	9
31	" to do things	9
32	suggesting	15
33	motivating	9
34	checking, marking	1
35	questioning: facts	26
36	" ideas	11
37	praise – verbal or smiles	14
38	Non-pupil resource management	2
39	reinforcing school systems	2

Chart 12: Graphical display of Table 16 showing the activities and behaviour of TAs observed in School 2.



While this cannot be used as a quantitative analysis it can be seen that certain categories stand out for notice:

- more than 25 times in different situations: physical contact, giving instructions, keeping control, keeping on task and questioning;
- 20 to 25 times: keeping up the pace and organising;
- 15 to 20 times: standing back, encouraging self-reliance and suggesting.

The balance for adults between doing work for children and getting them to do it for themselves has always been considered a crucial one.

Final analysis of observational data

After revisiting School 1, the three sets of data were coded similarly and collated together. The rather unwieldy list of 39 different types of observation was re-examined and the final data analysis was as follows. The items in bold type, not underlined, were tallied.

Personality

- **Intrapersonal traits** of the TA which showed. This included sensitivity and timing, concentration/commitment to task/professionalism, humour, high standards/expectations of self and others, using initiative/responsibility within the structure of the class.

Relationships

- **Interpersonal skills** - Relationships with the children and adults, showing knowledge and understanding of children's needs, sharing, co-operating, empathy, bonding, friendliness, respect for other adults and children, being constructively critical of self and others
- **Communication** with the teacher, including checking and marking work

Physical presence

- **Physical activity** – The constant mobility and multi tasking
- **Physical contact** – The comforting and the closeness which some of the children needed to feel secure, just being with the children.

Role modelling

- **Control** or behaviour management through non-verbal gestures

Supporting children

- Supporting learning by **keeping on task** e.g. finger on place, being a communication channel with teacher
- **Encouraging self reliance**, promoting self -esteem, or independence
- **Active non-intervention**, standing back, listening

Skills

- **Giving instructions, directions**, explaining, using the correct language – naming things
- **Questioning** facts, ideas or worth
- **Pacing, challenging, motivating** – increasing amount which could be done; extending ideas, encouraging thinking or imagination
- **Organising, suggesting**, resource management
- **Praise – verbal or smiles**

Understanding in

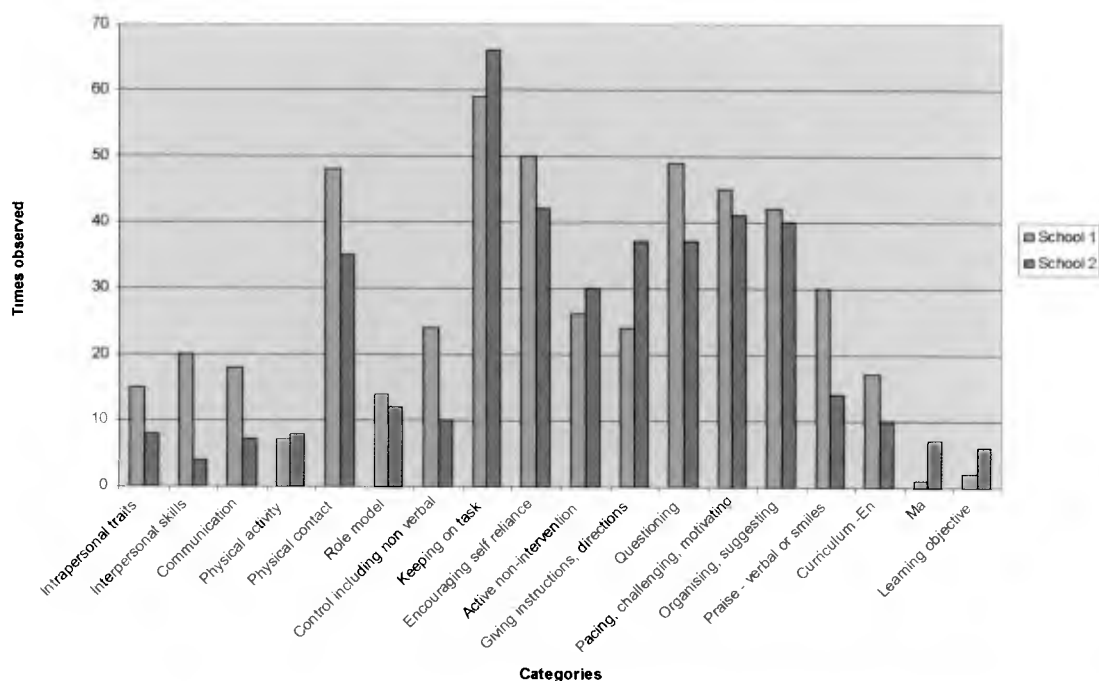
- **Curriculum En**
- " **Ma**
- Showing understanding of the teacher's **learning objective**

Using this categorisation the tallied observations were retabulated in Table 17 [p. 108] for both schools and all visits.

Table 17: The activities and behaviour of TAs observed in the two schools

Category	Visits 1.1	Visits 1.2	Total School 1	Visits School 2	Total seen on all visits
Intrapersonal traits	8	7	15	8	23
Interpersonal skills	7	13	20	4	24
Communication	2	16	18	7	25
Physical activity	4	3	7	8	15
Physical contact	13	35	48	35	83
Role model	3	11	14	12	26
Control including non verbal	9	15	24	10	34
Keeping on task	13	46	59	66	125
Encouraging self reliance	12	38	50	42	92
Active non-intervention	14	12	26	30	56
Giving instructions, directions	4	20	24	37	61
Questioning	24	25	49	37	86
Pacing, challenging, motivating	7	38	45	41	86
Organising, suggesting	12	30	42	40	82
Praise – verbal or smiles	4	26	30	14	44
Curriculum -En	3	15	17	10	27
“ Ma	1	0	1	7	8
Learning objective	2	0	2	6	8

Chart 13: Graphical display of Table 17 showing the activities and behaviour of TAs observed in the two schools



5.4 The interviews

5.4.1 The methods used in the interviews

In order to gain deeper insight, and offer the triangulation of insight as described in Chapter 2, interviews were set up. It was intended to interview as many of the TAs themselves as would be practical in the time, the relevant teaching staff - the headteachers, SENCO and line managers (if different from the SENCO) - and if possible, children who had worked with TAs.

An unstructured but pre-planned strategy was adopted. While this is much more diffuse and open to lack of consistency and difficulties with analysis, it is more conducive to the building of a climate of trust and thus more likely to result in a more comprehensive, open and interesting dialogue. Total informality was avoided by having prompt sheets, prepared beforehand, (see Appendix 8 [p. 219]) which were checked at the time of the interview to ensure the ground required was covered. The prompt sheets were different for different roles of interviewee and were based on questions from personal experience and those of Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a, p. 138).

The interviews were tape-recorded where possible and the tapes transcribed. All material was returned to the interviewees and their responses noted. This added to the collection of a comprehensive range of data (Cohen and Manion, 1994). The protocols set up with the school included the agreements about the conduct of the interviews. Interviewees agreed to anonymised quotes being used from their interviews, and the researcher also sent copies of the analysis of the individual school interview material to each school.

The professional role of the researcher, who conducted the interviews, had to be borne in mind. The tapes were examined for evidence of inappropriate interviewer techniques. While at times the interviewer did elaborate, giving information in advisory mode where requested, the conversational style resulted in a relaxed dialogue.

Technique

A purpose-built, slightly larger recorder with independent microphone was used for most of the later interviews, but these had then to be transferred to mini-tapes for the secretariat typing, or transcription by the researcher. The quality of the tapes was variable, owing to background noise (for example, children passing or Hoover cleaners) and the quality of the mini recorder. This was, however, relatively unobtrusive for the purpose, which helped the progress of the interview. Photocopies of the hand-written notes made were also given to those interviewed to be checked for accuracy, but the recipients found the writing hard to decipher. Some interviews took place without the recorders because of the timing or location; for instance, one TA wanted to continue photocopying while she talked. These copies were checked for accuracy against the tape, and

relevant copies sent to each of the participating schools. This proved important, for instance, where a child was described in the transcription as a 'demon', when the word actually used was 'diamond'.

5.4.2 The interview and analysis process

The interview process

Eight interviews were held on the first set of visits to School 1: three with TAs; three with teachers, one of whom was a teacher in the presence of their TA; one with the SENCO who doubled practically as their line manager; and one with the headteacher.

It had been hoped at the outset of the study to interview children supported by the TAs. Owing to the severity of the SEN of the children concerned, and the sensitivity of the process of observation, this was not done on the first set of visits. However, the TAs and SENCO were also keen that the children be interviewed, even the autistic and Down's Syndrome children. They promised to facilitate this. At the second set of visits, two TAs were interviewed for the first time and two re-interviewed. The SENCO and headteacher were also re-interviewed. Children B, F, and D were interviewed individually, and C and E were interviewed together. The interviews with the children were short and difficult, the SEN children finding it hard to articulate their understanding and views, but some interesting thoughts did emerge.

In School 2, nine interviews were possible: three TAs; four teachers, which included the deputy head who was also the TAs' line manager; and the headteacher who was also the SENCO; and a group of Year 6 children.

Interviews were slipped in between the observations, over breaks and lunchtimes. Only the headteachers were freer for longer periods in pupil contact time. The length varied from an opportunist chat of five minutes with a pair of children to an hour with one of the headteachers. Although the prompt sheets for each role were used, the subjects largely followed the interests of the interviewees. Sometimes the tapes were stopped because of interruptions and sometimes because personal material was discussed. In School 1, the SENCO and headteacher were keen to use the researcher as a visiting adviser, to discuss a potential policy or strategy.

It had to be recognised that in the busy life of a school, with only limited opportunity for dialogue in depth, and only limited opportunities of the researcher to have access to the schools, with the possibilities of illness, opportunities to talk with people would be opportunistic. In the event, there were mistakes in timetabling by the interviewer, a wet playtime, an unforeseen free 15 minutes for a TA, and absences, one through a family bereavement. These all added to the impossibility of a systematic, structured process.

The interview content

The contents of the interviews were seen as confidential by the TAs, so the following is an account of the ideas, interest and issues arising from them. Quotations are not ascribed to an individual, but to a role. Apart from a couple of minor corrections, no comment was received from the schools on the accuracy of the interview data, nor any proviso put on using any of the dialogue for quotation. Although the interviews from the two schools were collated and analysed separately to send to the schools, this final account is an amalgam of the responses from both schools, identified only where there are significant differences.

Writing up the interviews

Neither detailed descriptions nor summaries of each interview is given here, in order to retain the confidentiality. Various ways of summarising were tried, and various categories used for classifying responses. The actual process of analysis and writing up proved to be a major factor in deciding what did influence the role of the TAs. The transcripts were revisited on several occasions to check for omissions or nuances that might revise the final categorisation and resulting model and conclusions.

The analysis of the first set of interviews was written up and sent to each school soon after the visits, in 1999. A series of categories was developed for this. The information gained from the first set was classified into areas of interest, issues for the TAs themselves, the school, and local or national domain.

The analysis of the first set of visits had the following categories relating to the TAs:

- Personality
- Relationships
- Skills
- Knowledge and understanding
- Other significant features

Although the interviews of the second school were done in 1999, and the transcribed data returned to the school by the end of the same term, the analysis was not done until May 2000, a year later.

This is significant as during that time, a lot of thinking and discussion took place under various circumstances which must have influenced the final choice of categories. During the time gap, apart from the opportunity to reflect on the findings, national funding for recruitment and induction training had started, the national framework of standards and qualifications was being developed. The researcher was participating at a national level in the various debates. Having to justify first impressions of the data in public, without specific evidence to hand, gave the subsequent analysis of data an initial bias, setting out to prove the case which had been publicly defended.

Several sets of categories were tried on the data from School 2. The original one used on the first set of interviews from School 1, no longer seemed sufficient, so a category framework was built from the first one and the evolving national view of the TAs' role. At the time of writing, the NOS (Miller West Ltd., 2000) were also being developed. The function map drawn up for these used a framework built round TAs supporting pupils, teachers, the school and the curriculum with the TA being supported by the school. This was tried as a model for the analysis, but it did not allow for the dimension of the TAs themselves and their personal and professional development. The important influence of the relationship between individual TAs and the people and children they worked with also needed to be separated as a category in trying to answer **“What promotes the most effective use of TAs?”**.

A third model was then adopted, which incorporated both the structural items of the function map and the influences upon it. This worked well. It is more detailed, less linear, but when put together more diagrammatically, reflects the inter-related nature of the situation more fairly. The scripts were coded using both colours and numbers, and a separate jotting sheet was kept to note items that stood out as the researcher read and re-read the scripts.

The second set of interviews from School 1 were then coded in the same way, using the same set of categories. The first set of interviews from School 1 was then revisited in the light of this development. The summarised paragraphs coded very easily with the new categories without any alteration except of order and title, thus reinforcing the suitability of the categories.

Each separate account was returned to the school. The schools were then revisited to gain any further comment from them as to what had been concluded from their particular data.

The separate analyses and then the amalgamations were done deliberately in order that any difference between the two schools be clear, and that each school could receive a copy of its own analysis, on which to comment. Each category within the three sets of summaries were put together and examined for similarities and differences. The resulting collated account is that which follows.

The quotations are directly from the transcribed scripts.

5.4.3 The interview data

The categories used for the following collations of the ideas that came from the interviews divided into the following six sections:

1. The role

This first category collects the thoughts and descriptions of the role of the TA as given by the various people and children interviewed. It is subdivided into the original NOS (Miller West Ltd., 2000) categories of supporting:

- pupils,
- teachers,
- the school and
- the curriculum.

2. The TAs themselves, their:

- personality
- skills and
- knowledge and understanding.

3. The people TAs work with, including the comments on the relationship between the TAs and the various parties they come into contact with. This is subdivided into:

- teachers,
- pupils,
- parents and
- agencies.

4. The school including:

- the whole team,
- structures of the school
- and systems.

5. Professional development:

- personally,
- in-house provision and
- external training.

6. External influences that might impinge on the work of TAs.

A model built on these categories is set out in diagrammatic form in Section 5.8 [p. 140]

Category 1: The role

The role of the TA was complex, multidimensional and varied. The TAs tended to see themselves modestly and dismiss their capabilities. Despite being highly thought of, and generally confident, they still had bouts of self-doubt about their role and they voiced lack of confidence. One showed her anxiety over being watched saying “*Did I get it all wrong? I’m not much use to you*”, and “*Did I get marks out of 10?*”. Yet, she had been apparently happy with the exercise in prior discussions. They did not refer to supporting the school or teachers much but largely referred to helping the children they work with, and to a lesser extent the curriculum. “*It is a combination of things*”.

The teachers were clearer about the role. One said *"You see, I'd like to see D's role, not as somebody there assisting the children, but I'd like to see her as their teacher for that section. (It is) not to displace me but as she's with them, I want them to see her as an authority role and - you know - what she says, goes"*.

When asked *"Who therefore does clean your paint pots, put up your displays, organise your resources?"*, the teacher replied *"I do. I would never dream of seeing D as somebody who does something in my classroom. I wouldn't dream of it, I wouldn't dream of anybody doing that in my classroom"*. It seemed the teachers were also clear what the TAs did not do, for another teacher commented: *"I don't believe she should be the one that always mops up the sick or the wet knickers"*. And a third referred to the TAs taking home tasks such as cutting, sticking and pasting, yet said *"I don't want someone to cut up paper, that's a waste of time"*. Yet another added *"Nice to have someone to do that as well!"*.

It was voiced by a teacher that their job was now so much more demanding *"it is becoming more crystallised and definable ... you could get away in a primary school with being a bit of a general factotum. With the way things are going with SEN and IT... It is useful to have someone else in school, someone that is actually on something, not on a par because they are not trained teachers"* *"Perhaps the way things are going in the future, with the teacher's role expanding, being more demanding, the feeling that the TA could take over some of that, not slack..."*.

Clearly the boundaries were getting blurred. These were not descriptions of a 'dog's body'. The TAs were not qualified teachers, but they were teaching. One headteacher, trying to explain the difference between a teacher and a TA said:

" They are teaching and guiding. I think they have a different relationship with the children. I think the role has changed though over the years and I think the children do see them far more. It's very hard to describe the relationship. It's hard to put your finger on it. It isn't Mum, it isn't friend, it's beyond that, it's different. It's not that. It shouldn't be that because it's a working situation that perhaps they do see them as there for them more, but that's wrong too. Hopefully, they see as teacher, you're there for them too. But, the responsibility is different. The teaching assistant, to the children, appears to have more time because they're working with a smaller group, therefore for them". And then later when discussing the possible dependency that such a relationship might engender: *"I think that's where you manage as a class teacher and beyond that as well. Having said that, I think the teaching assistants are taking that on more as they are becoming more skilled and learn more about the process. The role of a teaching assistant has changed a lot too, over the years from being a helper to being involved in the children's education. I think, in the past, they were helping and not taking on responsibility for the children's development as they are now"*.

The children and the TAs talked of the TAs as someone the children can chat to or sit with, but recognise the help is for academic purposes – to help with spelling or handwriting, maths or science. *“She helps make things, shows me how to do things”* One child said, when differentiating between a teacher and TA *“They’re just sort of the same really. The helper keeps children nice, makes children good. The teacher – school people – make children work better, makes their work more nicer”*. Another, not being sure of the role or not being able to find other words described the TA as a *“learner teacher”*. He recognised the TA was not his class teacher, and worked under the direction of his class teacher, but was unsure of what you called their status.

Supporting pupils

The TAs still saw their role, and largely the enjoyment they got from their work, as supporting the children. While the move has been made towards the teaching role and curriculum support, it is the in-depth knowledge of the children which enables the TA to carry out the teacher’s curriculum objectives – the fine-tuning. *“She knows the children really well”* was a frequent comment, alongside *“thinking of ten different ways to explain it if they don’t get it”*. One of the children said, *“they’ll know how to operate with us, what you need and what it feels like”*.

The TAs talked of supporting children, particularly in School 1, where they have been appointed for named pupils, but it was so in both schools. They talked of changing things to make them suitable for the children they were linked with. They talked of carrying out the IEPs, developing fine motor skills, or life skills, as they have planned with the SENCO or the visiting SEN Support Teacher. They used technical terminology – autism, complex learning difficulties, Down’s Syndrome, poor language skill, motor skills, and social awareness.

They enabled the children to make choices and decisions. One recognised that *“My job here is purely for behaviour problems, a bit academic as well”*. They mentioned keeping children on task, getting them organised, of keeping their attention, encouraging, actually holding their hands (in handwriting), supporting practice, but most particularly, knowing the children’s strengths and weaknesses.

It was that little bit extra, as a child said *“help some people catch up”*. One TA spoke of working with children who need no help. *“They love having a bit of individual attention, someone to sit there and say ‘that’s really good’ or ‘could you have done that a bit better if you move it round?’”*. Teachers spoke of *“a little bit extra will make the grade”*, *“extra cuddle, extra time, extra explanation”*, *“everything, getting children to meet their targets”* not necessarily IEP targets, but the teacher’s intentions for that day.

The children themselves saw their role in terms of getting more attention, saying, *“they have less children to cope with”*, and *“she can tell you in a bit more detail from the whole class”*. TAs give

more information, check their work and help them if they are stuck or not going fast enough. One child added, rather honestly, *“you wouldn’t sit and do it if someone didn’t make you”*. A teacher spoke of *“hooking the kids into feeling wanted”*.

The TAs showed great perception. One said about her charge, *“We try to use language because she can’t think of words to express what she wants to say. It’s like trying to get blood out of a stone getting her to talk about it. It seems stuck in there and she can’t get it out, you see her do something with her hands. When there is something she is excited about and she’s really enjoyed it, the words do come out and things like sequencing and remembering things, but she could stand up and sing the latest Spice Girls’ songs and do the latest Spice Girls’ dance because she enjoys doing it. She can do sequencing, and moving, because she’s enjoying doing it”*.

While they are working so closely with individuals and small groups of children, they do see the need to develop children’s independence – getting the child to hang up his coat and deal with his lunch himself, giving children confidence to act on their own, for example to answer the teacher, reinforcing that they should think for themselves. One said *“I want these children to learn on their own, I’m there to help them learn independently, on their own ... I have one little boy who said, ‘I’m special needs’ So what!”*. A perceptive comment was: *“The target is to do myself out of a job”*.

They described with pride the progress of their charges. Child A originally had not been able to sit in assembly, or for the register, he now could. The TA had held his hand at first to make him write, then he pulled back his hand, now he tried on his own. He had refused to read, now he attempted it. He used to shout and do dangerous things, he had to be physically restrained, for instance in assembly he used to sit between the TA’s legs as she sat on the floor with the children. He can now sit at a distance; having had his own table with familiar things, he could now approach other children, and some approached him. B could now speak in sentences from having had limited language – *“coming on in leaps and bounds”*.

There was concern about the demands SEN children put upon the teacher when the TA was not with the class, yet both the teachers and TAs acknowledged the children’s need for independence from total adult support. There was also concern voiced about the growing demands some children may make as they got older and the gap got wider.

Supporting Teachers

The teachers frequently referred to the TAs’ support of themselves, of which the TAs were unaware. They made comments like *“It’s a terrific burden off my shoulders”*. In School 2, they talked of the target groups which take place during assembly time and how the TAs planned that and other small activities such as snack time themselves. It was a TA who had come up with the first draft of a planning/recording sheet for the target group time. Coming up with ideas is seen as supporting the

teachers in their work, as was the reporting back to them about the progress of children during a session.

One teacher said *"This is absolutely vital and it's good for us, I mean we've not had this for years and years, we haven't had this so you struggled with your three groups or whatever, and I know in my heart of hearts the groups I am not working with aren't working 100% - children being what they are!"*

There was a recognition however, that in helping the children, the TAs helped the teachers. *"Basically we are there to support the teacher to support him ... we come away and work on our own to give the teachers some space and to allow the other children not to be distracted". "It has a knock on effect. If I can manage F, then the teacher can manage her class ... Being there for him and in turn being there for her and also for her children".* One of the children said *"They're to help the teachers and the children who need help".*

Supporting the school

The senior managers talked more about TAs' role in supporting the school, and the TAs' participation in schools' policies. In their role, they naturally had a more global view. One of the teachers however said, when referring to a whole school policy supporting a child with a physical disability, *"(The TA) is part of that and she probably does not realise".*

While no-one mentioned supporting the school, the participation of all the TAs in meetings, training, carrying out school policies of handwriting and spelling, the ERR approach in School 1, all showed that it mattered that things were done as the school wished, not as the individual teachers or the pupils wished.

The whole policy of supporting the curriculum input of Literacy and Numeracy, in School 2, changing the TAs' hours to fit this, was about getting the group to support the way in which the school wanted to operate with increasing consistency. The deployment of TAs to complement age ranges although fitting in with skills and aptitudes of the TAs, reflects the way in which the team was being managed to support a whole school approach.

Supporting the curriculum

In School 2, the TAs were largely employed for the mornings, specifically to support the curriculum, with some little additional time being allocated to children with particular needs in the afternoons. The TAs' role had been deliberately changed from the more caring general support one to one of participating in the Literacy hour and Mathematics lessons. They were in the room for the whole of the literacy hour - checking the spellings, watching children to see they formed their letters correctly, reading questions so that children were clear about the meaning, reporting back progress

and monitoring the group. While observation showed their activities to be much more than this, their comments only spoke of these more limited tasks.

The teachers were also much more aware of how the TAs supported the curriculum. One spoke of a certain amount of input even with the most competent groups and another of the TAs "*managing learning*".

In School 1, where the TAs were employed largely for named children, they still talked a lot about the NLS, NNS and ERR. They corrected spellings and reminded children of punctuation. The senior management were looking "*for them to feel they have got more expertise in certain areas of the curriculum*".

Category 2: The TAs themselves

Personality

If the above is what is perceived as the role of the TA, and the observations made of their work with children supports and enlarges on this, the question remained as to what made it work. The observations of TAs at work show how much seemed to depend on the TA themselves, particularly the sort of people they are.

The TAs themselves rarely referred to their own characteristics, and if they did, it was in a very modest way. They used their own ideas, and their initiative. They told of some of these initiatives with pride. One described making a book of photos to show the autistic child his new classroom before the end of the summer term, for him to refer to during the summer break "*He's got a book I made up, (I thought) if I gave him a book*". Others spoke of doing things for a specific child; making sure where she was; a child's toileting needs; when to sit with a child apart and when to integrate them with a group; how to deal with tantrums, because they recognised frustration.

They shared ideas, they talked to each other, and spent time looking through resources. They made resources. One pointed out "*That's where I store all the stuff*".

They were aware of being a role model for children, even to how they used their own body language. They mentioned the use of gestures for control, and developing them, using simple language, for example, reducing the number of words in a sentence, and using signs, such as the red line on the playground for control. They had a great sense of personal achievement with individual children, and loved the work. One said: "*I do the best for him on that score*". One mentioned wanting to give something back as her own children had had problems.

They referred to deciding “*off the top of my head*” or “*whatever off my own back*”. One started her interview with the comment about her job: “*A lot of it is really thinking on my feet*” and another summed it up at the end of her interview with “*using my own common (sense) if you like*”. One TA, who had had a lot of experience, and high level training, recognised that some of what she does is instinctive. The discussion, with one of the teachers present, had been about challenging and questioning children. The TA said: “*I know it sounds big-headed, but I’m just myself and that’s what I do normally. It’s not something I’ve learnt to do*”.

The teachers talked more freely of their personality being important. They spoke of willingness, liveliness and energy, adaptability, innovations they had made, their sense of responsibility. They told of the pleasure of working with their TA, and how they liked what the TAs did. “*She picked it up*”, “*she notices*” or “*she homes in*” were some of the phrases used.

The children just reckoned the TAs wanted to work in the school and liked working with children. Their warmth and enthusiasm were clearly felt and appreciated.

TAs’ skills

While the TAs observed had developed certain skills of behaviour management, the task completion or actual teaching skills, they were very reticent to admit to them. They volunteered little in this area. It indicated a need for proper appraisal where someone formally observed them and commented on what they did, and enlightened them.

They did mention things like the development of handwriting by actually guiding the children and one talked about the way she had developed with her teacher to ‘pre-empt the subjects’. “*She lets me know ... to pre-empt a subject that afternoon or the next week so that they know what they are talking about and have the confidence to know about things and put their hands up*”.

The use of observation skills was greatly appreciated by the teachers, and the team in School 2 had developed the use of sheets to assist in this. Planning and using tools such as a trundle wheel were skills mentioned.

The mention to the TAs themselves, of teaching skills seen, actually caused a problem. One TA, who reckoned she was quite confident, but when her good ‘teaching’ was mentioned, got quite disturbed thinking it was being said that she was presuming to take the role of the class teacher. It took several minutes to reassure her that teaching skills and being a qualified teacher were different things. She insisted that she was “*very aware of my role in the class*”, meaning she knew her place. Another referred to having time to “*prepare quality work for him, work which is more satisfactory*”. She was taking responsibility to differentiate work “*to fit in with what the rest of the class are doing – he follows the rest of the class but I adapt it*”.

TAs' knowledge and understanding of the curriculum, children, teachers and the school.

The TAs knew the children well that they worked with, their capabilities, whether the children had 'switched off', and how far they could go for instance in managing behaviour. They talked of the children's progress very professionally, particularly in spelling and handwriting and where they had been closely involved in developing targets and reviewing IEPs.

Their understanding of curriculum matters had grown, which was enabling them to undertake the differentiation and 'pre-empting'. In Literacy, letter formation, sequencing, the language itself were all mentioned and in Mathematics, patterns and number bonds.

"Knowing what we are doing and where it affects her group" was the important thing to the teachers, "she'll fine tune it" one said. One teacher summed up her interview by saying: "I tease her sometimes, I say 'I'm not coming in tomorrow – you can do it' and she would. She knows exactly how everything works."

This summed up their understanding of the need for integration of the curriculum and the needs of the children: *"He can read quite well, he's past that stage and he's into written instructions". "I know what he needs to work on. I go back and look – he may need to work on vowels – he doesn't know what a vowel is – but I think he needs to work on a 'g'".*

Category 3: The people TAs work with

TAs and teachers

The way in which the TAs performed was very dependent on the quality of the relationship, and was therefore separated out as a distinct category. They got job satisfaction from helping both the teacher and the children by their efforts. One TA, when asked what was the best thing that had happened replied: *"It's the ... love and affection I get from the children. I get respect from the parents and the teachers as well. I've got a very good relationship with the teachers"*.

The relationship with the teacher in whose class they were, was vital. This was described in very warm language, both by the TA and the teachers. They enjoyed a joke together, one teacher laughingly said *"We row the whole time!"* in front of her TA. She followed it up by *"We couldn't have a better working relationship than we have now"*. Another teacher described how the TA knew where the boundaries were *"she would never go off and do something new or different without (asking me). It's all sort of within our routine, and she would always come and check things out or say (what she was doing)"*.

The way in which this depended on the goodwill of the TA came through, but it was also clear that the TAs did things in their own time because it was appreciated by the teachers.

The teachers chose the children with whom the TAs worked, explained what they wanted and the format of the lesson. There were a variety of ways in which the TAs found out what they should be doing, and increasingly they understood why they were doing it.

The question of planning or oversight of teachers' plans was raised. It was variable, depending not only on the school systems but the individual ways of working of the teachers. Some shared planning time on a Thursday, one TA had a copy of the teacher's planning on a Monday morning, two worked on differentiation on a Monday afternoon. One TA said: *"We are getting to know about the planning. I don't have to hang about for 20 minutes of a half hour session, waiting to find out what I've got to do while the teacher finishes talking"*. In School 1 the long and medium term planning was available in a folder in the staffroom, not all the TAs saw planning, although all seemed to sit in on IEPs formulation. In School 2 the teachers still retained their ways of working and the TAs adapted. Here, personal planning was done by some at home at the weekend, after the teachers had given them their plans on a Friday and for some, in the holidays with the teachers. One went to the planning on the teacher's desk. The TAs were part of planning the IEPs and were able to contribute to them saying what in their opinion the child needed to work on next.

In School 1, one TA said she spoke with her teacher every night about the next day's work. Another said *"(The teacher) hadn't done Fuzz Buzz before, she just lets me get on with that side of things while she does the rest of the class. That's what we do first thing on a Tuesday and then we all get together to do whatever work goes on from there and I just cover that group whatever. I do look at the planning on a Monday afternoon for the whole week for that class, specifically because I support C, so I know roughly what's coming up – not always when, sometimes its changed round, but we know roughly, and how she approaches things, so, what words and things like that"*

This liaison was crucial. One teacher commented: *"Because, I think, that as we've got (it) more together on what we're doing, they're getting more done. Because, there's no point you (the TA) coming in, and I'm going 'they're writing a story, there you go'. We actually need to spend more time together knowing what I actually do want from the children, so it's focussed"*. However the same teacher also admitted *"Because we plan on Thursday I won't really minutely sort out what I'm doing on each lesson until Sunday night exactly, I know the subject basis but exactly what I'm doing and where the children need to be – I won't know that until Sunday night, so when D comes in on a Monday all I can do is write it down and give it to her, which is not the same as talking about it and going through it, is it?"*

The informal way of working depended not only on goodwill but the TAs' expertise. One teacher described how the pair usually communicated first thing in the morning after the TA had seen the planning previously, then doing her own planning, then doing a final check. The teacher admitted, that if the TA was late it could throw her, but never-the-less the preparation and rapport enabled the TA to "*pick up instantly what was wanted – you see, she coped*".

TAs listened to the teachers during the whole class sessions sometimes "*with one ear while I do the filing*". The TAs used phrases like "*but we are aware*", or "*the teachers decide, but I have input*".

In School 2, the TAs themselves were in the process of devising a feedback system that would have some consistency for the teachers. The children's work went back to the teacher. In School 1, they kept a daily diary for noting improvement and problem recording, assessment forms which could be ticked when things were achieved.

The access to the senior management team was informal and effective in both schools. "*Anything we are unsure about we go ... and have a chat about what we are all confused about ... and we'll have a meeting about it*". They told of the meetings to share ideas, and involvement in IEPs. They talked about sharing ideas, for example suggest painting for the afternoon, and were allowed to have a go with their ideas. However, one said: "*We're not included in maths so I still say borrow and they say exchange. It makes me look a right 'nana' in front of them. We are not included in learning the new phonic system, so when I go in and I say "le" and they all go "lll" I look a right Wally. We want to be included, "How are we supposed to support these children in the way that the school want us to if we are not included, and this school's a really good school, you know, really good, some schools, well I wouldn't work for them but we still need to be included and kept up-to-date with everything*". Another said about their teachers and the course they were on at the time: "*They don't actually know what I am learning*".

One teacher appreciated that they were not trained to work with adults, and asked if there was any provision to help teachers to use a TA.

TAs and pupils

While the TAs did not speak directly about their relationship, much of their conversation was about the children in their particular charge. The depth of understanding about their needs was impressive, and their skill in adapting the requests of the teacher and the demands of the curriculum stemmed from this understanding. While the TAs in School 1 were particularly employed for named children, this attitude was the same in both schools. Without a good relationship, the continual challenge and pace which the TAs expected would not materialise – the children would just stop trying.

TA E said in front of F *"We get on quite well don't we F, I think we do anyway"*. Among F's problems was that of making relationships, he was out to challenge anything and everything. He said, holding teacher's hands was a punishment, and he didn't like it, and he saw the 'helper' as someone who made children 'nice'. TA D spoke of the difficulties of keeping D on task, getting him organised and then how he loved to chat, and that he had pointed her out to his own mother when they had met in the village.

The school was aware that too close a relationship can create a dependency culture for children and deliberately had two or more adults linked to a child. The programme being developed for A was all about creating independence and B's IEP included working in a group.

TAs and parents

There was little or no contact between the TAs and parents directly in School 2, except in the early years' class where the TA did home visits with the teacher, and attended the induction meeting. TAs were sometimes shown IEPs, but the inclusive policy of the school has meant IEP targets were part of the class planning for English and Mathematics. This took the focus away from the direct involvement of TAs with the SEN targets, and thus the need for TAs to be involved in reviews, as in some schools.

In School 1, the TAs tended to have particular relationships with the parents of the children they worked with closely. For instance, TA A had a very close relationship with child A's mother saying *"she's quite good if I tell her what we've been doing – she'll pick it up"* referring to the way the child was currently being encouraged to be self-reliant. So good was this relationship that it had been suggested that TA A accompany the child to the visit of the school doctor, rather than the mother. *"She agrees that I could get more from him than she does"*. As TA A knew that A knew his letters, she was able to inform the doctor, who, then able to perform a full eye test, discovered that A's eyesight was extremely poor.

One TA talked about training methods with the child's mother, and their friendship. Another talked of having informal chats, where the mother wanted mainstream school and not full support. They told of mothers whose expectations of a TA were difficult, for example, their having to discuss suitable clothing for school.

TAs voiced no problems over themselves being parents of children at the school, either at the time or in the past. One of the comments from the teachers about the TAs themselves being parents was *"They are parents most of them, so you are getting a very healthy interface between the teaching staff and the parents, and some of the teaching staff that are not parents themselves need to be told occasionally by a parent what it is like"*. The headteachers saw the TAs' parenting experience and local knowledge as a positive factor, and TAs' experience as parent volunteers as

giving the headteachers, as potential employers, an insight into how they would work as an employee.

The TAs in both schools knew a lot about the families and the social background of the children with whom they worked.

TAs and agencies

In School 2 the TAs made no mention of relationships with either outside agencies or governors. The senior management spoke highly of the governors' understanding of what was going on in the school, but not of links with advisers. The headteacher also included the Governing Body in the whole school team. *"The governors are very supportive of the needs of the teaching assistants"*. Governors saw the TAs at work when they made their classroom visits, and TAs' successes are mentioned in Governors' minutes.

In School 1, the TAs reported appreciating their weekly meeting with the Special Needs support teacher, who visited regularly and related their contacts with the specialists coming in to school for their children. They were not always involved with the Educational Psychologist or speech therapist enough for their liking.

The advice was not all one-way. One visitor had taken the idea of motivators from the TA, rewards for good behaviour, such as being able to play with toy cars. The TAs had made suggestions to the speech therapist. One commented that sometimes the therapists suggested boring things that meant sitting at tables with pencil and paper, even drawing pictures. The TA felt the child needed active, doing things. They felt they could say these things, as they had to implement the programmes and knew the children. They seemed to have done it in a sharing, professional way which had not upset the specialists. One TA sent for information from the Down's Syndrome Society, another had followed the ideas of the speech therapist, and developed them.

Category 4: The school

The whole team

The sense of whole school team and TA team as part of that, came over very strongly. The effectiveness was not just due to individual interpersonal relationships. The children commented that the TAs *"were all the same"*, it did not matter which one helped you. TAs spoke of how their team of TAs talked together, came upon things together, devised things together, for instance the new recording system in School 2. Some of the understanding was unspoken, but the TAs knew what was expected of them.

The whole school team at School 1 was important and was talked about explicitly. Teachers, senior management and TAs all referred to the 'St. X's way' when describing the behaviour of the adults. The senior management were looking forwards as well as recognising the changes taking place. They talked of future training; how to manage the fluctuating budget with its various pockets to the best advantage of the people in the team as well as the children; how they would like a male TA to serve as a role model, particularly for some of the more disturbed boys with dysfunctional family backgrounds. Understanding of staff's personal background featured high in conversations and humour infiltrated many conversations. "*The equation has become unbalanced ... but we'll work it out*". TAs were part of any social event organised by or for the teaching staff.

The teachers felt they were very lucky in the quality of their TAs. The headteacher said: "*(It's) having a very enthusiastic group of TAs that keeps me on my toes, because I'm never sure what they are going to ask me when two of them march in together and they are smiling and you think 'what are they going to say?' It works in two ways – rather than me go and find them all the time, they are so enthusiastic!*". The teachers like the "*more bubbling in a managed way*".

As regarding the team approach, it was said: "*(It's) creating a synergy really*". "*Their (the TAs') opinions are as valid as the teachers' on some issues*". "*It's having well-defined bits contributing to a much stronger whole, it's having a variety of backgrounds*". "*But also, (it's) in what they contribute to the whole community*". The headteacher said watching the TAs as volunteers in the school helped him see whether people would fit the team.

The team was also explicit in School 2. The TAs talked of "*one big family*". The teachers talked of teamwork, and the importance of communicating. They also referred to the new 'target group' innovation as going through the whole school. The support of whole school policies came unsolicited from individuals. This is not always the case when interviewing school staff on their own, in the experience of the researcher, for instance, when undertaking headteacher appraisals,

One teacher summed it up with "*There is no 'them and us' in this school, they are part of a team, they are welcome anywhere and everywhere. I don't know if we can do anything to improve, or if they have said differently, but I don't think we can make our situation any better apart from what finances and time would give us*". The headteacher was confident that any individual who had a comment would come and talk with her. She referred to "*the community atmosphere*" and "*the supportive school*". The changes she had implemented had not caused resentment. On the contrary, the staff had risen to the challenges.

Teachers and TAs gave their time voluntarily to school systems, structures and events, but the unpaid time commitment of the TAs was clearly evident. The timetable of staff training sessions

were still published and TAs welcomed this rather than seeing it as training time. TAs were also invited to the Ofsted feedback in School 2, and the governors' celebration tea.

The way in which the teachers, and the headteacher, were spoken about indicated a deep respect and ways of working collaboratively. *"We can always go to her anyway if there wasn't anything you were quite sure about how to approach, she'd come into the classroom and show you how to do it. If we want more meetings we just say we want a meeting. Everybody's happy with that".* One TA summed it up: *"I think there is a lot of team spirit, but not just the TAs, but the teachers, we all work together as a team. I get a lot of support from everybody really at the school. It's a nice school".*

Worries were voiced about the success of the current scene in School 1 possibly leading to greater inclusion of children with severe problems. Several mentioned that *"The balance has to be right because of the strain on the school"*.

School structures

It is difficult to separate structure from systems, but it is done deliberately here to try to distinguish between them. 'Structures' is the term used here to indicate finite frameworks for action rather than more fluid operational systems, but the two interact. 'Systems' are likely to be still evolving and 'structures' more set. The picture in both schools was one of constant evolution, of gradual change, as informalities became accepted ways of working, then incorporated into the systems and then the structures of the schools.

The structures of the two schools were apparently different in their way of using TAs, the one for individual children and the other for teachers to support the curriculum, yet the way in which the schools operated showed a great similarity. Both were: developing regular meetings for their TAs; planning and feedback systems; considering policies, job descriptions and appraisal strategies, Both were: committing sizeable portions of the general school budget to TA salaries; keeping governors informed; incorporating the TAs in school based INSET; and committing time to the professional development of TAs. The line management in both had been given to the deputy head, although the practical support in professional matters in School 1 was by the SENCO. The SENCO in School 2 was the headteacher. Appointing new TAs was seen as important a procedure as appointing teachers, with advertisements and interviews being held, and criteria being set in both schools.

In School 1, the staffing structure of two or more TAs working with a child with exceptional needs affected the way in which the adults worked, the necessary communication systems, and the outcome for the child. It added a dimension to the provision for that child as more than one adult was providing ideas for dealing with the problems.

The regular meeting set up with the visiting SEN support teacher, the development of meetings with the SENCO, the growing development of professional development meetings, the introduction of job descriptions, and the production of a TA policy all showed the gradual embedding of the less formal ways of working into the regular formal fabric of the school. The headteacher spoke of *“reaching a threshold”* where although the TAs had always been part of the school, they were now able to challenge the senior management, even talking in terms of having similar status to teachers to do so.

In School 2, the senior management spoke of how they had *“re-jigged the whole timetable basically so that we try to get the TAs to support the school”*. This referred to the decision to change the literacy and mathematics to being all morning focussed. Each teacher knew how much time they had been allocated, but used it to suit their own purposes.

The Wednesday morning TA meetings were set up initially as a *“focus point, so that they all met each other”* – but *“they know each other and work very well together anyway”*. The management team however *“needed everybody together if you’re trying to get messages across”*. It supported the new initiative of the target groups, but also recognised that different teachers had different recording systems. From this came the TA initiative of devising a more common format. *“Everybody brainstormed”*. The timetable of TAs was set up so that teachers could plan knowing what hours they had got, but *“they are not set in tablets of stone, because they can negotiate with each other”*. The TAs said they liked the Wednesday morning meetings. The teachers also referred to the attendance of the TAs at their training sessions, for example the booster class training. The Wednesday mornings were also seen as a place where TAs could pick up the ways of the school – such as how particular sums were done in the school.

TAs had general job descriptions, but not specific, individualised ones. It was recognised these needed updating. The deputy head had been appointed to be the TAs’ line manager, a role which was seen as part of her professional development as well as helpful to the headteacher’s workload and the TA team.

Systems

The senior management constantly referred to developing or evolving systems in both schools, which may later become structures.

In School 1 the SENCO was devising a policy, and part of the time spent in the school by the researcher was with the SENCO going through its content. TAs spoke of going to the INSET day and of their use of the SENCO’s room to keep their resources. They had ready access to this and changed things as they needed to. Access to and understanding of the school schemes was evident, TAs spoke of using the Nelson handwriting scheme and the ERR approach as well as the National Strategies.

The headteacher of School 1 met with the TA team at least once a term formally to talk about specific issues like child protection, but also to give him an opportunity to feel the pulse of the developments, and allow the TAs opportunity to voice their opinions – which they apparently did increasingly forcefully as their confidence increased.

Some things, like the recording system in School 2, were in their pilot stage. Another evolving system for them was appraisal. This had been deliberately played down, but the meetings had provided a venue and opportunity for the TAs to discuss their ideas more openly in a group. Individual appraisals would come later. The TAs were observed frequently by the senior managers in an informal way, and by their teachers who also talked with the senior management. It was indicated that, as confidence grew, these observations may well become more formal. Already, reflection on the TA role was part of the School Development Plan (SDP) review, and governors were showing an increasing interest in the work of the TAs. There was no detailed Staff Development policy with reference to the TAs, but the thoughts were there.

Category 5: Professional development

Personal development

If so much of the effective role in teaching and learning for TAs is down to their personal characteristics, skills, knowledge and understanding, the ways in which they and the school develop these, are clearly crucial.

As with their work, their development did appear to depend on their personality. One TA was adamant, courses were not for her. She got great satisfaction from her job as it was, and felt she got all the updating she needed from the in-house work. However, her personal enthusiasm and commitment to the teachers with whom she worked, meant she was always alert to their needs and the needs of the children. In no way was she complacent or inflexible.

The teachers spoke of the TAs' lack of confidence, and how they grew by talking together, watching the lessons and working alongside the teachers, particularly where the TAs experienced the work of more than one teacher. The talking took place at *"playtime or whatever, briefly at lunchtime, showing her forms and things like that"*. One said: *"If you'd asked me 12 months ago she would have said she couldn't do it. It's quite nice, in 12 months she has just forged ahead because of the support of the teachers, and she can do anything now and she's more than adequate to do it with any of the children"*.

TAs talked a little of the time they gave voluntarily, but were generally rather unsure about what was paid time and what not, as they get their salary monthly. They did things because they felt the need

to do them, for their own development as well as the children's. When asked where they got their skills from, replies were typically *"from watching other people and seeing how it should be done by other people"*.

The senior management were aware of how much the TAs' effectiveness depended on this voluntary time, and how the current contractual arrangements linking pay to individual children made the TAs insecure. The headteacher of School 1 commented *"In an ideal world I'd have TAs in most classes in the school"*. Both headteachers were also aware of the feelings of inadequacy the TAs sometimes felt, such as not having GCSE Mathematics when working in a class doing Mathematics. They talked of possibly developing specialisms within the TA team to suit their various strengths. *"So either you want them trained in those areas or you want to say, well you are obviously more confident on the literacy side, why not work in the literacy areas so that you can become more specialised in the area that you do"*. The TAs commented on the lack of free time to talk, and the teacher having such a heavy workload: *"not enough hours in the day"*, *"snatched times"*, and *"having to do things in passing"*.

In-house provision

The schools had to support the STA course with teacher mentors and had done so gladly. One teacher was currently mentoring a mother who was doing an FE college STA course, just to support her. The mentoring included an element of TA observation, and allowed the teachers to share developmental needs with the TAs and the headteacher.

TA A had accompanied the SENCO to visit schools specialising in dealing with autistic children and the subsequent discussions in the school have been very helpful for them in confirming the appropriateness of their practice. TA E had been trained in restraint procedures.

The appraisal was understood as *"I've had one of those – 'Where's your job going?' and 'What do you want to do in the future?'"*, and was appreciated.

The TAs on the first visits, felt regular meetings were not necessary. *"So long as we can ask for a meeting"*. *"We don't like to bother anyone"*. *"We don't want a meeting just to say we are OK"*. Yet at the second set of visits they were saying how much they appreciated the meetings with the visiting support teacher. *"I've been doing it for a couple of years – Fuzz Buzz – so I learnt from Y really, Y talked me through how to cope with that"* (Y being the visiting SEN support teacher). *"Y suggested that the group needed Fuzz Buzz"*. They would have liked more time with their class teacher, and more direction as to working with children during teacher input time. By the end of the study time, in both schools, TAs were having regular weekly meetings with their line managers or the SENCOs.

The Wednesday meeting in School 2 had started after the introduction of the morning Literacy hour and Mathematics lessons, but prior to that there had been SEN training for the TAs by the headteacher in her SENCO capacity for the target group initiative. The Wednesday meetings had an element of training, but were also seen as opportunities for the TAs to help themselves and initiate their own development. The Wednesday time was also paid time for the TAs whereas the attendance at after school sessions was not.

The teachers did not realise how much they were teaching the TAs both by example and through the TAs watching them – “*I don't teach her – no time*” yet they gave time to share ideas. The spread of TAs across the classes was seen as part of the TA development process, but the senior management voiced the need for balancing that against the skills and desires of the TAs themselves. The attendance of the TAs at the in-house training for the literacy and numeracy strategies had been seen as part of their training. The teachers admitted that part of the ease with which TAs developed transferable skills was due to the open plan nature of the school. There were no physical divisions to the classes, although they were clearly functioning separately.

External training

While the in-house development and training were supportive, the schools and the TAs had drawn heavily upon external funded outside courses, (the OU STAC and a European Union funded course). Sometimes a TA had funded their own course, as with the mother going to the FE college course on her own. It was accepted that these external courses, and one or two Teachers' Centre (LEA) courses had provided training of greater depth than was possible from school staff.

When asked about the future, most of the TAs were happy as they were, doing a good job, letting the future sort itself out. They were not ambitious to get more pay or become teachers. Some of them hadn't given the future much thought and others were looking at the possibilities of further training or career progression. The lack of clear pathways and qualification frameworks made these decisions hard for them. They asked, “*What next, is teaching the only route?*”. A teacher voiced a concern over changes in role, not recognising the changes in their own role that were also taking place. “*There is this need to stretch them, and then you get into how much more of the teacher's role can they take over?*”.

TA A spoke at length about the three-day conference she had been to which enabled her to set up the TEACCH programme for A which was observed in action. This had had a major impact on the way in which she worked with the child, and with the encouragement of the teacher and the school she had been able to implement the strategies suggested on her course.

The TAs of School 1 had been included in the consortium training day with their own programme.

Two TAs from each school had taken the OU STAC course. This is a difficult course for anyone with little experience of further or higher education as it is an undergraduate module of the university. Another, while still a volunteer, taking the locally developed FE college course financed through European funding did it "*because I was really interested in doing it*". Another, with no recognised qualifications, described her development as "*by finding what helps – intuitive*"

Some of the TAs who had the STAC award felt it had not made much difference to their work, as they were not using what they had learnt. The course gives a wide range of information on the curriculum, but in School 1 the TAs were working with the children with learning problems. The course had given them so many ideas, but had not changed their job description or pay. It had raised their personal expectations, which had not been realised. This was recognised by the senior management, but there was no easy solution. They wanted something to keep those with the STAC award going.

The teachers felt the TAs should be happy, they would like them to have training, but to have it partly built on what they would like for themselves. There seemed scope for further debate about needs of the school and the individuals, and more information about what was available. Teachers and TAs alike recognised that it would take more money but wanted to increase the TAs' time and expand their role – to include for instance, the able children, or music as well as Mathematics and English.

Category 6: External influences

These seemed to have marginal effect on what was happening in the school, but never-the-less must be considered in this account, as the researcher was coming to the scene as a potential external influence, possibly with the capacity in the results of the study, to make a difference to future provision.

The categories here therefore do not reflect a way of collating raw data, but ones which were of interest to the researcher.

Courses

The courses themselves are likely to influence the development and efficacy of the TAs and separate research done by institutions such as the OU testify to this (Loxley and Swann, 1997a). It was clear, however, that the increased knowledge and understanding gained by their TAs can only be of as much use as the schools and the teachers were prepared to make of it. The variety of courses, their differing purposes and content were not understood by the schools, nor had the colleges always made links with the schools to make best use of the school support. There seemed to have been few links from the FE college to School 2 for the course attended by their TA.

The TAs and senior management all looked to higher level training coming from outside sources, and wished to find the appropriate course for each person at appropriate times for all concerned. The headteachers expressed a lack of understanding of the level of different courses, and the teachers had little idea of content unless they were directly mentoring the TAs concerned. The TAs had talked of the skills and understanding developed on the courses not being utilised for the school and the children [p. 131]. It seemed that explicit briefing of all concerned from the course writers, to all those affected in the school was required, along with discussion of actual outcomes.

Agencies

School 1 had made use of linking a visiting specialist with their TAs, but this was not apparent in School 2. Here, TAs may have been to teaching staff training where an external specialist had given input, such as in the booster class training. Links had been made with the SEN staff of the nearby secondary school, and the TAs were inter-visiting.

Funding

Teachers and TAs mentioned the need for time, realising time costs money. There is only so much in a school budget, and while TAs gave of their own time so freely, the money was spent on hours of pupils' contact time. These schools contributed to the TA funding in general from their own budgets in addition to the special needs budget, because management and governors recognised the value of the TAs. The TAs themselves in School 2 had been given a small budget to manage, to help their target groups.

Recognition

The TAs were valued both implicitly and explicitly, but there was little concern with national issues. The TAs were much more concerned with the local scene.

Legislation

National strategies had clearly affected the deployment of the TAs in School 2, the whole timetable and roles had been changed to supplement the teachers' role in Literacy hour and the Mathematics lessons. Qualifications were becoming part of the appointment criteria, although there was still confusion over the difference between the various ones on offer.

The planning of the Strategies was seen as supportive in School 1, the TAs had copies of the folders and could see what was driving the teachers' planning. *"We know exactly what they are covering that week, so we can get all our resources put together before we go into the classroom"*. The senior management included the ALS funding in their calculations about the future of individual TAs in the school team.

5.5 The questionnaires and meetings

5.5.1 The questionnaires

A simple questionnaire had been used by the researcher on courses and at school staff meetings of TAs and teachers with some success in eliciting perceptions of the TAs role, and obtaining some basic data about the characteristics of TAs' backgrounds. These questionnaires had been used when compiling the county questionnaire and contained for example, questions about age, qualifications and previous experience, as well as questions about partnership, and feelings about the job.

Copies of these were given to the SENCO of School 1 and the deputy of School 2. Few staff actually bothered to complete them, preferring to talk to the researcher rather than complete a piece of paper. The paper exercise seemed like an additional burden, whereas being observed and interviewed seemed more like part of the job itself. The lack of pressure or emphasis put on the process by the researcher meant they were not taken sufficiently seriously, and the more serious business of teaching and supporting children took precedence.

In the end, only the TAs of one school and three staff of the other school completed them. They were analysed and the resultant information fed back to the schools. Those that were returned were analysed separately after all the observation data had been collected from the schools, and the interviews completed. The information gleaned, was minimal in comparison to the other two methods used, as well as being unrepresentative. The forms used and the results are therefore not included in this study.

5.5.2. Meetings

School 1

At the first meeting, the purpose of the project, as well as the groundrules, were shared with the TAs and SENCO. The question was asked: "*do TAs make a difference?*". There was some discussion as to how their work with special needs children could be measured, as the children were not comparable with others of the same age. They understood the problem, but felt measuring the difference they might make to children's learning would be difficult, as it was intangible. At this first meeting their enthusiasm, pride, and understanding were evident. They spoke of their love of their work with children and the high regard in which they were held. They voiced no threat at being observed, and were puzzled that teachers sometime felt this, although in practice later, [p. 113] some instances occurred which showed their anxieties. They said – either they would do their job, being observed or not – or they would not. They did feel the children would notice and could behave differently with an observer. Two stayed behind to discuss personal issues of possible opportunities and career development.

A second meeting of four of the TAs, and the SENCO, was held after school, after the first set of visits. A concern was voiced about lack of confidentiality on the part of the researcher, who had commented at one interview of a TA on something another TA had said in her interview, remarking on similarities. While the subject matter was not a concern the principle was, and it showed how sensitive these matters are, and how careful the interviewer has to be in trying to remain neutral, but also how free the TAs felt to voice their opinions. At this meeting, the TAs also requested a second set of visits, wishing to show and explain more of their work. The SENCO agreed to expedite this.

In the autumn of 1999, the leaders of the DfEE Teaching Assistant project were taken to visit the school by the researcher, and the TAs were able to have a separate meeting with them to voice their views on their job, the conditions under which they worked and their wishes for the future. In March 2000, the TAs were filmed for the DfEE Role and Context video (DfEE, 2000b), the children and TAs, being undaunted by the cameras.

A final meeting with the SENCO took place in the summer of 2000, after the receipt by the school of the draft of this chapter. The researcher remained in telephone contact with the headteacher, and only positive comments on the procedure and its outcomes were received.

School 2

The first meeting, arranged for the early part of the first visit day was missed by the researcher, and the protocols were agreed verbally with the headteacher and each TA and teacher individually. The researcher was made very welcome in the staffroom over meals, and considerable informal discussion about the study was possible. No adverse comments were received directly or indirectly, and no responses to the written material were received. The researcher stayed in telephone contact with the headteacher, and had several informal meetings with the deputy head at other, off-site opportunities.

In the autumn of 1999, the leaders of the DfEE Teaching Assistant project were also taken to visit this school by the researcher, and the TAs were again able to have a separate meeting with them to voice their views on their job. The TAs in this school were not used for the DfEE video, because of their use, predominantly in literacy and mathematics. These areas were covered by the Literacy and Mathematics modules (DfEE, 2000f; DfEE, 2000g).

The deputy head, one TA and the researcher were able to work together on reviewing the consultation materials for the NOS (Miller West Ltd., 2000) during the summer of 2000 in a very positive relationship.

A final meeting was held with all the TAs, the deputy head and the headteacher in the autumn of 2000. Prior to that, the priorities of the school had prevented such a meeting. This was a very positive meeting. They showed interest in the study, and were very pleased to have been able to

take part. They also wanted news of the outcomes of the DfEE visit made in the autumn of the previous year.

5.6 Outcome data

It had been hoped at the outset of the case studies that the schools would be able to contribute some 'hard' numerical test data on the children being supported by the TAs. Both headteachers were keen to do this, although both insisted that the 'soft' outcomes were currently of more interest and value to them. They considered that the ability of the teachers to do their job more effectively, the contribution that the team of TAs made to the life of the school as a whole were sufficient justification for the time and money put into supporting their employment. When questioned harder, statements were made [pp. 115-118]: giving individual attention; encouraging concentration; enabling communication; knowing children well; organising the disorganised children; and managing the difficult children. Watching the TAs at work they certainly enabled the children they were with to complete more work, raise the children's self esteem and self-confidence.

In School 1, where the TAs were deliberately employed to support children with severe special needs, it was clear that some of these children would not otherwise be in mainstream school. The benefits for them and the other children in coping with life in a community were of major value to all of them. The children's IEPs had not been tracked to ascertain specific progress against targets. SATs results, and reading test outcomes on five of the study children were examined with the SENCO. These looked poor when set against the expectations of average children, but were set in context by the SENCO. The study had begun in the autumn of 1998 and the SENCO's comments were made at the end of the academic year 2000, two years later.

A had been statemented soon after coming to school and had complex learning difficulties. As a rising five, he had been difficult to control and communicate with. The study observations had seen him working on his own in the classroom full of other children, rarely communicating with them and occasionally sitting with them in whole class lessons, the TA being physically nearby. A year later he was able to work in groups in a Year 3 class and only needed close supervision in the freer activity times, such as PE. His SATs scores at the end of Year 2 indicated him as 'working towards' level 1 in everything except spelling and maths where he was level 1. The target for a Year 2 child is level 2. At the end of Year 3, he was still having problems with conceptual understanding and creative subjects, he was unable to make up anything from imagination, but his reading age was 7.0 when his chronological age was 8.0. He was able to participate in class performances and sports day.

B, completing her Year 2 year, had progressed to a Year 1/2 class. While her English results indicated her as working towards level 1, she had scored a level 1 in Mathematics. Her learning had plateaued. She had had a period of saying, "can't do", but was now enjoying school again although still achieving little academically.

C with, global learning difficulties, was in a class below her chronological age, and might still need to go to a special school rather than the local secondary school. Her reading age had stayed at 7.3 for two years, and her chronological age was 9.6. The TA support had enabled her to be in a mainstream school for her primary years, with a curriculum differentiated for her and with one-to-one support. Her maturity and confidence however, had developed noticeably, she was gaining life skills, including being able to talk to her peers in class. The TA was helping with specific life skills training, doing such things as teaching her how to cross the road safely. These life skills were not being taught as such at the local secondary school, and her scores would put her in 'the bottom group'. These skills were taught at the two nearest special schools.

When D had come to School 1 in Year 1, he could not speak at all, or communicate other than with a grunt or by grabbing. He took a long while to settle down into a normal routine when he came back to the school from the Speech and Language unit at another school. There, he had been in a class of ten with five adults, and missed all the curriculum except literacy and numeracy. As a Year 6, he was completely settled, and he was leaving and going on to the local comprehensive. He probably need not have been labelled as being on Stage 3 Code of Practice level, but the school was leaving him there, because of the transition to secondary school.

E, as a Year 4, had scored level 2s in all his Year 3 SATs, and a level 3 in his Year 4 Mathematics SATs. His writing and spelling had let him down in the Year 4 English SATs. His general language understanding and application was very poor, and he was not very sociable. He was only getting five hours support, and did not understand class instructions. A decision had been made to keep him at the school and not send him to a Speech and Language unit. His speech was sufficiently competent, and it had been considered he would benefit more from staying in a mainstream school.

School 2 was not able to extract the data from their general database on the children in their 'Target' groups as they had intended and they were as disappointed as the researcher. It had just been pressure of time, other priorities had always being more pressing. The children concerned were not statemented, or even had IEPs in many cases, and so tracking them had not been as important as for others in the school. The reason for delaying the final meeting at the school from the end of the summer term 2000 to late in the autumn term had been purely the hope on the part of the deputy head, that she would find a free time to extract information. It had not been possible.

Both schools were quite satisfied at the time with their internal perception of the efficacy of their TAs, and often gave 'soft' measures to justify the expenditure. It had not been a requirement of the study, merely a wish to do so, in the current national climate, to gather 'hard' numerical data. The schools themselves wished to do this as well. Given the problem of unravelling the effectiveness of a complexity of school factors which could affect the children's performance, this personal study was not the right avenue to pursue this particular result. Both schools were reluctant to recognise qualifications and status of their TAs in any financial terms, although they took every step to show in other ways how much they appreciated what they did. The headteachers believed they had already stretched their schools' budgets beyond expectations to make the provisions that they did. The TAs themselves valued being valued, as well as their relative freedom from accountable responsibility.

5.7 Conclusions from this chapter

5.7.1 Conclusions about the methods used

It had been important to both observe and interview the TAs. The TAs did not mention some things in their interviews, they appeared genuinely modest about their abilities, and in some cases quite unaware of their skills. Also, some of their actions, while seeming instinctive were the result of considerable insight into the needs of the children, the wishes of the teachers, and the demands of the curriculum. The combination of the two methods also brought out the dependency of their efficacy on much time given through goodwill, yet the culture of the goodwill depended on the climate of the school and the nurturing and respect given to them from the teachers.

The observations were not done in any set pattern, or to any constraints of time sequence. While this had been attempted in the first place, it was found this restricted the observation of the range and complexity of the TAs' activities. A more open-ended, but consistent framework was developed which enabled tallying of observations to be made. The use of video material made it possible to explore a variety of observation schedules and to develop one which proved of use, not only for the study, but in later work, videoing TAs in class during the DfEE and DfES video filming. A check-list observation schedule based on a levelled list of competencies, developed from the existing qualification criteria was also of little use, as the range of activities it contained was far too comprehensive for one observation. The optimum had proved to be an open framework, with opportunities for a time frame to be recorded, as shown in Appendix 7 [p. 217]. This was reproduced in the Teaching Assistant File (DfEE, 2000d, pp. 9.7,9.8).

The interviews were able to maintain a balance between covering the ground of interest to the study and allowing the interviewees the opportunities to express themselves. The role of adviser did intrude at times, but could be clearly distinguished in the transcripts. The transcripts and the analysis were acceptable to the interviewees; not only as a true reflection of what was said and

meant, but also that they covered the ground desired by them. In hindsight, a particular omission was to neglect to interview governors and possibly some parents. It would also have been more satisfactory to interview all staff, particularly the teaching staff, also some of the other support staff, and more children.

The questionnaire was ineffective, people preferring direct dialogue to paper.

The outcome measures were also left to the school to acquire and these were low on the priorities of the schools. As only one school was able to provide much detail in academic terms, positive as they were, this was not a very useful exercise.

5.7.2 General conclusions from the case studies

Although these data cannot be used for detailed quantitative comparison or analysis they do show certain trends which provide useful insights.

The general spread of categories evolved during observations was similar in the two schools, despite no deliberate attempt to do the same number or type of observations in the schools.

The TAs' physical presence was important, particularly their physical support of the children by their nearness. It must be remembered that this category does include all those incidents where the TA was not actually touching the children, although touch was important at times. This may not be so important with older children. To support the SEN children they used more physical contact and non-verbal control, more praise and spent time encouraging self-reliance. Where TAs were used more generically, they were more directive in their activities, more clearly non-interventionist, yet facilitating achievement. They showed clearer understanding of the curricular intentions of the teacher.

Where the TAs were used more for SEN support, there was more evidence of their personality affecting their work although this was evident in both schools.

They supported learning by keeping children on task, yet encouraging their self-reliance enabling them to become better independent learners. Keeping children on task was seen more with the SEN children, and encouraging self-reliance more evident with the general classroom TAs. They all used considerable but appropriate praise. They showed skills of instructing, explaining, questioning, pacing and organising, many of the skills of a qualified teacher. The ways in which the TAs supported learning and assisted teaching is developed further in the final chapter, after evidence from other sources is added to that from the two schools.

The TAs' professional role observed was not a static, circumscribed one. It was continually evolving as they developed as TAs, gaining understanding, skills, and knowledge about the curriculum and children. Diagram 3 [p. 140] takes the categories developed through analysing the interviews and shows how they inter-relate. This diagram provides a model representing a more comprehensive way of considering the work of a TA in schools.

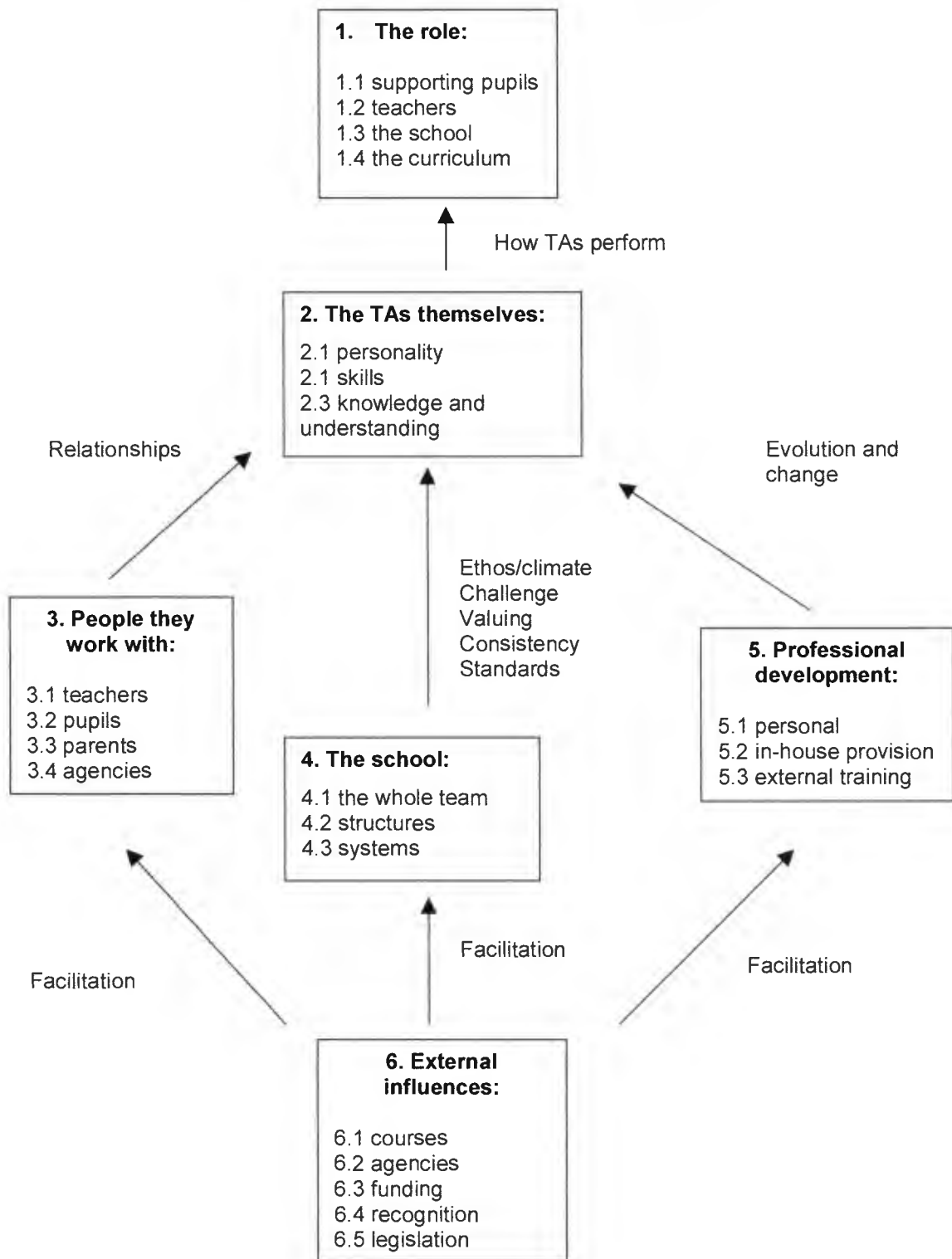
The outstanding factors were not so much the content of each category but the links between them: the relationship between the people and children involved; the influence of the senior management facilitating a whole school approach; the use training courses are put to, that make the whole thing effective. The process is developmental, evolving, yet within a structure. The labelling on the arrows in the diagram is as important as the cement in a wall is to the content of the building blocks used for the structure.

The similarities of the work and context of the TAs in the two schools had been obvious from the first observation in the second school. The field notes made at the morning break contained a list of the similarities which already showed, covering the characteristics of the TAs themselves, the relationships with their teachers and senior management, and the general systems of communication and management.

The personal traits of the TAs, the relationships between the people and children and the climate of the school were evident in their effect. The results of the efforts of the TAs could not easily be measured in academic score terms, particularly with children with severe learning needs, as their steps were so small. One of the headteachers, when asked what difference do the TAs make to children's learning, said *"It's not all in the classroom, the challenge the TAs give to the teachers in the staffroom dialogue is invaluable"*. The active learning of all the children with whom TAs worked was evident when watching them in the classroom. Most of the children observed in School 1 would not be in mainstream school, fulfilling targets set on IEPs, and progressing in this setting without the support of these adults. The attitudes of other staff and children to the children with difficulties reflected the support given by these staff – helping when and where they can, recognising the needs but also the strengths and individuality of the children. TAs were neither patronising nor discriminatory, and respected independence. However, the school recognised that the balance of peer and adult role models had to be sufficient to allow such children freedom to be themselves, within a climate that allows other pupils to learn and develop according to their needs.

The TAs themselves recognised the boundaries of their role, and were forthcoming about their needs and wishes in a professional way. Transfer of information on children's progress was seen as a two-way process, with some inclusion of the TAs in review meetings. TAs themselves created some of their own problems, doing so much voluntarily through a sense of not letting down the individual children. They found it difficult to retain a sense of proportion. The relationship of a TA

Diagram 3: The model developed when collating the interview transcripts, to show the systems supporting the role of the TA.



with the teacher in whose classroom they worked was crucial, as was the climate and ethos of the school. There was mutual trust and a sharing not only of planning but also of philosophy. Concerns were shared between people behaving as professionals with mutual respect, compromises achieved were beneficial to the children concerned. TAs benefited by sharing the long-term vision of the teachers, but this took time. Teachers were responsible for what went on in the classroom, and the TAs respected this. Individual teachers had different views of protocols and procedures within the domain of their own room, and these differences were shared openly with the TAs. This was needed as the TAs worked in several different classrooms.

It was the responsibility of the senior staff of the school, the line management, the curriculum leaders in the area of work, or the SENCO, the head and the class teachers involved, to find out what their TA could do, to enable the TA to continue to develop and to utilise the skills, knowledge and understanding to their best advantage. Senior management provided opportunities for appropriate training or variety of experience. Class teachers provided opportunities to share and develop particular skills appropriate for the needs of the child or children. In some instances the mentoring role of the class teacher in external accreditation procedures had been developmental for both teacher and TA. The culture of both schools was about all staff being learners, that relationships matter, where each person has something positive to contribute, where respect for the individual counts, whatever their age or background. Personality and relationships were considered in decision making, within a framework of trust and fairness. They were all members of a learning community.

Systems were being developed into frameworks and structures embedded in the school life. PDRs, which might look critically at TAs' self-imposed workload, were beginning to be instigated. This process never stood still. Procedures and policies were being documented, but common sense, the needs of the situation and the recognition of intangibles was set alongside the documents. Budget constraints meant that much good work was being done in people's own time and their pay did not reflect the job done. Planning time with individual teachers outside pupil contact time was also seen as necessary and valuable, but not always paid for. Worth or value were recognised by other means and in an explicit way.

Boundaries of responsibilities academically and in health and safety issues, were clear. School protocols were also important, and were clear and observed by all – such as what adults are called in public – and served to reinforce the consistency of practice. This consistency provided clear safe boundaries for the children and role models, the influence of which was evident in their behaviour towards each other and towards all the adults.

The process was two-way. TAs provided an added dimension to the work of the schools. They were not teachers with the training, background, experience and expectations that teachers have.

They were parents and came from the immediate locality of the school. They had a broader view of learning, and a more relaxed view of life. Their very lack of responsibilities brought a breath of fresh air to the often fraught atmosphere of the late 1990's staffroom. Their humour and humanity were needed, and were a welcome addition to the school team spirit.

A climate of trust and respect, yet appropriate challenge and expectations in academic work and attitudes, enhanced the work of all who worked in the schools. This had not come about by accident, but from the professional and personal commitment of the leaders – largely, although not necessarily always, the headteacher. Governors, line managers, subject or aspect co-ordinators and self appointed spokespeople all had a part to play. As one of the headteachers said on one occasion in passing *"It's all down to ethos you know"*. The ethos of these schools was about valuing people and learning, consistency and high standards, working together to provide effective learning environments.

Relationships and strategies to enhance communication between each other and with teaching staff and management were open and available in these schools. Paper systems were being evolved to support the transfer of information about planning and assessment. Meetings were essential, and taking place weekly by the end of the study. These might be: for developments in curriculum; for example, the literacy strategy; sometimes small points of technique or content in a curriculum subject; joint planning with appropriate people for the subject. Both sides were able to request or suggest ideas for such meetings. They believed training should be both skills based and contain theoretical underpinning knowledge about children, the curriculum and school processes.

The schools saw much of the future development as lying in the hands of the policy makers:

- the funding arrangements for employment and training
- policies for appropriate teacher support or inclusion of children with special needs
- national framework of job expectations and qualifications giving a career structure
- recognition of the role as professional but not as qualified teachers.

The TAs welcomed the opportunity to share their views with the visitors from the DfEE, and proved prepared and articulate. The headteachers were also appreciative of the opportunity to share their views.

These results were obtained in only two schools, with good reputations. The next chapter puts these results in to the wider context of the developments nationally over the years of the study, and observations made in over 200 other schools in the LEA. Chapter 6 will show that the results obtained from these schools represent fair examples of good practice in the role and development of TAs.

Chapter 6: Developments during the study - a reflective account

“As the numbers have grown, so too has interest in what the assistants actually do, what they might be encouraged to do and what they feel about what they are asked to do. The last decade has seen a number of important papers published, commissioned by government bodies, local authorities, academic institutions and trade unions. Out of these, as will be seen, a remarkably uniform picture emerges”.

(Adamson, 1999, p. 1)

The purpose of this chapter is partly to demonstrate that since the beginning of the study, TAs have become more noticeable on the national agenda. These changes were tracked during the study with a reflective diary. This diary also gave evidence which is used to strengthen the validity, reliability and generalisability of the research results by recording observations made in many other schools. The structure of the chapter follows the categories developed in the previous chapter.

Chapter sections:

6.1 Methods used

6.2 The role: Category 1

6.3 The TAs themselves and their performance: Category 2

6.4 The people TAs work with and their relationships: Category 3

6.5 The school, its ethos and culture: Category 4

6.6 Professional development: Category 5

6.7 The external influences – Locality, LEA and national: Category 6

6.8 Conclusions from Chapter 6

6.1 Methods used

During the period of the study a diary was kept. The rationale is described in Chapter 2 [pp. 31,32]. The diary consisted of notes, references to appointments and associated documentation, cuttings, course evaluations and literature references. There was no attempt to make a daily record or even a record of particular items, but whenever a significant event or thought occurred, it was noted. These were sometimes hand-written, on various papers to hand, always dated, or dictated into a Dictaphone on a car journey leaving a venue. The tapes were transcribed by LEA administrative staff, e-mailed, corrected and only hardcopy retained. Tapes and e-mails were wiped. All paper records were dated and kept in chronological order in a ringfile.

An appointments diary recorded dates of events and meetings. Minutes of relevant meetings, accompanying papers and notes of further publications were kept and filed separately, as were odd

newspaper clippings and magazine articles collected. Many evaluations of courses were kept and filed. When organising this material, it was categorised fairly simply, firstly using numbered 'post-its' for items of interest or relevance, and then the subtitles of the entries were collated under the headings which had evolved during the case studies, shown in Diagram 3 [p. 140] (Cohen and Manion, 1994). This same classification was also followed when organising the publications and other materials collected during the latter part of the study. The sections of this chapter follow the same categories and provide further support for the model of operation being postulated.

The researcher, as an SASD, over the period of the study, was closely associated with over 50 primary schools, both in deprived urban London over-spill areas and more wealthy suburban and rural areas. In some of the rural areas, however, the picturesque scene disguised pockets of rural deprivation. In all areas, the domestic circumstances of children often affected their behaviour, and learning attitudes, creating the need for individual attention to support learning. No schools were encountered without TAs. Being a SASD meant attendance at staff meetings and governor meetings including Ofsted feedbacks, frequenting staffrooms at informal times, participating in INSET, headteacher appraisals and appointments, debating issues with many categories of staff, observing lessons, and occasionally even supporting the running of schools in difficulties. The job also included taking part in inspections using the Ofsted framework. Being a member of LEA teams, including Ofsted inspection teams, assisted in gaining a moderated view of good practice. The diary entries were often about schools causing concern, as these tended to be the focus of the SASD's work. Probably over 150 other schools were visited during the study period in various capacities. Full references to schools are not included in the following account in order to preserve anonymity, and names, titles and places have been omitted. The diary items quoted are referenced by term and page number.

The diary entries also logged the researcher's involvement at an LEA and national level. Because of the researcher's involvement in TA work at an LEA level, contacts were made with various organisations at a national level, namely the DfEE, the LGMB which later became the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA), the OU and APU, the examination board Edexcel, and the TTA. The existence of this study itself resulted in the researcher being asked to join TAWG as the LEA representative in the summer of 1999. On retirement from the LEA in December 1999, the researcher became an active member of the DfEE design team responsible for the training materials for the induction of TAs in England, and contributed to the writing of the Role and Context module and the Teaching Assistant File produced in 2000 (DfEE, 2000b; 2000c). This gave an opportunity to test out ideas informally with senior colleagues from the DfEE and from many other LEAs. A table summarising the coincidence of events nationally, locally and in the study is in Appendix 9 [p. 223].

6.2 The role: Category 1

6.2.1 The complexity of the role

There was little in the notes diary about the actual role the TAs performed. In the various essays the TAs wrote for their OU STAC course (seen in 1995), it was clear that the role was much more than the 'paintpot washer'. Subsequent short courses also produced small assignments, again referring to the variety of tasks undertaken in the classroom. There was such a variety, each person, classroom and school making of the job what they could, largely dependent on initiative, opportunity and above all the relationships. County Personnel were reluctant to produce a model job description for schools because of this variety and diversity of role until after the publication of the NOS. Even the negotiations under the new pay and conditions agreements for all 'non-teaching' staff, amalgamating 'manual' and 'white-collar' workers on one pay scale – the Single Status agreements, left the TAs until last. The DfEE decision to make creating job descriptions (DfEE, 2000b, Session 1) as a major task for induction, reflects the level of importance given to defining each person's job appropriately.

6.2.2 Supporting pupils, teachers and the curriculum

The *SEN code of practice two years on* (HMI, 1997) said "*Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), are making an increasing and valuable contribution to the support of pupils with SEN ... The in-service training needs of LSAs are gradually being recognised and addressed by schools and LEAs*" (p. 7). The *SEN Code of practice: three years on* (HMI, 1999) dealt with the increasing use of LSAs to support pupils at Stages 3 and 5 funded by the schools themselves, and their positive contribution.

A major report, (Farrell et al., 1999), commissioned as part of the SEN Green Paper (DfEE, 1998b), told of LSAs implementing programmes designed and monitored by the teachers. A variety of practice in withdrawal of children and appropriate contact with the pupils with SEN was seen while visiting 17 schools and four LEA Support Services. Positive findings included the views of teachers and managers about their work, the understanding of parents and the pupils themselves, the "*active and pivotal role ... in supporting pupils, in assessment and recording and working with parents*" (p. 3). They also mention the use of LSAs in the literacy hour, the variety of practices seen and the range of extra curricular activities undertaken by the LSAs.

Another important report (Lacey, 1999) looked at the role of LSAs in the inclusion of pupils with severe or multiple learning difficulties. It found that while LSAs may have been appointed to support individual children "*they did not want to isolate him or her and felt they could work most effectively with a small group*" (p. 19). It was also clear to the researchers that the LSAs felt "*both teaching and promoting learning ... were an important part of their job*" (p. 20).

The picture reported was not always so positive, however. Marvic (1998) warned of the use of support assistants creating overdependence or decreasing teacher contact and Steele (1998) felt TAs with SEN pupils could create barriers to other interactions. Ainscow (2000) warned about poor practice, indicating that TAs could possibly do more harm than good. He also felt TAs could act as a barrier between pupils with and without SEN, by isolating pupils with SEN from their peers. Tennant (2001) observing 73 additional adults in 85 lessons concluded "*the status quo is at best inefficient, and at worst counterproductive as far as individual children are concerned, both socially and academically*" (p. 187). All recognised the need for appropriate training and management to facilitate the skills TAs bring to the classroom.

The NLS and NNS have had a major effect upon the employment of TAs, bringing their use away from a focus on children with SEN, to a focus on support for the teacher in general and understanding of the curriculum in particular. While the NLS (DfEE, 1998c) did not refer to the use of TAs, Ofsted (1998) in their evaluation of the NLP said

"eight out of ten schools refocused the support of these staff (support teachers and non-teaching assistants) to secure maximum help in the Literacy Hour, particularly for pupils with SEN and EAL, and for pupils in Reception and Key Stage 1 classes. This incorporated joint planning, involvement in training and attendance at courses such as specialist teaching assistants (STA) courses" (p. 12).

TAs became widely used to support the group work during the Literacy hour as many teachers found an extra pair of hands essential in coping with this way of working and having to pay attention to one particular group. For some schools, this meant more volunteers in the classroom, but for some, the employment of more TAs or their redeployment. Many TAs had to change their hours of working, as did those in the study School 2, where the TAs changed to work more frequently in the mornings when the Literacy hour and the Mathematics lessons were taking place. HMCI (1999) commented, after the first year of the NLS, "*Many schools are now effectively deploying their support staff and volunteer helpers to work with groups of pupils in the literacy hour*" (p. 32). However the next year he voiced concern about the use of resources: "*For example, while many schools choose to employ teaching assistants to support the group work element of the Literacy Hour, it is not always clear how these assistants can be used most effectively during other parts of the lesson*" (HMCI, 2000, p. 33).

6.2.3 The National Occupational Standards

The diversity and variety of role was a challenge for Miller West Ltd., the firm commissioned by the DfEE through the Local Government National Training Organisation (LGNTO) to produce the NOS. They first produced what they called a 'function map' in the early part of 2000 which bore considerable resemblance to the work of care workers and those supporting EY children. It did not reflect the greater understanding of TAs of the teaching and learning processes and the content of

the curriculum. After consultation during the spring 2000, the four strands of TA support became the preferred first subdivision on the map of the TA's role. These four strands were taken up by the Induction training modules (DfEE, 2000b), the TA file (DfEE, 2000c) and the Good Practice Guidance (DfEE, 2000a). They formed the foundation of the recommended framework for job descriptions.

The four strands are that TAs support:

- pupils (the old SEN support)
- the teacher, (the Green paper initiative (DfEE, 1998a))
- the school (the research to date)
- and the curriculum (the NLS and NNS).

The draft standards (Miller West Ltd., 2000) were consulted on during the summer of 2000, the first draft of a two-level NVQ set of standards went out to consultation in the autumn of 2000. The final standards (LGNT0, 2001) were published on the Internet in the summer of 2001.

6.3 The TAs themselves and their performance: Category 2

When the working group from different parts of Essex LEA came to define Good Practice for the LEA (*Good practice in the employment and management of Learning Assistants*, unpublished draft) it was heartening to have unanimous agreement about what was good practice. It did not matter whether the talk was on SEN or gifted children, in secondary, special or primary schools. Reports and diary entries included words like enthusiasm, dedication, commitment, professionalism, learner, bridge, responsiveness, empathy, and goodwill. This confirmed the findings of the case studies that for whatever role the TAs were employed, good practice was similar.

Farrell et al., (1999) reported that while the LSAs had reservations about their conditions of service, and a consistent problem of lack of planning and feedback time with teachers, "*The vast majority of LSAs are extremely enthusiastic about their job*" (p. 24). Personal qualities were seen as a better criterion for employment than qualifications.

Comments made in TA course evaluations reflected this enthusiasm that the TAs develop. "*I hadn't been told working with children is addictive ... seeing the children develop and flourish ... you can see the excitement in them when they achieve ... it is something great to witness*". "*It is the best of both worlds: work with children without ultimate responsibility*". "*Most of the preparation work I had to do for this child was done outside school in my spare time. I found there was never enough hours in the day for me to be able to do this at work*". Diary entries record the dedication and interest of the TAs providing an enormous source of goodwill and voluntary work, enabling much of their good performance with the children to take place. TAs were seen preparing materials in the

teacher input times of lessons, or assemblies and breaks, but only on one occasion did they do this while they were with a child or group of children.

Professionalism

TAs' professionalism characterised observations. TAs have been considered something less than professionals, where teachers are seen as the 'real' professionals. 'Professional' can indicate something elite such as officers of the church, practitioners of law or medicine, but can also refer to a level of commitment to a job (Little et al., 1983). Farrell et al., (1999) said the variety, complexity and lack of distinctively different roles for TAs "*indicates the need for a single profession of classroom assistants with a unified career structure*" (p. 1). This is suggested, not to make TAs a threat to teachers, but that they should be seen as an essential component of the school staff, supporting learning and assisting teachers. English TAs themselves, when discussing titles, did not like 'para-professional', as it seemed something 'less' rather than 'alongside', despite the acceptance of the term 'paramedic'. Teachers would like to professionalise their classroom assistants in the same way as the medical profession has professionalised the nursing of patients (Horne, 2001, p. 29).

Responsiveness and commitment

Several times the diary noted the comments of other advisers. They liked tutoring TAs, commenting they were so much more responsive than teachers were, "*they listen, work with their schools, produce material of high calibre off their own bat*" (Diary, 5.5). The DfEE requested some examples of good practice in secondary and EY teams of TAs. The scenarios obtained contained similar TA characteristics, where, supporting teaching and learning in the classroom, they showed commitment, buoyant personalities, understanding of children, curriculum and the task, and a range of skills. Similar characteristics were reported by Ofsted teams as seen in extracts from reports of 1999 used by the DfEE team producing the induction materials (Ofsted, 2000).

The TA as a learner

The TAs were frequently noted as 'learners' themselves. Other notes refer to empathy and role modelling. A question posed in the diary asked whether the TAs' success is due to them being a bridge between pupil and teacher, parents and the school, the client and the system, and whether this is due to their own personal cultural background, their background as a parent, or a member of the local community. It could be all of these.

Their 'reflective' potential has been developed by Potter and Richardson (1999), who used video workshops for groups of teachers and TAs together. They felt the outcomes of their work were "*extremely positive*" (p. 35). They outlined a framework they had developed for facilitating discussion. Blenkin and Kelly (1997) pointed out that their most successful case study was undertaken by a Nursery Nurse, purportedly of similar academic standard to many TAs, who, using

action research, was able to change her practice, increase her understanding of her role and “take clear control of her own professional development” (p. 99).

Teaching skills

Sometimes it is the individual teaching skills which stand out, particularly, for example, the ability of TAs to explain or question. After one visit to a school, the diary entry read “*The ability of the TAs to question the children about their work is exemplary, and effective and fascinating to watch in process. This is a school I would like to go back to do observational work in, on the way in which the TAs work with children and tease out this whole adult/child, intervention/stand back, valuing, quality*”. (Diary, 2.28). It was not one of the study schools but at the feedback from the inspection of this school the TAs were very highly commended. The Registered Inspector commented confidentially that the inspection team had made some graded teacher observations of some of the TAs, and there were some ‘goods’ and ‘very goods’ on the teaching scale, higher in one or two cases than the teachers had been.

However, Hughes and Westgate (1997a; 1997b), working in EY classes suggested that EY assistants who adopt a ‘teacherly’ mode of interaction are not as helpful as they could be as a ‘talk partner’ for young children. They found that the assistants adopt “*the ideology or image of teaching which appears to guide the teacher they work with*” (Hughes and Westgate, 1997b, p. 8). A talk partner needs to understand the language and conceptual development stage of the children, and teachers needs to be trained to co-ordinate staff, and know what areas they want to develop. The diary often recorded examples of TAs, who seemed to have used the teachers they were with, as role models, clearly this can be to the benefit of the TA or not, depending on the role being modelled.

Understanding

The NNS (DfEE, 1999b) indicated strategies which imply a level of understanding and skill of TAs often previously ignored, while clearly indicating the continuing responsibility of the teacher. It said

“Ask the assistant to:

- ensure that children interpret instructions correctly, concentrate and behave responsibly;
- remind children of teaching points made earlier in the lesson;
- question children and encourage their participation (you will need to suggest the questions and prompts that would be appropriate, and any particular children whom they should focus on);
- look for and note any common difficulties that children have, or mistakes that they make, so that you can address these in plenary and future lessons;
- use and make available to children a number line and/or 100 square, visual or practical aids or a computer with suitable software, especially when they are helping children with difficulties or misunderstandings;
- include assistants and adult helpers in whole-school training days” (p. 25).

Poor practice

It was rare to record poor practice in TAs, but it did happen, and was cause for noting in the diary. Examples of good work, because they were seen every day, were not recorded. A group of TAs in one school had an attitude problem when observed in the playground, and when meeting in the staffroom later, they seemed not to like children. In another school with serious weaknesses, a TA sat with the children during a class session totally unresponsive to the lesson, (which was at a low level for the age of children), then merely kept the children on task during the group work, and quietened fidgets. At the end of the lesson she left quickly without communicating to the children or the teacher. Possibly she had personal problems, but it was uncharacteristic. A further example was noted where ostensibly the structures were in place for supporting the TA. She was observed “*creating a dependency culture*” while supporting a child with SEN using a computer (Diary, 6.10).

“She did not allow the child to access the computer for himself ... she used letter names not sounds ... she used an upper case keyboard with a child with learning problems ... his seat was inappropriate ... she sent him back to class before printing out the names typed in” (Diary, 6.10).

Another TA in the same school drew pictures for a child.

6.4 The people TAs work with and their relationships: Category 3

Farrell et al., (1999) found no problems over boundaries with teachers, “*there is a clearly understood distinction between the role of LSAs and teachers*” (p. 3), but they also remarked on the lack of opportunities for class teachers to receive training for working with LSAs in any phases of education. Lacey (1999) concluded that, when considering inclusion at classroom level, it was vital that there were “*clarity of roles and responsibilities*” and “*collaboration between teachers and LSAs, including time to plan and work together*” (p. 33).

It is difficult to disassociate the TA from the class teacher, as the directions given by the teacher delineate the task for the TA. Again, the picture revealed in the diary was one where schools with serious weaknesses which included weaknesses in the quality of teaching, also had poor TAs. This reinforces the notion that TAs use the teachers as role models, negative as well as positive, as well as the need for management skills by teachers. Where there is weak teaching there may be no directions for the TA, or the TAs are underused.

In one school observed by the researcher, in a difficult social area, the TAs were being used to contain unruly children in order to support the weak teachers, but with little worthwhile to give them to do. Another school sent TAs on the OU course, supported them well, and had a favourable catchment area. All went well until a couple of severely disruptive children arrived. The teachers were unused to the problem and dealt with it by excluding the children from the classroom with the TAs to an isolated area of the school. The TAs did not know how to cope either; the school had

never needed a positive behaviour management policy, and eventually the children were permanently excluded from the school.

Relationships of TAs with teachers within the schools observed were usually good, but it had taken time to build up trust. A note made after a visit to a school later in the study described the typical scenes of these later years:

“The partnership theme was high on the agenda. The head will cover for a teacher in an emergency, but will take the part of the TA while the TA directs further activities. She sees the role as the professional assistant, pay is an issue but all (the staff) recognise the budget limits. Pay is also an issue at (this school), the teachers are so positive about TAs, the course and mentoring. All hard work, but worth while. A governor (was) listening in” (Diary, 8.30).

This raises other issues than pay differential, about the role of the qualified teacher.

Lack of communication with the teacher appeared to be the problem in one school where the headteacher was concerned about the poor performance of a TA, and in another a clash of personalities. One TA reported on a course that a teacher would greet her with *“Oh you are here again”* in the tone of voice which indicated a nuisance rather than help (Diary, 6.16). Another at the same session reported her mentor as *“aggressive towards the SENCO who had organised the TAs’ participation in the course”* (Diary, 6.16).

Comments were made by TAs, during school quality assurance visits for the OU, concerning lack of understanding by teachers and headteachers of the potential use that could be made of the knowledge being acquired through the course. Also, sadly in some schools, on subsequent adviser visits, the notes reflected the lack of use made of what the TA had learnt. One school had two OU students who had produced exceptional portfolios. A year or so later, it was noted that the TAs said the benefits of the course had been *“largely in self-confidence”* (Diary, 3.4). Adviser observations of teachers teaching in that school had noted the lack of use of the TAs to their known potential, other than in the deputy’s classroom. The deputy of the school was the only member of staff aware of what the TAs had learnt, and would *“ask them to do something and know they can organise themselves to do it”. But the TAs felt generally underused. They stayed at the school, because they lived in the vicinity, and felt loyal to the school, although it actually had serious weaknesses”* (Diary, 2.40).

The summary of the findings from a course in Essex, ‘TAs and teachers together’, were published (Watkinson, 1999b). Among other things it emphasised:

- *“the importance of communication and dialogue between the partners;*
- *TAs do instinctively what they feel is the right thing, but want and need guidance and reassurance to make the best use of their knowledge and skill”* (p. 68).

Morgan et al., (1998) pointed out the advantages of teacher and TAs learning together, as strengthening the team. They recognised that both in the USA and the UK teachers have had little training in collaborating with other adults. They also found when carrying out their training sessions the biggest issue was having time to collaborate. Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a) referred to this as “*the perennial problem*”, a feeling reiterated by most headteachers when interviewed (p. 30).

In the early days of the OU STAC course 1995/96 in Essex, when doing mentor-training sessions with the teachers, there was resentment and even on one occasion anger. While this response had largely gone by 2000, partly due to warning schools very clearly about the nature of the support required by the course, it was also due to the greater realisation by teachers of what TAs can do when they have the underpinning knowledge about the tasks they are asked to do. Teacher mentors were even known to declare themselves “*converts*” to the TA working in their class after their mentor experience (Diary, 5.6).

The NUT (1997) response to the White paper (DfEE, 1997a) showed a softening in the hard attitude of the 1960’s, recognising the support TAs could be to teachers although they still showed their concern about the possibility of TAs usurping the place of the qualified teacher.

“Without such an initiative (consultation and guidance on responsibility and remuneration), staff other than teachers will not gain the recognition they deserve. Teachers would welcome the employment of more and better trained assistants to assist them in their professional role. Such assistants must be in support of, but not in place of, qualified teachers” (p. 23).

Dew-Hughes et al., (1998) collected comments from their course for LSAs in secondary schools, which emphasised the important role of mentors and whole school support in training TAs.

Unfortunately the part of the new induction courses of the DfEE (2000b), requiring the attendance of a senior teacher/mentor at them for some sessions, brought out some similar feelings. Schools were invited to send their newly recruited TAs and mentors for training free of charge, paid for under the Standards Fund, and some schools, previously avoiding commitment to training or professional development of support staff, sent unprepared and even unwilling teachers with the TAs (Diary, 13.2). This reinforces the importance of the next category, 4, the school, its climate and ethos.

6.5 The school, its ethos and culture: Category 4

While the DfEE has not laid down how TAs should be employed, they have produced national guidance (DfEE, 2000a). In this, they recognised certain views on what constitutes good practice. Estelle Morris, the Minister for Education at the time, wrote:

“The recruitment and initial training of teaching assistants will only add value if assistants are deployed effectively by teachers and managers inside schools. This guide documents practical ways in which many schools are working to make better use of the skills of their teaching assistants” ((DfEE, 2000a, Foreword).

The guide uses the work of Farrell et al., (1999) as a basis for its structure and philosophy in the first section of what constitutes good practice: fostering the participation of pupils in the social and academic practices of a school, seeking to enable pupils to become more independent learners and helping to raise standards of achievement for all pupils. The guidance makes clear that TAs can only perform to their potential to support children where they themselves are supported:

“These four strands of support are only one part of the story ... At the same time the school has a responsibility to support the TA in fulfilling the expectations of the role. ... This obligation calls for consideration both of the way TAs are managed and of their professional development needs: management support should enable them to perform the job to the best of their abilities, and they should be encouraged to develop their skills and their potential. Clearly this view of two-way support requires the close co-operation of class teachers with whom TAs work as well as of headteachers and other managers” (DfEE, 2000a, pp. 8,9).

Lacey (1999) suggested that while the duties of LSAs in managing inclusion in different schools were similar, the greatest differences *“between the schools lay in the area of planning and preparation”* (p. 20). She considered the vital ingredients at school level were:

- *“a positive planned, whole school approach to inclusion*
- *active management support for those who carry out the inclusion*
- *clear and shared aims for included pupils*
- *enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers*
- *well trained and valued LSAs*
- *sound communication between different sites and units”* (p. 33).

The main thrust of the DfEE (2000a) guidance was to introduce an audit for schools, again based on the findings of Farrell et al., (1999), which gave a review agenda as part of their recommendations. This should help schools querying their existing practice, in order to identify the next moves. The very asking of the questions may well alert staff as to their needs and possible directions for development. Research (as yet unpublished) has subsequently been conducted with a few schools to ascertain how useful such a tool might be (Balshaw, 2001). Asking questions was also the aim of the two NFER papers written by the researcher (Watkinson, 1998a; 1998b). The FAS (1999) produced a booklet on making effective use of support staff which also contained some simple audit materials as well as strategies for planning change, maintaining good communications and managing support staff from recruitment, training, and development to evaluation. Booth et al.,

(2000) have produced audit materials for compiling a School Development Plan, and include some pages for investigating support staff.

Farrell et al., (1999) also raised the issues of contracts, career structure and pay, as well as management. They commented on the lack of relevant job descriptions and on conflicting ideas about appropriate employers – LEAs or schools. The onus in the view of the DfEE, is quite clearly on the employer:

“The Government takes the view that pay and conditions for teaching assistants are best determined at local level ... Work on the new national occupational standards and a qualifications framework .. should (make it) then be possible for employers of TAs (local authorities or schools) to compare their local arrangements with what is implied by the framework, satisfying themselves that those arrangements properly recognise different levels of responsibility and encourage development through training and the acquisition of relevant qualifications” (DfEE, 2000a, p. 4).

Yet, this guidance was not sent to all schools. Only those who were informed and motivated to send for it would receive it. Marr (2000) warned that however good the intentions, schools still use TAs as a cheap option to teachers. Although Tennant (2001) suggested *“In consultation with the SENCo, the senior management would need to arrange a thorough audit of the special educational needs provision for the children in the school”* (p. 187), he concluded *“despite major research projects such as Farrell et al., (1999), necessary changes are not realised quickly”* (p. 188).

Thomas et al., (1998) in their chapter on the role of TAs (or LSAs as they called them), *‘Using support in inclusive classrooms’* (pp. 26 - 34) reiterated the needs of LSAs for training and appropriate management. They also posed questions about the kinds of support best suited to the needs of the child. Phillips et al., (1999), in *Management skills for SEN co-ordinators*, makes reference to Fox (1998) and Thomas (1998), in their chapter on managing support assistants.

The diary entries show changes in attitudes over time. An early entry records a headteacher declaiming:

“No-one in my school except the teachers, hears reading, changes books or has anything to do with it. We allow books home and parents may read with their children. We feel very strongly about this. It is the professional job of the teacher to hear reading and we ensure each child’s needs are met every week” (Diary, 2.4).

Another headteacher responded *“So much depends on strengths of people, give a person a job to do because you think they can do it. Brighter people do it better because they are more perceptive”* (Diary, 2.4). At later courses and meetings, such comments about hearing reading were not voiced, although concerns about using TAs for assessment purposes were (Diary, 10.6).

TA problems were all found in schools with a marked negative ethos, although these were not all failing or potentially failing schools. This group was characterised by a variety of headship problems: lack of competence, illness, stubbornness, bereavement, arrogance, or even lack of a headteacher at all. Relationship problems could also begin to show after major changes in senior management. The negative schools were also characterised by a loyalty of staff to the headteachers of the schools, weak as they were, and while this could have been used to develop more constructive systems, it was not. The staffroom relationships would appear friendly, but conversations were rarely about learning or children, more often television soap serials or holidays. It was difficult to get at the tangled webs of relationships within such schools, but working with them over a period of time, it was clear that these schools were really uncomfortable places in which to be, jealousies and suspicion allied with incompetence and inadequacy creating entrenched ways of working, and preventing change and communication. These schools would have teachers antagonistic to change and progress, there were negative attitudes all round. TAs became negative about their situation and with the children. In a time of educational change without adequate leadership, the TAs had poor role models, and were unable to see any other way of working. They would be surprised and defensive at suggestions, occasionally even aggressive, certainly disillusioned. Some of these TAs had qualifications, and were experienced in their schools, external training was not the problem. The underlying problems of the schools went beyond simple changes in routines.

Sometimes it is the simple things which are meaningful, such as where TAs hang their coats or take coffee. There were still reports in 2001 of staffrooms where TAs are not welcome, problems with support staff using car parks, small staffrooms and even toilet facilities as total staff sizes grow (Diary, 14.2). Ben-Peretz et al., (1999) have described how staffrooms in schools are influential in improving the learning environment in schools.

“ It is highly probable that lounges, as sites for teachers’ interactions, provide the necessary conditions for the development of strong teacher networks and the generation of communal knowledge about teaching. This knowledge might lead to more effective teaching modes” (p. 150).

The role of headteachers was crucial to the work of TAs. One school visited had communication problems. In it, the TAs, having their coffee separately, were using the time as a planning session. They said:

“We are putting the learning objectives to the list of activities that the teachers have given us... cannot even pass the time of day with us, doesn’t enquire whether we are well or unwell ... bad vibes within the school ... lack of moral and spiritual backbone within the school” (Diary, 8.26).

These TAs were well qualified and the diary note concluded:

“appalled by the waste of talent that sort of situation creates within the school and at the reduction in learning opportunities for the children. The negative role models (of senior staff) must surely affect the whole atmosphere within the school” (Diary, 8.26).

On one occasion, after an afternoon with a group of TAs from a consortium, their first time out of school, they raised all kinds of issues. The diary also referred to the subsequent meeting of the headteachers.

“My presence was tolerated ... They did not want their TAs to meet in case they came back opening up cans of worms with which they could not deal ... That was what had happened when their administrative assistants met ... are the heads threatened by these people in that it might mean that they have to do more?” (Diary, 3.19).

In a series of cameos of good practice written for the DfEE, management strategies as well as TA characteristics were similar. In all of them, the senior management or the headteachers had a clear understanding of what was happening in their schools. All spoke of their TA teams, saw external and internal training as important, had regular meetings of TAs, and allocated non-pupil contact time to meetings or planning or teacher liaison time. The TAs were highly valued, participated in policy formation, usually had job descriptions frequently allied with appraisal processes. The TAs helped with after school activities and participated in the formulation of IEPs. In some of the schools, higher responsibilities had been recognised with higher grades of salary.

One entry recorded a headteacher of a successful and happy school with nine TAs for five classes. She stated a belief in expenditure on people, as well as the environment and equipment. All the staff worked together, staffroom discussions were largely on professional matters, but there was a lot of care and empathy for the human side of each other. The headteacher said apart from their work in the classrooms, the TAs *“relieve stress of teachers and keep absenteeism down, and they contribute to humour and morale by their attitude and support”* (Diary, 7.3). Visit notes later commented *“clear support of TA by teacher, team/partnership, reiterated by HT (headteacher). The HT spoke of the team - of taking three years to find people who fitted. All but one teacher had their own TA - plan together - all staff went to OFSTED feedback. Standards were good, the teaching and the use of the TAs were good”* (Diary, 8.29). Some schools, encouraging the team approach, even developed supply TAs, so that these would know how the school worked.

At the end of 1998, a note made after the study skills session prior to the OU course reads

“of the 29 potential students who came today only two do not go to staff meetings on occasions, all take part in literacy hour and had been part of some form of literacy training within their schools. No one mentioned any problems with access to the staffroom, and the whole climate of the way in which the students are approaching the course is different from four years ago. They already come with a certain confidence and understanding of what is going on in the classroom, with a sense of partnership and self-value” (Diary, 8.35).

School matters (Mortimore et al., 1988) established that the purposeful leadership of the staff by the headteacher was one of the key factors in a successful school and “*all the research confirmed by HMI and more recently Ofsted, suggests that leadership in schools is the key factor in improvement and success*” (Brighouse and Woods, 1999, p. 45). These authors go on to say it is much more complex than just ‘*leave it to the headteacher*’, leadership of all who work in the school is important. However, it is impossible to disassociate ethos and culture from the influence of the headteachers, and a document from a group of TAs in a school exemplifies this. They do not mention the headteacher, but the management strategies are clear, the relationships are positive and the TAs part of a learning community, which depends for its effectiveness on the headteacher. It reads:

“Why it works so well in our school:

Teaching assistants are given planning time to get resources and ideas for the right approach ready for lessons to come that week.

We are treated as part of the (school) team and we all support each other.

We know each other (the whole school) (their brackets) socially.

The teaching assistants are encouraged to go on courses and use training schemes.

We are included on the progression of IEPs and forward our comments and ideas.

The teaching assistants which have achieved their STAC course would love to go further.

We work with outside agencies i.e. speech therapists on behalf of the child's teacher and report back to the teacher with progress and ideas” (Diary, 11.5).

One area of school life that was relatively unexplored by this study was that of the role of the governors. They were not interviewed. Since 1998, the support staff have been able to elect a representative to the governing body in the same way as the teaching staff do, but many support staff themselves seemed unaware of this. Sallis (1999) suggested “*it is not easy to translate into daily good practice*” recognising “*It is a tough assignment to represent staff whose jobs may include little communication with each other, few common concerns and different working hours*”. She added: “*Establishing the equality of all governors is not going to be easy*” (p. 10).

6.6 Professional development: Category 5.

During these latter years, the requests made in the earlier research for proper training and qualifications for TAs became realised. The changes in role brought about by the NLS and NNS were followed up by training for the TAs involved. It was in 1999 that the ALS training for TAs and teachers together was introduced. This was funded, but there was some cynicism, as little rationale was spelt out in the materials (DfEE, 1999c, Module 1) other than the achievement of government targets for 2002. TAs were to become the recommended way of delivering catch-up work for children in Years 3 and 4, who seemed unlikely to attain level 4 when they reached Year 6, because they only achieved level 1 or only just attained level 2 in their Year 2 tests. The funding supported the development of specific tasks for these children, special materials for the TAs, and training for the TAs and a teacher from each school. After trying ALS out, it was generally well

received, although on some occasions slavishly followed and lacking in teacher involvement. This caused some bored children and disillusioned TAs, but it meant TAs being employed consistently to work with children in KS 2, and not just with the lowest attainers. TAs again had to use their own time to prepare the materials, and even try them out, but they developed skills, particularly with phonics, which were recognised.

In the NNS, STA training was recommended "*but we are convinced that the first priority for the strategy should be to train teachers*" (DfEE, 1998d, p. 64). In the training materials and the framework itself, guidance was given. Giving copies of the guidance to the additional adults was recommended, along with thorough briefing. Aplin's book (1998) was recommended for use when working in schools with assistants for Mathematics. The statement "*Make sure that they know not only what the children are to do but what they are to learn*", recognised that adults other than teachers could understand 'why' as well as 'what' they were doing (DfEE, 1999b, p. 24).

The Green paper initiatives (DfEE, 1998a) for recruitment also included training and this was spelt out in the details about Grant 32 (DfEE, 1999a; 1999d). England-wide training for all new recruits in primary schools was proposed, funded by the government and delivered by the LEAs. It included training to support literacy and numeracy, and also covered the generalist role of the TA as well as, possibly most innovatively, behaviour management. The trainer materials covered a four-day course, although induction was seen as a more lengthy process, extending from the TAs' first day to their first appraisal, probably at least a term and more likely a year. The course was only the off-site part of this process. The emphasis was put in the course, on ensuring that TAs were part of a whole school team and process, had job descriptions, and briefing on relevant school policies, particularly literacy, numeracy and behaviour management support. (DfEE, 2000c; 2000f; 2000g; 2000h). The DfES are now addressing the training needs of TAs in secondary schools (DfES, 2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 2001d; 2001e; 2001f).

In order to build on induction and the national standards being developed, a framework of qualifications was sought. That for EY is now in place (QCA, 1999), following much lobbying from people like Abbott and Pugh (1998), but the EY child has different needs to that of most school age children (Blenkin and Kelly, 2000). QCA are matching existing qualifications against the NOS (LGNT0, 2001) and all new qualifications will have to be matched. The TTA Corporate Plan, Strategic Objective 7 was "*To ensure that classroom assistants are effectively used and deployed by teachers and headteachers and have access where appropriate to career ladders into teaching*" (TTA, 1998a, p. 33). The TTA commissioned research into the pathways to teaching for TAs partly to look at career pathways for TAs who might wish to develop along that route, although it also could be seen to be an attempt to address the teacher shortage (Smith et al., 1999). Smith et al., (1999) found it was only the minority that wished for that route, although this formed a sizeable group in total. They drew conclusions about the nature of the TA role and the interest in training,

although only sampled a few opinions. The TTA (2000) published a first guide to what was available.

Farrell et al., (1999) surveyed the training providers of courses and also found that TAs “*valued the opportunity to receive training, both accredited and non-accredited, particularly if it related to their daily work*” (p. 3), but stated such training had no impact on salary or career progression, both of which concerned the TAs. They wanted to be “*better LSAs and to be valued for doing just that*” (p. 64). The consideration of career progression leading inevitably to them becoming teachers, while needed for a few, was not the desire of most TAs. On-site training including induction was variable, although some good practice was observed. The researchers noted the development in some schools of training teachers in collaborative working, and advised that all internal staff development opportunities should take place within the working hours of the TAs. Internal staff development plans seen did not always meet the needs of TAs.

Blenkin and Kelly (1997) had also found nursery nurses disinterested in career progression, however they “*only appear to engage in further training if it is the requirement of the post*” (p. 20). Possibly the more closed society of EY institutions prevents any vision of possible changes, or reflects a group of people already at the ‘top’ of what was attainable. Robins (1998) suggested nursery nurses may be “*so overworked that they find it difficult to, or too time consuming to manage anything else, such as ‘getting advice’*” (p. 46). Blenkin and Kelly (1997) also reported some indifference towards training because of a distrust of higher levels, what they called “*anti intellectualism*” (p. 24).

The diary findings and those in the study schools found TAs very keen to go on learning, and attend courses, ambitious to be good TAs, but recognised as such. Teacher training was only the ambition of the few. Much of the diary evidence for the need for professional development was reported in the paper by Watkinson (1999a). Links were made with the role of the headteacher and school climate. The premise of the paper was,

“that the professional development of all staff can add to school improvement, and that the support staff directly in contact with the pupils and students can have a direct role in enhancing achievement. Assistants supporting learning and assisting teachers should be seen as professionals in their own right” (p. 63).

6.7 The external influences - Locality, LEA and national: Category 6

6.7.1 The locality

Little was found in any literature about any effect of locality on TA work. The studies seemed to concentrate either on the internal workings of the individual school or the functions of the LEA or colleges.

This study also found little to suggest that where the schools were situated affected the TA practice. The schools visited by the researcher were in varied localities. While recruitment of teachers was sometimes difficult in the more deprived areas, recruitment of TAs was not. One headteacher told of an advertisement for a teacher eliciting one response and that for a TA eliciting 120 applications (Diary, 7.3). She was able to select some qualified and experienced people for this work. Deprived backgrounds did not necessarily indicate weak schools. A school with 40% free school meals could have excellent practice with TAs, praised in inspection, and others, in more affluent areas, could have problems, and poor practice in using TAs. Networking was rare, although some opportunities for joint training on days organised as teacher consortium training days were found as well as in School 1 [p. 130]. Only a few loose associations of TAs operated in Essex with the support of keen headteachers in their areas. Their success seemed to depend on the enthusiasm of the local TAs associated with the support of the schools, and the proximity of the participants. In larger towns with several schools, transport was less of a problem; few TAs had their own cars. One enthusiastic SENCO of a secondary school in one of the large towns registered as a C&G assessment centre and, to make the process viable, invited TAs from neighbouring schools to participate. Courses in general provided the major source of networking for the TAs.

6.7.2 Local authority changes

Various government initiatives such as target setting (DfEE, 1998e), the SEN Action Plan (DfEE, 1998c) and Fair Funding (School Standards and Framework Act 1998), as well as the Standards fund allocations, called for action at a local level but the effects for schools were not necessarily similar across the country. Essex policy had been to delegate to schools the maximum amounts possible. Central funding was not retained for any large LEA employed teams of TAs, even for supporting SEN. No training funding and little research work was done as occurred in some other authorities. However, the need for LEA Education Development Plans ensured a place for TAs in the developments of Essex (ECC, 1998c), and the development of the self-evaluation movement for schools resulted in an Essex initiative to produce a Quality Framework (ECC, 1998b), which included the unpublished draft of *Good practice in the employment and management of Learning Assistants*. Some authorities had initiatives for career pathways (Lancashire), induction training on a wide scale (Kent), or qualification frameworks (Devon). Newham developed links with an HE provider and Tower Hamlets developed job descriptions and recommended levels of pay (Gage, 2000). These all depended either on LEA Member finance or held back central funding from the Standards fund, usually from the SEN budget stream.

Some LEAs even now, still manage their own teams of TAs despite maximum delegation of budgets under fair funding, financing them with 'buy-back' systems (personal communication). This must have a beneficial effect on the consistency of practice, training opportunities and career vision unattainable by TAs operating within the confines of one school. Farrell et al., (1999) found where LEAs centrally managed the service, TAs could be "*placed at the forefront of groundbreaking*

developments in practice" (p. 62). They also found that examples of effective practice in training in colleges tended to come from areas *"where there was tangible involvement of LEA staff in the planning and presentation of the courses"* (p. 63).

6.7.3 Government initiatives

Paragraphs 29 to 34 in the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997a) in its Chapter 5, led to the question *"how should teaching assistants ... be used in schools?"* (p. 51). The government recognised that teachers are highly qualified, and that there are many valuable things that can be done by those less qualified. The assistants in the classroom can *"make a major contribution to raising classroom standards, both by their direct work with pupils and by freeing teachers to make the most effective use of their time with pupils"* (p. 50). They also recognised the variety of people and tasks, and the need for training.

In *Excellence for all Children*, a Green paper (DfEE, 1998b) recommending as full inclusion for SEN children as possible, Chapter 6 showed that TAs have a recognised role to play. *"The contribution of LSAs is central to successful SEN practice in mainstream and special schools"* (p. 65). The action plan produced following this (DfEE, 1998f) refers to TAs (or LSAs as they called them) as playing *"a key role in supporting children with a wide range of needs, yet training and development opportunities are limited and provision is patchy"* (DfEE, 1998f, p. 30). While the focus of Farrell et al., (1999) was LSAs who work with pupils with special needs in mainstream and special schools, the authors recognised an overlap with general classroom assistants, and felt their recommendations applied to both groups. Lacey (2001), reporting the research work associated with her previous report (Lacey, 1999), also stated *"thus it can be recommended that the work of LSAs should be broadly the same whatever the severity of the difficulties of the pupils being included"* (p. 166). These findings reinforced the finding of the researcher's case studies.

The emphasis on inclusion by the government has resulted in increasing the spotlight on TAs. It has led to a new Code of Practice (DfEE, 2000i). Here, TAs are seen as partners in the support of learning needs, involved in IEP formulation as well as delivery, and liaising with parents. It indicates that *"the expectation that this help (for supporting pupils with SEN) will take the form of the deployment of extra staff to enable one-to-one tuition to be given to the child ... may not be the most appropriate way of helping the child"* (p. 53). The insistence by some teachers and parents to an entitlement, resulting in a 'velcro' model of support has been criticised as discussed earlier [pp. 145-146]. Farrell (1997) discussed the importance of helping all children, when reviewing the literature for those with severe learning problems. It is not just about IEP planning but enabling the TAs to be skilled in supporting social interactions, and training both teachers and TAs in support which does not result in segregation.

The moves to support those with SEN more appropriately were not the only initiatives to highlight the role of TAs. The increased emphasis on the nature of the teacher's role has also been instrumental. The Green paper *Teachers, meeting the challenge of change* (DfEE, 1998a), referring to the changes proposed to move the teaching profession into the twenty first century, summed up the training proposals for TAs with:

"Training for teaching assistants is uneven and sometimes poor. The extent and quality of training varies widely from one Local Education Authority to another and there is an equally wide range of qualifications. We propose to work with Local Education Authorities and the relevant agencies to develop an overall training framework, based on National Vocational Qualifications, which would clarify how the various types of training and qualifications fit together, including across the various specialist areas such as early years care, special educational needs, literacy, numeracy and ICT. We do not wish to constrain the range or variety of teaching assistants but we do want them all to have good quality training opportunities ... We want to make it easier for teaching assistants to become qualified teachers" (p. 53).

Then in the support chapter, key proposals for TAs were:

- *"an increase of 20,000 in the number of full-time teaching assistant posts by 2002*
- *spreading good and innovative practice in the use of teaching assistants*
- *better performance management of classroom assistants"* (p. 55).

They admitted there *"has been little analysis of how teachers can use people working alongside them most effectively"* (p. 56) adding *"We will produce guidance on the use of teaching assistants based on good and innovative practice"* so that *"Assistants will provide an important new resource to use in their developing role as managers of learning"*. They also referred to the pay and conditions issues, recognising that these are determined locally, but added, *"We will discuss with local government representatives and other relevant parties how arrangements for job evaluation accommodate the range of assistants' functions. Assistants' pay should reflect their duties and responsibilities. We will also encourage employers to develop more systematic performance management arrangements"* (p. 57).

They emphasised the need for a whole school approach through liP, whole school plans and policies and sought *"to enable teaching assistants, including those who are part time to be involved in the school's training days"* (p. 58).

This has been reinforced by the recent White paper (DfES, 2001g) which says the government has *"a clear picture of a good primary school ... In every classroom, well trained and committed teachers and teaching assistants provide(ing) high quality daily teaching"* (p. 9). This is supported by the intention to:

“increase the number of staff supporting teachers inside and outside the classroom” (p. 73). “In addition we are funding the recruitment of extra teaching assistants and providing for the first time, structured induction training for them ... we will continue to invest so that schools can employ additional support staff ... so that overall pupil:adult ratios continue to improve. We believe that well trained assistants working effectively alongside a teacher can help teachers deliver effective lessons and so contribute to teacher outcomes” (p. 76).

This was a recognition that adult:pupil rather than teacher:pupil ratios were considered significant. The more recent class size debate had focussed attention on additional adults in the classroom, as well as teachers (Aldridge, 1997; Thornton, 1998). However the intention still seems to be to fund such increases in staffing through Standards fund and not through a recognition of the basic funding needs of all schools.

The ways of supporting teachers was also investigated by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) (2001). Unfortunately, in only looking at workload issues they did not comment on the educational value of TAs and only evaluated how extra pairs of hands could relieve teachers. They did look at more flexible teaching approaches, including larger classes with TA support freeing other teachers for non-contact time. Even more unfortunately, they talk of transferring tasks of teachers to support staff in general, including *“supervision of pupils in a variety of contexts – e.g. class cover”* (p. 42), a comment which enraged the teacher unions and was reported widely in the national and local press. A lack of understanding of the role of TAs in supporting the curriculum as well as pupils and teachers led them to distinguish between two distinct kinds of TAs: Learning Support Assistants and Classroom Assistants. Presumably, this was what they found when talking with schools, but it does not reflect the findings of Farrell et al., (1999) or this research.

The PwC report was used as the basis of a speech by Estelle Morris to the Social Market Foundation. In the accompanying pamphlet (Morris, 2001) she tries to look into the future but again has a limited and potentially contentious vision of TAs. She sees them as supporting teachers. They *“will be:*

- *Supervising classes that are undertaking work set by the teacher, or working with small groups of pupils on reading practice*
- *Supervising lunchtime activities and invigilating tests*
- *Giving pastoral support to pupils and covering for teacher absence”* (p. 15).

Individual school Ofsted reports began to draw attention to the value of TAs, and then in the 1999 guidance (Ofsted, 1999) for inspectors specific reference is made to *“the extent to which teachers: use time, support staff and other resources”* under *“How well are pupils taught?”* (p. 46).

There were also all the other government initiatives already mentioned in this chapter: the NLS and NNS which promoted the TA support of the curriculum [p. 145], the support of pupils with SEN (Farrell et al., 1999) and the detailed description of the work of TAs in the NOS [pp. 146-7].

In addition to the initiatives and research, the increased visibility of TAs resulted in more materials to support the work of TAs, teachers and schools. Fox's and Balshaw's books went into second editions (Fox, 1998; Balshaw, 1999). More books especially for TAs, or support staff working with children, were written (Schonweld, 1998; Fox and Halliwell, 2000; Fox, 2001). Further surveys and reports were commissioned by Unison, the NUT and the DfEE, (Lee and Mawson, 1998: NUT, 1998; LGNTO et al., 2000).

Diary records show that schools visited tended only to respond to those initiatives that demanded action, otherwise change was slow. Few staff, even headteachers, ever read long documents but depended on press reports or courses to inform them. Headteacher meetings tended to be administrative rather than opportunities for discussion or forward looking, and conferences became large and impersonal in a county like Essex. While Tennent (2001) complained of lack of progress since Farrell et al., (1999), and PwC (2001) reported teachers resenting the pace and manner of change, spending time in individual schools did give an understanding of the ways in which every day demands can override the ability to reflect or take strategic views about practice in the schools. TAs and their management issues were often of low priority.

6.8 Conclusions from Chapter 6

In tracking the changes, monitoring the emerging literature and recording observations made in other schools, the conclusions reached at the end of Chapter 5 have been reinforced. Validity and reliability were confirmed by personal and published findings. The data gained from a breadth of experiences in other schools, not all with good practice in the work of TAs, reinforced the findings of the case studies, enabling the model postulated at the end of Chapter 5 [Diagram 3, p. 140] to have a more general application.

The personality of TAs, their relationships with teachers, and the climate of the school were all as important as the definition of role and the national initiatives in maximising the effect of TAs on teaching and learning.

The significance of these findings and the model are expanded in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations

“the general findings ... suggest that effective practice:

- *fosters the participation of pupils in the social and academic processes of the school;*
- *seeks to enable pupils to become more independent learners;*
- *helps to raise standards for all pupils”*

(Farrell et al., 1999, p. 4, underlined words are bold in their report)

This chapter draws some final conclusions from the whole study. It begins by a review of the suitability of the research methodology used. It then looks at the answers found to the research questions, using the model developed during the study. It examines the role of TAs in supporting teaching and learning. The role enhancement by the personality and professionalism of the TAs themselves and their relationships, is explored along with the impact of the context in which TAs work. The significance of these findings for teachers and headteachers, LEAs and national policy is discussed and some suggestions are made for future research.

Chapter sections:

7.1 The suitability of the study methodology

7.2 The role of the TA – supporting learning and assisting teaching

7.3 The TAs themselves

7.4 The people TAs work with

7.5 The school

7.6 Professional development

7.7 External influences

7.8 Recommendations for future action

7.9 Conclusion

7.1 The suitability of the study methodology

The basic question asked by this study was:

What do TAs do, to make a difference to children's learning?

A subsidiary question asked:

In what ways can their role be enhanced in order that they can be more effective?

The original premise was that the role of the TA had to be ascertained with reference to the complex context of the classroom, school, locality and country. The multi-dimensional approach of

the whole study allowed for this complexity to be treated flexibly, and a more comprehensive picture to be obtained.

The literature survey made prior to the fieldwork, described in Chapter 3, was a necessary and helpful process. The methods used to investigate and record literature references continued to prove useful throughout the study and beyond. The survey reinforced the initial perception that TAs were largely an unrecognised, yet growing workforce increasingly being used to support learning and teaching. Relatively little research was found into what they actually did, although issues had been raised about consistency of practice [pp. 45-46], and management systems both at classroom level [pp. 48-50] and at school level [pp. 50-52]. In looking for what might support TAs, issues about boundaries, management, professional development and career structures, had been raised, with nearly all of the articles leading to recommendations for change at LEA or national level. Many of the comments and recommendations found in the early work continued to be valid through the study period and still are, for example those of Plowden (1967) and Mortimore et al., (1992) [pp. 44,51].

The LEA survey began to answer the second question for the LEA in which the researcher worked, a largely quantitative method which also gave qualitative data leading to a rich picture of TAs as a valued staff team, and their involvement with children and the curriculum. The results compared well with those of national surveys [p. 81]. However, there was no documentary evidence to support the practices mentioned in the responses, to show how the TAs were actually supported within the schools and little evidence as to how the TAs did their job. It was not a representative survey, had a fairly low response rate, and only addressed the primary sector in one LEA although sufficient responses were received to provide useful information. The LEA set in motion strategies and processes to support the work of the TAs as a result of the survey.

The main section of the thesis, Chapter 5, reported an ethnographic, multi-case study of the work of TAs in the classrooms of two schools, again only primary schools, but resulting in a rich and complex picture of practice. In that chapter, the appropriateness of the methodology was examined [p. 137]. The observations and interviews were conducted to cause the least disturbance to the existing systems within the classroom, which entailed a flexibility of approach. They were not done to a strict time schedule or pre-constructed formats, but with prompt sheets for consistency, and were examined for researcher bias. Despite the qualitative approach, simple comparisons of two schools with dissimilar rationale for employment gave similar results of the way in which the TAs worked. Some areas were not touched by this study – not all staff were interviewed, the role of governors, parents and the wider school community in relation to the work of TAs was not examined, nor was there consideration of the impact on the TAs of the locality of the school, or their contribution to the community as a whole. Children's views gained were limited.

The methods used proved reproducible within the study and beyond. The observation schedule and video technique developed were useful in later work in schools, when carrying out videotaping for the DfEE (2000b) and the DfES (2001b). The judgements made about good practice of TAs, as seen in these films, were confirmed by colleagues working in the field reinforcing the validity and reliability of the methods and results. The protocols too, proved reproducible and valuable when dealing with material for public use. The schools understood the need for publication and were able to check all the data for veracity. The relationships built up through the interviews with the study schools proved lasting and the researcher was welcomed on many subsequent visits. The ethical criteria of respect for democracy, truth and persons were fulfilled (Bassey, 1999). Visiting two different schools, and visiting one of them twice at differing times, meant that “*cross case analysis*” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 172) or “*multiple case design*” (Yin, 1994, p. 44) became possible. While three sets of visits hardly constitute many cases, it offered more than a simpler, closely defined single case study, such as the in-depth study of one school over a limited period of time might have provided. There were opportunities for variation and comparison, which could also be set alongside the survey and other opportunities for observation and discussion.

Although the researcher was operating alone and unfunded, the breadth of opportunity offered by the experiences in a variety of schools, on a variety of training courses, and with a variety of professional people involved with TAs across the country, enabled the findings from two schools to be seen in the wider perspective described in Chapter 6. The tracking of national developments, although in an eclectic fashion, the impact of national initiatives on schools and the recent findings from the literature proved an essential component of the study, as so much happened during the time. The diary data and references were collated using the categories developed through the case studies. This has meant that the conclusions of a very localised study could be set in the context of what was already happening nationally. The model developed from the two case studies was confirmed by the additional data gained. This meant the findings could be seen as more generalisable, not in scientific or statistical terms, but in what Bassey (1999) calls a “*fuzzy*” generalisation (pp. 12,44). It is more ‘*likely*’ that the model developed in the two schools would hold good in other schools because of these additional data (p. 12). It also meant that there was the opportunity to:

“increase generalisability, reassuring your(my)self that the events and processes in one well-described setting are not wholly idiosyncratic. At a deeper level, the aim is to see processes and outcomes across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and thus to develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 172).

The writing of the thesis itself, pulling together the various strands was an important part of the process. The complex picture became clearer on reflecting on the study as a whole. The research also enabled the researcher to contribute personally to national developments. The time delay allowed reflection, local and national dialogue with informed colleagues [p. 110] which added to the

validity of any conclusions. The opportunity to write materials (DfEE, 2000b; DfEE 2000c) and books (Watkinson, 2002, and one yet to be completed) meant having to clarify thoughts for a variety of audiences and the opportunity for public debate on results and conclusions.

The first research question is addressed in the following discussion about the role of the TA (Section 7.2) and the support mechanisms for them is addressed in Sections 7.3 to 7.7.

7.2 The role of the TA

7.2.1 Supporting pupils – supporting learning

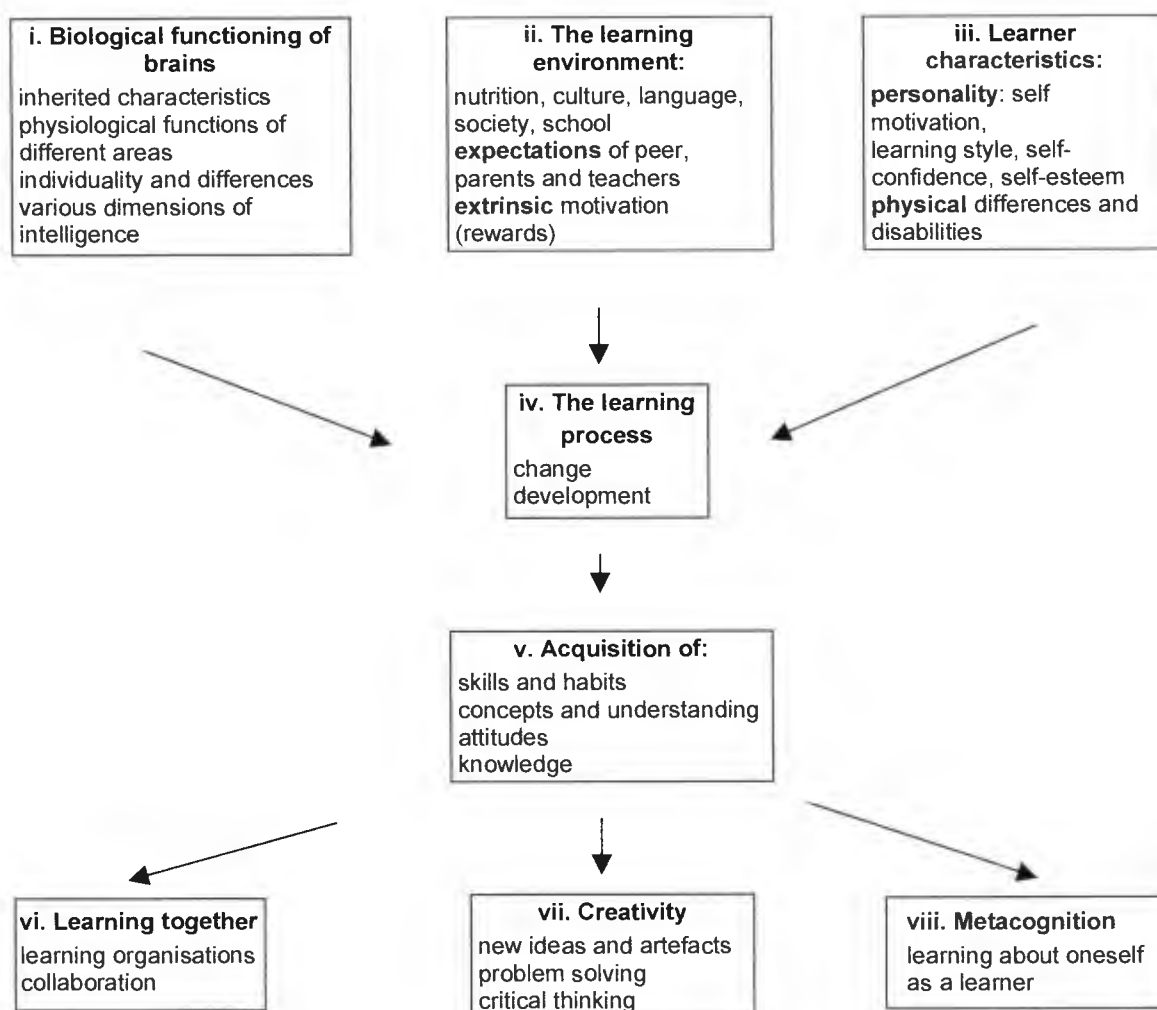
In looking at how TAs make a difference to pupils' learning it was necessary to postulate some definition of learning. Learning is complex and active, it appears to follow a cycle of doing, reviewing, assimilating and applying as described by Kolb (1984) referred to in Watkins et al., (1996). It is affected by context and learner characteristics. Abbott (1996) defines learning as *"that reflective activity which enables the learner to draw upon previous experience to understand and evaluate the present, so as to shape future action and formulate new knowledge"* (p. 1). Ofsted (1993) had a definition of the quality of good learning in their first published guidance which proved useful with schools, but this was withdrawn in later editions, in favour of pupil attainment, response and progress. It was felt that these were more observable than learning itself. Their original definition had included aspects of concentration, progress, context, methods used and organisation, confidence and questioning, perseverance, evaluation and collaboration. Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a) used the Ofsted response criteria when observing TAs, but the case study observations in Chapter 5 found these too limiting [pp. 92-93].

Diagram 4 [p. 169] was developed by the researcher in order to put some kind of framework on a discussion of the role of TAs in supporting learning. It is used to try to identify some of the strands which may be involved. Deeper analysis, given the current interest and complexity of the area is not possible here. Each box shown is discussed in separate paragraphs.

i. Biological functioning of brains

Learning is a process taking place in the brain. Human beings are animals with highly developed brains. As human activity takes place at all sort of levels, automatic and unconscious movements to deep abstract thought, so the brain functions to control all these activities. Research has concentrated in the past on observing changes in bodily function with learning and more recently actual brain changes are being observed. Brains develop, the neurone networks change, patterns of learning develop and change, various dimensions of function are proposed and theories of how, when and why these events take place have been postulated by people such as Pavlov, Piaget, and Gardner (Wood, 1988).

Diagram 4: A model developed to describe the learning process



While TAs often know little of such theories, although on courses show a great deal of interest in them, TAs do understand about the individual differences between children [p. 114]. For many of them, it is the reason for their employment: the children they work with, have special needs. Despite some dissenting voices [p. 140], Farrell et al., (1999) indicated that TAs can contribute to the teacher's understanding of pupils' needs from their observations. TAs understand that some children can be well physically, properly cared for, and have every encouragement to learn, but they do not progress in the way the rest of the children can. They recognise something is different in the way a certain child's brain works when they are tackling activities. The TAs working in School 1, with children with learning delay, were very perceptive as to their needs [p. 116]. The TAs' descriptions of the children they worked with [p. 115] continually showed a sensitivity and understanding [p. 116], insights into the way the children's minds were working [p. 139]. They set small but appropriate challenges for the children they knew well [pp. 96-97].

ii. The learning environment

Just as diet and housing environment can affect physical growth, the learning environment can affect brain function and learning. The learning environment includes the physical surroundings or the social, emotional, linguistic and cultural contexts of the learners. Bruner, Vygotsky and Bernstein, for example, have posited various theories of how social interaction and language can underpin learning development (Wood, 1988).

The TAs showed how important they felt the learning environment to be [p. 117]. They encouraged the children to clear up, to work tidily, to manage resources appropriately [p. 102]. Their traditional role had been the 'paintpot' washer, the carer (Plowden, 1967). The TAs in the study were another pair of hands [p. 38]. Even when a TA supports a teacher in the more mundane tasks, it may allow the teacher to do the more skilled interventions.

Smith (1996) promotes the use of a multi-sensory environment, with bright display, plants, well-organised and accessible resources. The TAs' role in helping the teacher achieve this is an important one, and not to be dismissed just as 'washing paint pots'. The teachers and TAs in the study schools took joint pride in this kind of maintenance [pp. 99,100,114].

Emotionally, they settled the children, sometimes with personal chatter [p. 99]. They gave comfort appropriately, by their physical proximity [p.115]. The very increased use of language around the pupils may have been beneficial for some. It could be argued that the TAs may come from cultural backgrounds nearer that of the pupils in the school than the qualified teachers, but Wood (1988) does not favour this. They also provided the scaffolding for learning. For instance, they supported children by using the correct language in English or Mathematics [pp. 100,116], ensuring they had the correct tools or books, or were on the correct page [p. 101]. It is likely too, that verbalisation of the problem helps understanding, and the TA provides vocabulary to assist in this. The TAs served to reinterpret the teacher's instructions in shorter bursts, or simpler words or even just repeating them [p. 116].

Learning also has a social context, no-one is totally isolated from another human being. *"Much of what has been described as schooling's 'hidden curriculum', for instance, consists of what children learn by their social relationships, rather than as a result of what they are 'formally taught'"* (Jarvis et al., 1998, p. 37). The case studies focussed on the role of the TAs in the classroom, but they were also seen in schools contributing in informal times. These times were not directly observed but were often evident in walking around schools. As well as the social aspect, they could support the English curriculum when talking with children in cloakrooms or the playground, Mathematics when assisting the changing of clothes, Science in the school grounds, the Humanities on school trips, or more generally they could contribute to the children's self-esteem through their behaviour

management strategies. The survey responses indicated considerable out of classroom involvement [p. 75].

iii. Learner characteristics

The characteristics of learners, other than the way the brain functions, also affects learning. Physical impairment, attitudes to learning, or to the people involved in the learning process can affect learning. Part of the concept of individual needs and special needs develops from this (Roaf and Bines, 1994). Self-esteem and motivation powerfully affect the learning process (Holt, 1964; Holt, 1967), and as adult learners on courses testified. TAs used many positive verbal and non-verbal signals to encourage and gave pupils regular attention and praise, They would change direction if concentration flagged [p. 116]. This was particularly noticeable with the TA supporting a child with severe behaviour problems when she learnt he was due to go to a special school the following term [p. 101]. Frequently, the observations showed the subtle ways TAs boosted the children's self-confidence and self-esteem [p. 102]. Increasing the children's motivation was frequently noted [p. 105]. They did not praise lightly, they reinforced success [pp. 96,97]. They recognised the emotional difficulties of some children that were hindering their progress [pp. 102,115]. School 2 had a child with visual impairment, but the support of the TA during the class times observed was virtually non-existent, she had set up the appropriate apparatus before the lesson began. She was, however, also employed to be present during the afternoon lesson time, a time not observed during the research. The work of TAs with SEN pupils is well documented (Farrell et al., 1999; Lacey, 1999).

Farrell et al., (1999) emphasised the need to create opportunities for independent learning. They, suggest the key to this is for TAs to have flexibility in the way they work, be clear about when to intervene and when to become a general resource. Lacey (1999) spoke of "*just the right amount and type of support for individual pupils*" (p. 33). This flexibility was observed in the case study TAs: in particular, their mobility [p. 100]; multitasking [p.101]; and 'thinking on their feet' [p.119].

iv. The learning process itself

This is the area where only the later behavioural outcomes can be observed. The 'penny dropping' moments are not observable every day, but learning is going on internally. "*True learning is active learning, in the sense of direct and active involvement in the substance of one's learning . this kind of developmental learning is empowering*" (Blenkin and Kelly, 2000, p. 37). TAs have been encouraged on all the courses, to stand back and observe children when they themselves are not involved. One headteacher had said they saw them as "*taking responsibility for children's development*" [p. 114], and the TAs themselves reported with pride when they described the progress their charges made [p. 116]. The responses obtained from exercises of this kind, as read in essays or reported verbally on courses, have indicated the positive ways in which such experiences can be used.

v. Acquisition of skills and habits, concepts and understanding, attitudes and knowledge.

The outcomes of learning are sometimes considered the real indicators of learning having taken place. The outcome data in terms of acquisition of testable knowledge were difficult to determine in this study [Section 5.6, p. 135], but the headteachers were clear that the TAs did make a difference. TAs understood that this area was how others viewed the work of the school. They followed the teachers' intended learning outcomes, and the schools' planning policies encouraged the teachers and TAs to share these as far as possible. TAs were seen marking, and assessing reading [p. 98]. Pollard and Tann (1993) describe the various ways of supporting learning. They showed how adults could provide support and instruction allowing the pupils to act and discuss, and make sense of the subject matter of the lesson.

“Any intervention must be appropriate. It must connect with the understandings and the purposes of the learners so that their thinking is extended. If this is to happen, teachers need to draw on both their subject knowledge and their understanding of children. They must make an accurate and reflective judgement themselves about the most appropriate form of input ... if the judgements are astute then the input could take the children's thinking forward, across the ZPD (zone of proximal development of Vigotsky from Pollard and Tann p.111) and beyond the level of understanding which they would have reached alone” (p.112).

The observations made of the TAs, showed them acting as the teachers as described above, but this has implications for the levels of understanding required by the TAs both in understanding children, and the subject matter involved. One headteacher reported that the TAs got better at their job *“as they became more skilled and learn more about the process”* [p. 113]. TAs were seen both transmitting information and making sense of it for the groups of children with whom they worked. They can support individuals and small groups by being the personal interpreter of the subject matter for the children [p. 115]. If the class teacher relies on class teaching, the TA may be the only opportunity the pupil has to explore meanings.

TAs assisted the children to develop skills [pp. 101,102,115-116]. Wood (1988) refers to skill acquisition as moving from the novice to the expert. This may involve demonstration and verbal instruction on the part of the teacher (he includes parents in his term of teacher) but the instruction must be adapted to the level of competence of the learner, building on the learning they have already made. The TAs' close and frequent contact with small groups of children [p. 115], allied often with their being able to follow these children from class to class as they got older, gave them a perception as to their competence and a knowledge of what they had already done. Where they themselves had skills, for instance in a craft area, their understanding of the expertise which would be required in the future assisted their ability to present appropriate steps to the children. Wood (1988) refers to the possibility of experts in any area not necessarily being the best teachers of that area.

TAs were developing in children the learning attitudes of concentration and perseverance by keeping children on task [p. 116], what Farrell et al., (1999) refer to as "*client engagement*" (p. 109). The TAs were systematic in "*ensuring they had enough to do*" (p.110). When children were observed with TAs, they were on task, but not just occupied, as children 'busy' within a classroom can be. The TAs observed ensured the tasks allocated by the teachers were not only occupational, but also learning experiences.

vi. Learning together

When children or people learn together, the outcomes can be different, often better than isolated efforts may produce. The TAs recognised the need to introduce the children to a collaborative way of working. This had been a particular outcome for child A, [p. 135], who had found working with others so difficult. They made sure children were part of the whole class by stopping their activity or speech whenever the teacher spoke to the whole class [pp. 98,101]. They largely worked with small groups of children, and were clear within these when the children were completing individual tasks and when the task itself was co-operative, for example the capacity work [p. 98], or the measuring of the playground [p. 100].

vii. Creativity, problem solving and thinking

The TAs observed were often questioning and challenging [pp. 98,107-108,149]. Galton and Simon (1980) described the higher level and higher order of teacher interaction as "*important determinants of pupils' progress*" (p. 199). They provided role models as learners for the children [pp. 101,148,160], they were keen to make the children think about what they were doing and extending their ideas. Pollard and Tann (1993) refer to teachers' style and values influencing the views of children and the "*role model which teachers provide through their own actions and lives*" (p. 276).

The recent report on creative and cultural education called 'All our futures' (NACCCE, 2000) stated in the summary

"Creativity is a basic capacity of human intelligence. Our ability to represent experience in various ways so fundamental to how we think and communicate. Words help us to formulate some ideas but not others. We think about the world in the many ways we experience it: visually, in sound, in movement and so on. Conventional education tends to emphasise academic ability and, in particular verbal and mathematical reasoning. These are vital to young people's intellectual development but they are not the whole of intelligence". (Rogers, 2000, p. 4).

In the main body of the report they discuss the characteristics of teachers who can develop creativity. The TAs, using their active listening strategies [p. 107], certainly encouraged

- “autonomy on both sides; a feeling of ownership and control over the ideas that were being offered;
- authenticity in initiatives and responses, deciding for oneself on the basis of one’s own judgement
- openness to new and unusual ideas, and to a variety of methods and approaches
- respect for each other and the feelings that emerge
- fulfilment: from each a feeling of anticipation, satisfaction, involvement and enjoyment of the creative relationship” (NACCCE, 2000, p.91).

viii. Metacognition

Children need to learn to think, become independent learners and understand their own learning styles. “*The job of the school is to motivate the learner; to encourage her or him to want to learn; to help the learner understand how to learn; and to believe that it is possible to do so ... This will also be dependent on the way she is being taught*” (MacGilchrist et al., 1997, p. 36). The TAs observed, appreciated the need for these attributes, although they would have found it hard to articulate them in terms like metacognition. They were however able to articulate the need to stand back and not do things for the children – “*I want these children to learn on their own*” [p. 116]. They encouraged independence whenever they could [pp. 97,102]. One actually said, “*the target is to do myself out of a job*” [p. 116]. The TAs in the study schools would question and probe to find the difficulty, give demonstrations rather than complete a child’s work, and talk with children about what the problem might be if they were stuck. It is possible that the understanding of metacognition is an important one to consider in the training of TAs.

TAs themselves are learners, often very conscious of their own apparent lack of paper qualifications to prove they could do the job of a TA. They wanted to take further courses and some even attended the induction courses after taking an STA course previously (Diary, 13.2). The empathy for the role of the learner, and in cases of school-based course work, presentation of themselves as a role model of lifelong learning, may influence both the way they work and the perceptions that the pupils have of them [p. 118]. They are examples of the fact that learning is not just about school or about being a child. Perhaps their schools are examples of “*attempting to build a community of learners*”? (Watkins and Mortimore, 1999, p. 7).

TAs can operate instinctively but will clearly benefit from having some theoretical underpinning to their work. Educational psychology is not beyond them, particularly at Level 4. So often after a STAC course, which contains such material, they say “*Now I know why I am doing what I am doing*” (Diary, 6.13).

7.2.2 Supporting teachers - assisting teaching

As well as supporting learning, there was evidence that TAs also teach. This question has long been a contentious one. While the teacher unions are less vocal and aggressive in their communications, they rightly need to protect the perceived roles of their members. Palmer (2000) in a recent TES article praised the work of TAs, provided they did not teach. This statement created

some responses in the correspondence columns of the paper and a report of Marr's (TES, 2000) research, where Marr indicated that schools are afraid to admit to the teaching competence of their TAs, often because of the salary issues it then raises. The debate has again been in the public eye with the recent announcement of using TAs to support teachers by reducing their workload (Morris, 2001; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2001). The unions were involved in the discussion prior to the publication of the PwC report (2001), yet their vocal responses, especially the NASUWT in apparently referring to TAs as "*pig-ignorant peasants*" (The Times, 2001, p.9) created much correspondence and articles in the national and educational press. The epithet was referring to the possibility of untrained, uneducated TAs being used for some of the tasks being suggested (de Gruchy, 2001), reiterating the need for defining clearly what TAs can and cannot do, both from a point of view of their competence, and that of what is meant by teaching.

Moyles and Suschitzky (1997) found this same problem. "*CAs (classroom assistants) do have a role to play in helping children to learn – a role in teaching. What this has raised so clearly for the researchers, is a key question about what is 'teaching'?*" (p. 52). They went on to resolve the problem by using a construct of the work of Dunkin and Precians (1991), Berliner (1992) and Bennett (1993), when they explored the views of teachers on the CAs. They found "*less perceived differences expressed within the responses of trained teachers and mainly untrained CAs (non STAs), than might have been anticipated*" (p. 50). The case study teachers were clear "*I'd like to see her as an authority role ... as a teacher for that section*" [p. 114].

The problem seems to be the semantics of the words: teach, teaching and teacher. Parents teach their children, peer and sibling teaching is well known. By teachers, the government, the general public, and more particularly the media, seem to mean adults with qualified teacher status (QTS). TAs teach, but do not have all the attributes of a qualified teacher. They act under the direction of qualified teachers at all times, and these qualified teachers take responsibility for the learning of the pupils in the class. For this organisation and responsibility, teachers are well trained and paid on different scales.

Views of teaching

Like learning, teaching is complex, and has been the focus of much research. Watkins and Mortimore (1999) defined pedagogy as "*any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another*" (p. 3).

Kyriacou (1986) offers three models or levels of teaching, the first of which he refers to as surface – maximising active learning time and quality of instruction. His second level covers the conceptual or psychological level, and the third or craft level relates to classroom skills. He has rating scales on "*preparedness*", "*pace*" and "*flow*", "*transitions*" (beginnings and ends of lessons) "*clarity*",

“business like” manner, “withitness” and “encouragingness” (pp. 110,111). The TAs observed would score highly on all of these. Kyriacou (1991) gives details of the various skills he sees as important. These are set alongside some of the references to TAs’ observed behaviour in Table 18 below.

Table 18: The skills of TAs set alongside the list of Kyriacou

Kyriacou's teaching skills (p. 10,11)	Instances of these skills observed in TAs
<i>“planning and preparation</i>	[pp. 102,116,119,153,156]
<i>lesson presentation</i>	[pp. 102,149]
<i>lesson management</i>	[pp. 100,102]
<i>classroom climate</i>	Section 6.4 [pp. 151–153]
<i>discipline</i>	[pp. 101,102]
<i>assessing progress</i>	[pp. 98,100,101]
<i>reflection and evaluation”</i>	[pp. 119,120,149]

Dunne and Wragg (1994) describe nine dimensions of teaching:

- “0: Ethos
- 1: Direct instruction
- 2: Management of materials
- 3: Guided practice
- 4: Structured conversation
- 5: Monitoring
- 6: Management of order
- 7: Planning and preparation
- 8: Written evaluation” (pp. 41-43).

They see these as levels through which teachers can progress, the first three being applicable to students at the end of their training. All newly qualified teachers would now be expected to manage all nine. The TAs observed managed the first three, and most of the second three as well [p.107].

The general pedagogic principles outlined by Ireson et al., (1999) were drawn up after they undertook various literature searches. These could well be adapted to make a set of principles for TAs.

- “it appears beneficial if teachers:
 - are clear about their aims and share them with learners
 - plan, organise and manage their teaching effectively
 - try to formulate the highest expectations about the potential capabilities of learners within a general context of inclusivity
 - provide learning tasks which will challenge and interest and which are aligned to appropriate assessment procedures

- seek to relate academic learning to other forms of learning and promote 'boundary crossing' skills
- make explicit the rules and at times, the hidden conventions of all learning institutions so that all learners become aware of ways in which they will be judged
- include an understanding of metacognition in their objectives so that all learners can benefit from this knowledge and – as they advance through their learning careers – take increasing responsibility for their own learning
- motivate and enthuse learners” (p. 230).

A definition of teaching used by inspectors is that found in the Ofsted Framework (Ofsted, 1999). In Table 19 [p. 178], there is an attempt to comment on each of the headings in the most recent Framework with what was observed of TAs in schools. Being a trained Ofsted inspector, the previous Framework (Ofsted, 1997b) was used on one of the video recordings, with the result that the TA was in the 'good' category [p. 102]. Diary notes also referred to observations done on TAs actually in inspections who also scored high, and in some cases higher than the teachers did [p. 149]. In the second part of the outline definition, the Framework asks for comment on the learning progress of pupils, already dealt with in Section 7.2.1 above.

Qualified teacher status (QTS)

A group of colleagues from various authorities met to define and write the units for new awards for teaching assistants with Edexcel (1999), the examination board. There was considerable agreement about expectations of competence of TAs at various levels. Looking at a Level 4 award, instead of defining what a TA could do, the national standards for QTS (TTA, 1998b) just published at that time were used, to ascertain what a TA could not do. In the words of a post graduate student teacher recently observed by Jim Rose (ex HMI), and quoted at one of the TA LEA conferences in September 2000, *“There is so much more to teaching than teaching”* (Diary, 13.3). Section B and Section C of the QTS standards (TTA, 1998b), *Planning and class management*, and *Monitoring assessment, recording, reporting and accountability* were seen as in the field of the qualified teacher. However much of the 'teaching' of Section B (TTA, 1998b) did apply.

7.2.3 Supporting the school

Section D of the QTS standards, *Other professional requirements* (TTA, 1998b) seems to define teachers' professional status, not that of the TA. The TAs were aware that legislation existed on Race relations, Health and Safety at work, and the Children Act. They knew of the appropriate physical contact and restraint procedures and had the same professional relationships, commitment and understanding indicated in the standards [p. 149].

Table 11 [p. 75] showed the areas outside the classroom where TAs gave support, and Table 6 [p. 70] the large number of voluntary hours which they worked in and for the school. Forty nine percent worked three or more hours a week, with nearly all of them giving at least an hour a week. In the study schools, the TAs supported the school policies and practice, took part in meetings and

inset, and welcomed opportunities for participating in social and fundraising activities [pp. 117,125].

Table 19: The observed work of TAs set alongside the Ofsted categories of teaching

1999 Ofsted definition of good teaching (p. 46) <i>“ In determining their judgements, inspectors should consider the extent to which teachers:</i>	Observed behaviour of TAs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>show good subject knowledge and understanding in the way they present and discuss their subject</i> 	<p>In the short times observed, the TAs showed sufficient subject knowledge for the tasks requested by the teachers, for example: spellings [pp. 98,119], mathematics language [p. 100], differentiation (pp. 102,119,120).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>are technically competent in teaching phonics and other basic skills</i> 	<p>In observations, referring to the phonics in the literacy strategy, this was probably not so. However, subsequent to these observations, ALS materials (DfEE, 1999c), and the induction training materials for literacy from the DfEE (2000f) focused largely on competence in teaching phonics. TAs showed competence in teaching handwriting and basic number skills [p. 102], and in the video made for the DfEE (2000b) can be seen showing competence in recording science, PE movement, practical skills and linguistic skills.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>plan effectively, setting clear objectives that pupils understand;</i> 	<p>Where planning needs to be done by the TA, they show competence, and in one case were seen putting objectives to the teacher's planned activities [p. 155]. Joint planning was common and effective, but the class teacher's role was seen to be a director of the learning [pp. 119,121,152,157].</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>challenge and inspire pupils expecting the most of them, so as to deepen their knowledge and understanding;</i> 	<p>Challenge was evident, as were high expectations, and the ability to inspire and motivate [pp. 99,105].</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>use methods which enable all pupils to learn effectively;</i> 	<p>Usually the methods were set by the class teacher, but TAs were able to adjust and change where they thought it helpful, and fed the changes back to the teachers [pp. 119,149].</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>manage pupils well and insist on high standards of behaviour;</i> 	<p>This was particularly evident [p. 102].</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>use time, support staff and other resources especially information and communications technology effectively;</i> 	<p>Time and resources use were evident [pp. 101,102,118,127]. TAs themselves did not 'use support staff'. However, TAs were able to call upon parents and agencies effectively [pp. 123,124]. Little ICT was observed in the study schools, but TAs sitting with children with the computers were seen in adviser schools [p. 150]. This was not always an effective learning experience for the pupils, in that the software chosen by the teacher was not always itself the most appropriate for the needs of the children involved.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>assess pupils' work thoroughly and use assessments to help and encourage pupils to overcome difficulties;</i> 	<p>Informal formative assessments were made all the time to help and encourage [p. 99]. Formal observations were undertaken at the request of the teacher [p. 98]. Feedback, using informal and formal systems was constant [pp. 116,151,153].</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>use homework effectively to reinforce and/or extend what is learned in school;</i> 	<p>Not applicable to TAs seen.</p>

7.2.4 Supporting the curriculum

The first section, A, of the QTS standards (TTA, 1998b) refers to the *Knowledge and understanding* of the NC and Religious Education syllabi, which both primary and secondary teachers need. The TAs observed knew of the parts relevant to what they were doing, and where to obtain copies of the documents. They did not have the subject knowledge equivalent to that of a graduate in an NC subject, a requirement for QTS. However, they did have an understanding of “*how pupils’ learning in the subject is affected by their physical, intellectual, emotional and social development*”, and were “*familiar with subject-specific health and safety requirements, where relevant*” and planned activities “*to avoid potential hazards*” (TTA, 1998, p. 3). The DfEE (2000f; 2000g) and DfES (2001d; 2001e) induction training packages have two full days devoted to Literacy and Mathematics. The STAC and STA courses (OU, 2000; CACHE, 1998) have a large element of curriculum content, particularly since the introduction of the NLS and NNS, which have themselves produced materials to support the work of TAs in their respective subjects (DfEE, 1999c; Aplin, 1998).

The new national standards (LGNTO, 2001) when investigating what TAs actually did reflected the curriculum support strand with a unit at level 2 to support literacy and numeracy activities, and another to support ICT. At level 3 there are two units to support literacy and numeracy skills. All the units contain elements of curriculum knowledge and understanding. Unfortunately, despite this evidence and the thrusts of the NLS and NNS, this strand of support was particularly missing from the recent PwC report (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2001) and reading was the only area of curriculum mentioned by Morris (2001).

The survey Table 9 [p. 73] shows how much time was spent by TAs in 1998, before the full introduction of the NLS and NNS, on subject support and the whole rationale of employment in the second study school was to support the curriculum. Farrell et al., (1999) said that planning together with the teacher “*should include consideration of overall curriculum aims and content*” (p. 52).

7.3 The TAs themselves

The boxes in the model [p. 140] indicated that the nature of the TAs themselves affected how they perform. It attempted to put some structure to the complex issues involved, and stood the test of examination in the light of visits to other schools.

7.3.1 Personality

One of the areas that was often missing in the earlier research, prior to recent publications, was consideration of the person of the TA. They had been interviewed and their role had been explored, their qualifications had been collated, but they were not often watched. When they were, it was for what they did rather than who they were.

They were alert, committed and enthusiastic [p.148]. They spent a considerable amount of their own time, planning and preparing for their paid time with the children [the survey evidence p. 70]. Colleagues delivering courses commented on their will to learn and question [p. 148]. They were active members of their staffroom cultures [p. 125], and a friend in the classroom (evidence from the partnership courses). The TAs, who were closely observed, knew what they had to do and showed appropriate initiative [p. 97]. They even challenged the headteachers on occasions, if they were uncomfortable with what they were doing or what was happening about them [p, 125]. TAs of this calibre have been described as “*feisty*”, (Diary, 11.6), and even TAs, setting out on their exploration of issues, can be too much of a challenge to less confident teachers or heads [pp. 154,155]. It could be that their apparent bold front is akin to that of many people, who normally calm and rational, when they have a cause to fight challenge established systems and structures in an inappropriately over active way. Suffragettes, normally supposed to be ‘lady like’, had to fight in an unladylike way to get what they felt were their rights.

The study indicated that role models of teachers were important [pp. 98,100,118,149] as were high expectations of all staff [pp. 99,150]. This means, as has already been suggested, that there are concomitant dangers of teachers providing poor role models.

The heads in the study schools freely admitted that while they were using open advertisements in their employment processes, the volunteers, whom they had seen in operation in a positive light, had an advantage at selection time [p. 125].

7.3.2 Skills, knowledge and understanding – competence

The concept of competence in employment assessment terminology is relatively new and has come in with the formal introduction of vocational qualifications. The NOS for TAs (LGNT0, 2001) have been discussed in Section 6.2.3 [p. 146]. There was much consultation of the workers themselves, their employers and specialists in the field. The observations made in this study [Section 5.3, pp. 92-108] show how competent and knowledgeable TAs can be.

The NOS will be used to define NVQs for TAs, assist in personnel discussions with employers and unions and provide a standard against which to measure all the other qualifications. It is difficult to see how they will be used by ordinary school managers, to assist in job descriptions or reviews, as they are so detailed and 166 pages long. Induction or entry levels are not defined, nor are higher levels. As level 1 is a level of basic skills and repetitive tasks, not applicable to work in a school or classroom, there is no level 1 NOS for TAs. The essential qualities for working with children or young people were in a proposal put forward for an orientation programme in the consultation for the framework of qualifications for those working in the EY (QCA, 1999). The suggestion did not come to fruition, but the suggested qualifications and the characteristics necessary to undertake

even the first steps of such a job and the need for an induction process to ensure certain basic knowledge and understanding were useful.

During the study, attempts were made to use summary versions of competencies in tabular form in an attempt to have a tick sheet for observation, but it was not useful, as such, for one observation. These tables, or versions of them, however provided useful discussion tools to use with the TAs themselves, teachers and headteachers as a single page of A4 paper was manageable. TAs do not show all of which they are capable in half an hour. After all the observations in the study, and the publications of the NOS, a further summary table was drawn up (Appendix 10 [p. 224]). The TAs observed were operating well at level 3 and with many strands of level 4. Four TAs had the OU STAC qualification, a first year undergraduate course. However, level 4 NVQ has also to contain an element of management practice, not yet often applicable to TAs working in schools, and not seen in the study. Developments of TA teams [p. 157], particularly in secondary schools, and hopefully recognition of career progression will make it imperative that this level of competence be defined in the future, and TAs paid appropriately. Perhaps this is the level of responsibility being suggested in the recent pronouncements (Morris, 2001; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2001)?

Much more is required for QTS, as discussed in Section 7.2.2 [p. 177] above.

7.3.3 Conditions of service

In all this discussion of value and levels, the TAs always asked about their pay structure. When they are often paid less than a shelf stacker in a supermarket, yet have a level 4 qualification and are operating as seen in the study, they are right to question this. The allied issue is that of the time they give of their own freewill and lack of holiday pay (O'Leary, 2002). Pay needs to relate to job description not qualifications unless these were seen as needed when the job was advertised. While this is an issue for heads and governors to address, it will continue until schools are funded to assist this problem. SEN and Grant 32 funded staff in Essex were on the lowest pay scale, below that usually awarded to administrative assistants, and bursars. Evidence from the diary showed that TAs do not have job security beyond that of employment legislation, and frequently do not contribute to superannuation. Their posts were usually the first considered for pruning in times of budget shortfall. Yet they loved the job and from the evidence of the survey, would rather do it than stack shelves.

The study confirmed there is a gender issue for TAs and for schools. If so many are women, as shown by the surveys (LGMB, 1996; Watkinson, 1999a; LGNTO et al., 2000) and it is possible that addressing the pay and career structure for TAs along with the raising of their profile might attract more men to the job. While there is still some concern around men being employed with younger children, this can be overcome with sensitivity. All children need good male role models, particularly in the more caring professions, and men can make good teachers and assistants with

younger children as well as the older ones. Men are now recognised as a normal part of the nursing scene in hospitals, as well as among doctors.

7.4 The people TAs work with

7.4.1 Teachers

TAs assist in the teaching programme of the class under the guidance of a qualified teacher. They cannot operate alone with a whole class, they are not qualified nor insured to do so, despite some current reports to the contrary (Dean, 2001; Kirkman, 2001). Thus, TAs can only be as good as the use teachers make of them. In the study schools, there was a clear partnership with all those with whom they worked. They were valued colleagues, the teachers were aware of the TAs' potential and their own dependence on them. The NOS values and principles recognise the importance of this relationship:

“Working in partnership with the teacher

It is the teacher whose curriculum and lesson planning and day-to-day direction set the framework within which teaching/classroom assistants work. The teaching/classroom assistant works under the direction of the teacher, whether in the whole class or on their own with an individual or a small group of pupils. Teaching/classroom assistants, therefore, need to be fully briefed about the teacher's plans and intentions for teaching and learning and her/his contribution to these. Ideally, teaching/classroom assistants will be involved by teachers in their planning and preparation of the work” (LGNT0, 2001, p. 5).

The courses for partners [p. 151] were well received and reiterated this theme. On these courses, the TAs and the teachers saw themselves as pairs, offering different but complementary skills, and ideas, with additional moral support in times of stress (Diary, 8.4). A 'joint working' policy would help those teachers given a mentoring role in the training courses for TAs, seen as important by course planners for TA courses from induction to HE level. The very act of mentoring for a course proved enlightening for both partners. Some schools recognised the importance of this role by awarding temporary half scale pay rises to the teachers involved (Diary, 8.9). In some schools, the TAs on a course, alone or with their mentors, shared with the whole staff the content and purposes of their course. This helped all the teachers to understand the implications and potential of having a TA in their classroom and the TAs gained confidence in making the presentation. Initial teacher training and professional development courses need to recognise the needs of the teacher in developing their own managerial skills.

If TAs are displaying some of the aspects of the characteristics that traditionally have been reserved for the qualified teacher, teaching or marking books [p. 101,102], yet must work under the guidance of the teacher, the issue becomes one of defining boundaries. Working relationships are crucial, needing to be planned and rational, open and honest. Communication is vital. Farrell et al., (1999) emphasised the need for planning together and sharing the evaluations of outcomes. Both become

indicators of good practice in their suggestions for whole school audits. They suggest that tasks allocated in advance can actually cut communication time in class for the teacher, and that it is important to allocate defined roles to staff, yet retain interchangeability.

One suggestion to help the process, is to take the approach of performing joint audits of the teachers and TAs as to their perceptions and needs and feed this back to the staff as an INSET exercise. It takes a confident, forward-looking staff to undertake this, but it can be effective as experiences of the researcher in schools, other than the study schools, showed (Diary, 9.10).

Another possibility, is for the TA and teacher together, to draw up a diagram similar to that in the paper by Goodman (1990) where the author sets out the role of each partner in the classroom and the ways they interact. If teachers were more involved in the drawing up of the TAs' job descriptions, the mutual understanding of roles would also be assisted. One problem is that TAs often work for several teachers, and each of these may have a differing way of approaching their management role. This is particularly true in secondary schools (Diary, 1.5), where traditionally the line management of the TAs is through the Special Needs department, and therefore the TAs do not know all the curricular expectations of the subject teachers. TAs are also known to work in separate faculties and therefore do not know the needs of the children they are with as well as their SEN or primary colleagues. Teachers and heads of department have little inkling of the role of the TA, let alone their potential. A third model is also being utilised in some schools, where the TAs are line managed through year group leaders, where both children's special and curricular needs can be examined, but progression may not be supported (Diary, 14.2).

Another suggestion is that teachers or schools take a copy of the learning pact reproduced in Diagram 5 [p.184] from MacGilchrist et al., (1997). This can be adapted for TAs as in Diagram 6 [p.184]. Teachers and TAs working together might produce a diagram such as Diagram 7 [p. 185].

Farrell et al., (1999) talk of the teacher and TA sharing the preparation of job descriptions, of planning reflecting the needs of the TA, including entitlement to support for the learner and the flexible use of space. They recognise the TA can bring experience of other classrooms and teachers to the partnership, and suggest wider understanding of the management of TAs can bring about *“more participation, independence in learning and higher standards”* for TAs and pupils (p. 55).

7.4.2 Pupils, parents and other adults

The relationships with pupils were bound up with their way of working in the classroom. It was the TA that had the time to explore ideas and listen to individual stories, to develop appropriate individual strategies for learning, catch the learning moments and boost self-esteem [p. 97-98,107]. Much of this is dealt with under the section on learning. This close relationship, responses in the

Diagram 5. The teaching and learning PACT -the interdependence of the teacher and learner
(MacGilchrist et al., 1997, p. 52)

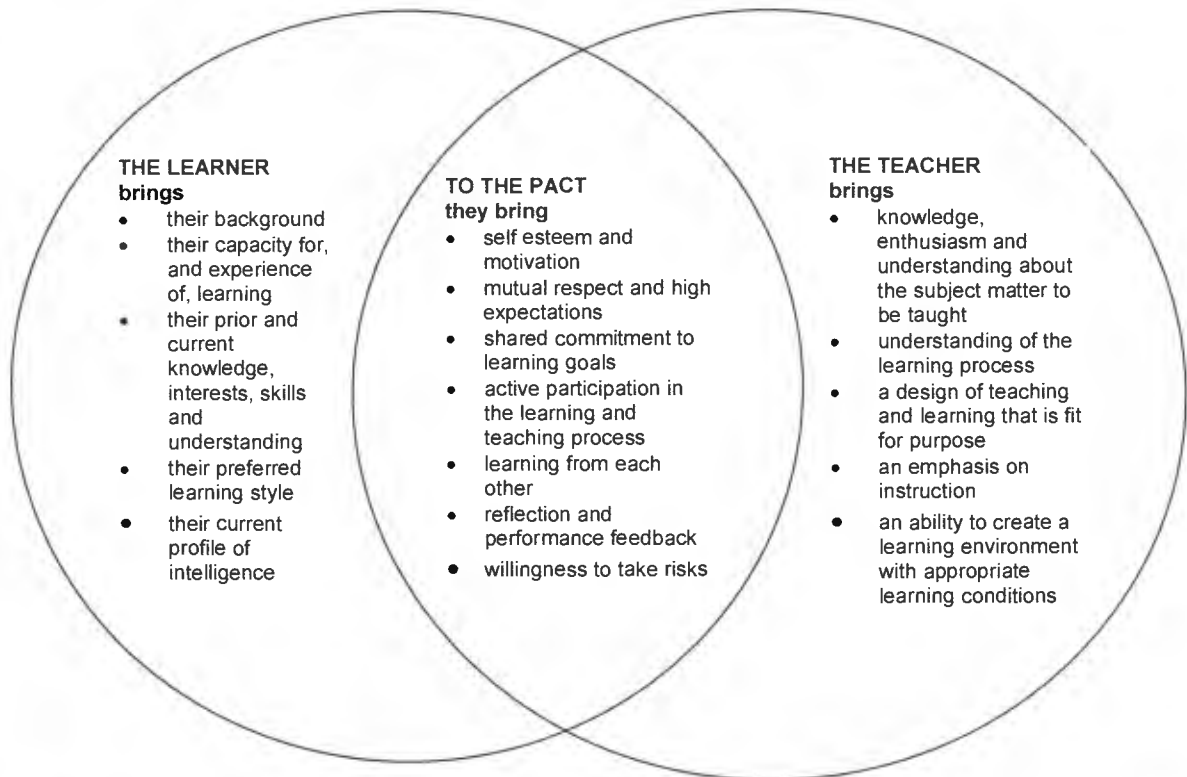


Diagram 6: The teaching and learning PACT - the interdependence of the TA, teacher and learner

THE TEACHING ASSISTANT

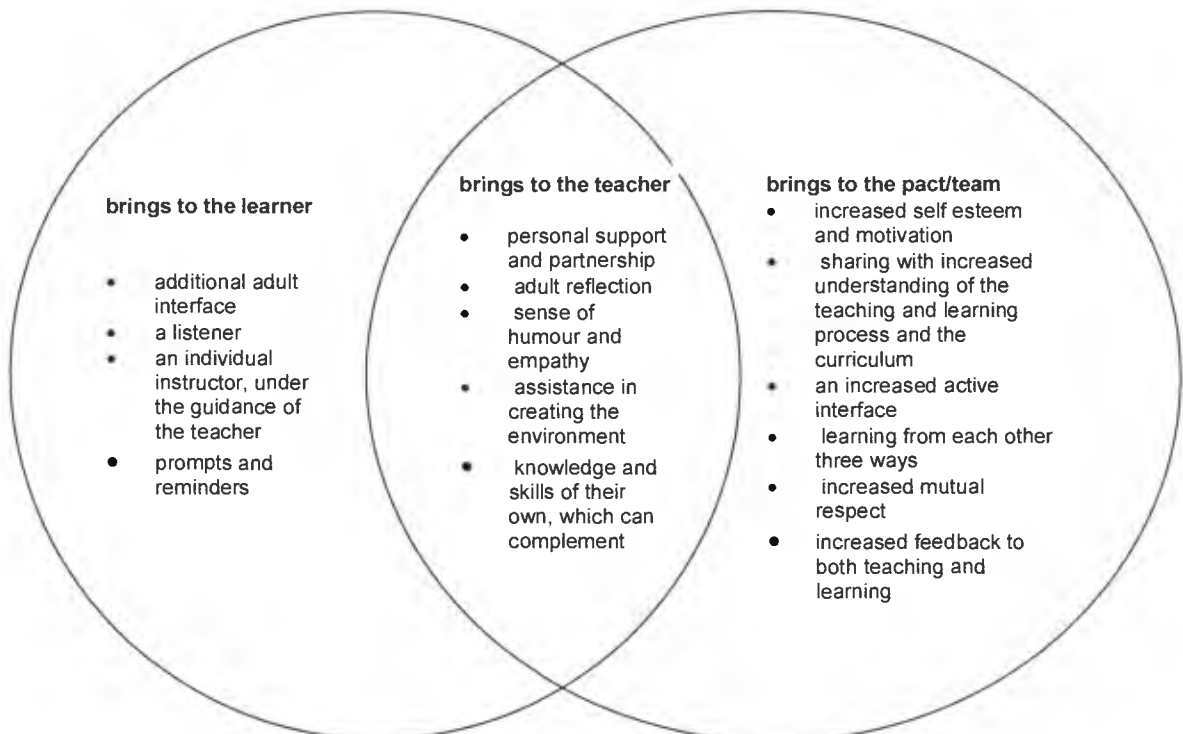
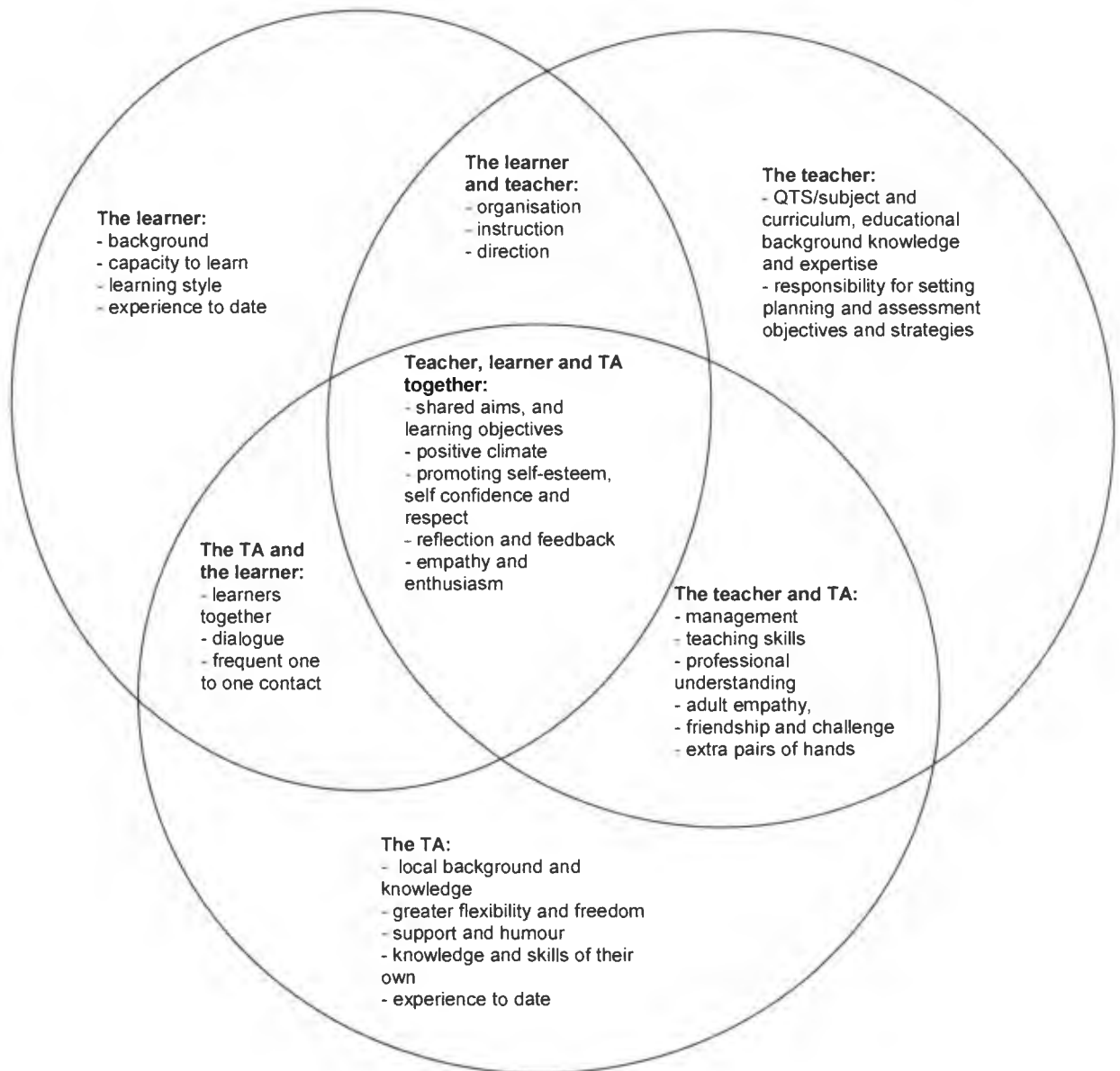


Diagram 7: The interactions of teachers, TAs and pupils in the classroom



survey [p. 79], and headteacher comments in the interviews [p. 128] suggest that it is crucial that the TAs should be trained at an early stage in the school's policy for child protection to ensure: they do not question inappropriately if children reveal details of abuse; they know to whom to go to for assistance; and they know how to protect themselves from false allegations when dealing with children in intimate situations.

Traditionally the TAs seem to have not got involved with parents in mainstream schools, leaving this area to the teacher, but in some cases of supporting SEN, it becomes more useful and appropriate

for the TA to deal directly with the parents (Lacey, 1999). Dealing with child A in School 1 was a case in point [p. 123]. However, the new draft Code of Practice (DfEE, 2000i) is suggesting that TAs be included in IEP reviews, and the training of TAs for secondary schools promotes this kind of involvement. One problem which faces TAs, coming as they do largely from the locality of the school, and are often parents themselves, is how to deal with the enquiries from anxious parents who see the TA as a source of information on what goes on in the school. Another policy, therefore, which is vital for induction is that of confidentiality.

The NOS values and principles state:

“Confidentiality

Teaching/classroom assistants must adhere to the school policy for the confidentiality of information at all times. This requirement covers information about pupils and colleagues and extends to communications with others in social as well as work-related situations” (LGNT0, 2001, p. 6).

There were few data about TAs operating with other adults, governors, inspectors, outside agencies or people in the wider community of the school but given the increasing trend for involvement at school level, these contacts are likely to increase. As stated earlier, governors were not considered sufficiently in the study, yet they have a role in determining policies and strategies for the school.

7.5 The school

The case studies and visits to other schools showed clearly the importance of the school environment, both on the work of the TAs and in their utilisation [pp. 124-125,152-157]. The responses to the survey also reflected this [pp. 67,77].

7.5.1 The team, structures and systems

From this evidence, backed by findings of Farrell et al., (1999), schools need to develop policies and practice, systems and structures relating to TAs, and refer to their work in policies such as SEN or behaviour management, planning or assessment. The school development plan is pivotal to a school's direction (MacGilchrist et al., 1995), although its effectiveness depends on the type of plan in use. In the study schools, the TAs were involved at all levels of the plan. They contributed to, appeared in it and helped evaluate it. Diary evidence recorded that some schools had become Investors in People, others had followed the principles without the bureaucratic process – that of ensuring professional development for all staff. The unpublished interim Ofsted report to the DfEE (Rose, 2001) indicated that 45% of classes inspected had TAs, the quality of teaching of the teachers was higher in classes that had TAs in them, and that schools with best practice also tended to be Investors in People.

This study has revealed the importance of the processes between the categories, relationships and communication. It is therefore important regarding TAs, that the invisible is made visible, that the implicit is made explicit. Schools need to define professional boundaries, expectations, and values for pupils and staff, to establish processes of evaluation and reflection, and to challenge the comfort zones of the complacent. In the study schools, the TAs were clear about policies and practice [p. 96]. *“School development processes should seek to nurture the conditions that facilitate the tasks of teachers and LSAs working together effectively in classrooms”* (Farrell et al., 1999 p. 55)

Practice in the study schools indicates that the management should provide for INSET for teachers and TAs, where appropriate, and pay for the TAs' time to attend these sessions. Time for planning and feedback should be built in and paid for, and school-based systems established in order that these are possible for both TAs and teachers.

The NOS values and principles state:

“Working within statutory and organisational frameworks
Teaching/classroom assistants are an integral part of the school staff team and as such have a responsibility for working to agreed school policies and procedures. In turn, the day-to-day work of the school takes place within a wider legislative framework affecting the content and delivery of the curriculum, health and safety, child protection and other aspects of school life. Teaching/classroom assistants need to be aware of these school and statutory frameworks, particularly those that directly impact on their own work with pupils” (LGNTO, 2001, p. 5).

The NOS also contain paragraphs on TAs supporting inclusion, equality of opportunity, anti-discrimination and celebrating diversity.

7.5.2 Consistency

Classrooms are not islands. The time has gone when teachers believed they could operate independently and that their training of possibly many years ago, entitled them to a professional status which could not be questioned. Open-plan schools were an anathema for some teachers, where each classroom runs into the next one. The headteacher of School 2 believed that much of the consistency of her school stemmed from the geographical ease with which TAs and teachers worked together in the open-plan arrangement of the classes, and that this contributed to the consistency of working practices to the benefit of the children. Headteachers need to manage as well as lead, developing people, delegating and enabling teamwork to flourish. Both headteachers in the study schools delegated responsibility for line management of the TAs, but kept a clear view of their expectations of the role. Supply teachers in study School 1 made little difference to the work of the TAs [p. 96].

Consistency, communication, and a positive climate with the need for whole-school policies, and plans, were three of the key factors identified as contributing to what makes effective schools

(Mortimore et al., 1988; Sammons et al., 1995). (Freiberg and Stein, 1999) defined school climate as:

“the heart and soul of schools. It is about the essence of a school that leads a child, an administrator, a staff member to look forward to being there each day. School climate is about that quality of a school that helps each individual feel personal worth, dignity and importance, while simultaneously helping to create a sense of belonging to something beyond ourselves” (p. 11).

Hall and George (1999) correlated classroom climate to a school's climate, and both to the impact of the principal.

The headteacher promotes the ethos and climate, has an overview of consistency, and is responsible for setting up of systems of communications. The climate and conditions depends upon the ethos and history of the school, and all school staff following the aims and policies of the school. Ethos is not built up overnight and is dependent on the leadership of the head with a committed team. It was clear from walking round the study schools and participating in the staffroom interactions, that the climates of the study schools were good and influencing the staff in the schools in positive ways.

7.5.3 Expectations

In the experience of the researcher, in schools where she worked in some depth over a period of time, a history of low expectations, weak teaching or relationship clashes can take years to overcome. Role models have been shown to be powerful guides to the TAs on how they should conduct themselves [p. 180]. The case studies also showed how the staff there had high expectations of themselves, each other and the children in academic and behavioural areas [p. 127]. Externally accredited courses for TAs are highly dependent on work experience. These courses can only be effective in raising standards of TAs, if the work experience gives the TAs the appropriate expectations of their role [p. 130].

The good practice in TAs seen by the researcher can contribute to the climate, and effectiveness of the schools in which they work, as well TAs being able to benefit from the systems and relationships they find there. TAs can challenge and provide companionship and humour for those carrying greater responsibility [pp. 125,126]. They can be sources of local understanding and contacts, and even provide a parental point of view in a staff team with few teachers who are parents [p. 123].

7.6 Professional development

7.6.1 Personal: Qualifications and experience

The TAs were modest about their capabilities [p. 118]. Diary evidence from courses showed TAs saw their own personal education as a handicap, they valued paper qualifications about their job, but recognised achieving these would not advance their career or increase their pay, evidence

borne out by Loxley and Swann (1997a). It can be seen from the survey evidence that most had some kind of qualification and many had quite advanced qualifications [p. 68]. Only 16% wanted to achieve QTS [p. 78], the majority said 'I just want to be a good TA'. Keeping up-to-date [p.122] or meeting other TAs [p. 77] was as important. Their attitude to paper qualifications [p. 129] may have been determined because the current climate is driving parents and pupils to believe that paper qualifications are the mark of quality, and only 'qualified' teachers matter, or it may be caused by a need to boost their own confidence [p. 151]. TAs talked of lack of self-confidence, yet in action, they were observed operating with confidence and competence [p. 105,128]. They appeared to operate by instinct [p. 119], no one had articulated their role. TAs reported their courses enabled them to understand the purpose of tasks [p. 158].

It is suggested (DfEE, 2000e) that TAs should have professional development similar to teachers, but while this resulted in performance related pay and its legal status for teachers, no requirement is made of schools to ensure it exists for TAs. While headteachers indicate that appraising teachers is already too much of a burden, it is likely to remain the case that good schools who value all staff will find the time and resources to appraise and develop all their staff, and the less committed will avoid an extra task.

The professional portfolios of TAs seen as part of the NVQ and C&G centres' verification processes, had a section on life experiences. This, and the evidence of experiences quoted in the survey responses [p. 68], show how much the TAs brought to their jobs, in addition to their qualifications. To have brought up children, or cared for the elderly, been an officer in a club, playgroup or brownie pack, run a household budget, learnt to drive a car or use a computer, explored foreign places, gives life skills and understanding of the world that sometimes young teachers do not have.

The NOS values and principles state:

“Continuing Professional Development

Teaching/classroom assistants will take advantage of planned and incidental self-development opportunities in order to maintain and improve the contribution that they can make to raising pupil achievement. Asking for advice and support to help resolve problems should be seen as a form of strength and professionalism” (LGNTO, 2001, pp. 5,6).

7.6.2 TAs as a profession

The recent pronouncements (Morris, 2001; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2001) reinforce the need for appropriate TA training and qualifications: for their own professional status, self-esteem and self-confidence; to ensure recognition by the teaching profession; and to enable continued professional development. While they might have many of the characteristics of teachers, they need a career structure in their own right. Some of the items developed during the study were attempts, before

the NOS came on the scene to develop such a framework. A version of the competencies in Appendix 10 [p. 224], and a list of the most commonly available courses and their levels were used when submitting a proposition to the TTA (Appendix 11 [p. 225]) about existing provision for TAs which might add up to a career pathway.

TAs interviewed, and some of the respondents of the survey, indicated that one of the reasons they are so keen and lively is that they are not overwhelmed by responsibilities, assessment implications and the requirements of the NC, the NLS and the NNS. Most do not want to be teachers. The balance between TAs' status and recognition and appropriate systems of support and pay needs to be carefully examined (Farrell et al., 1999), a point also made about nursery nurses (Blenkin and Kelly, 1997; Robins, 1998).

TAs form part of the support staff structure of the school, the foundations on which the more senior staff members depend. Edwards (1997) makes a case for the professionalisation of support staff, making them a team in their own right. "*The growth of the professionalisation of support staff in colleges has greatly increased the efficiency and effectiveness of operation and there is no doubt that the quality of provision for students has benefited in consequence*" (p. 15). The headteachers [p. 114] and teachers in the case studies often commented on the value of their TAs "*absolutely vital*" ... "*terrific burden off my shoulders*" [pp. 116,156].

While QTS level is seen as the entry door into the teaching profession, the TA foundations remain underground, their grade rating as zero or minus if the scale of QTS is seen as one. The quandary is to find a way of increasing their visibility without upsetting some of the real support they give. They are currently like the roots of a tree, below ground, but a gardener knows that the roots upon which the life of a tree depends, often extend beyond the canopy of the tree, and need appropriate nourishment.

7.7 External influences

Listening to the TAs, they rarely referred to outside influences, their school-based influences are what mattered to them. They worked to their school policies, within their allotted classrooms. But, the diary tracking showed that it was the effect of national and local strategies upon the schools' operation, and the schools' uptake of what was on offer that made the difference [pp. 154,155,160,164]. Schools had employed TAs increasingly to support SEN, with earmarked funding. Then LMS resulted in the variety of practice and diversity of role. The national picture was one of agreement in the value of the TAs' support role and increased the need for resource allocation and interest. It was initiatives like the NLS and the NNS, as well as the national TA initiatives that brought the TAs' role to the fore. It was the national funding that enabled all LEAs to provide induction training. It was the DfEE lead, along with the TTA and I&DeA, which provided the

national frameworks [p. 164]. Ofsted clarified the importance of support staff in good practice for schools. It has been national funding either through government departments, unions or charities which has enabled larger-scale research projects. It is only national action and appropriate schools' funding which will bring professional status and appropriate pay scales.

7.8 Recommendations for future action

The findings of this study have reinforced many of the findings and subsequent recommendations from previous research, as well as opening up new areas in need of attention. Some of these are being addressed by the initiatives of the last three years, but some issues remain, particularly those of gender, diversity of role expectations, variability of quality and the concomitant variability of pay, professional opportunity and conditions of service.

It would help the TAs, if their work could be seen as a profession in its own right, akin to nursing. Along with professional status could come a professional association, recognition, and a voice separate but allied with teacher unions and the General Teaching Council (GTC). This would encourage the development of a literature of pedagogy for TAs, and could assist in defusing the problems of boundaries with qualified teachers. A possible discussion paper for considering the professional status of TAs is provided in Appendix 12 [p. 226], using the definitions of professionalism given by Morris (2001) for teachers.

TAs have often been appointed in a random way, when the funding arrived for a child with SEN, or the annual budget notification came. Sometimes, in the past, they were appointed without advertisement or interviews (personal experience). If the support is valuable, as has been shown by this study, it should be planned, costed and maintained at local and national level. Schools, including governors, can celebrate the diversity and variety of their staff, which can create a richer learning environment for the pupils.

Through an exploration of the two research questions and an analysis of the data, it is possible to identify implications for:

- TAs themselves
- the management of TAs by teachers and schools
- external agencies.

7.8.1 Implications for TAs

TAs need to:

- take responsibility for their own professionalism, professional development, training and qualifications because of their current relatively insignificant status

- recognise their boundaries and limitations and build appropriate relationships with teachers in order that teachers can make the best use of their talents
- consider the possibility of specialisation, in a subject or a variety of SEN, such as a communicator for the hearing impaired, or working with children with EAL, in order to further their concept of themselves as 'really good TAs', rather than just see career progress leading to teaching
- consider the implications of 'a proper job' on their out of pupil-contact time and family commitments, in order that they can be employed for meetings, planning and feedback activities
- consider forming their own professional association or joining an existing one, in order to have a voice in the national and local educational debate
- celebrate their achievements to date.

7.8.2 Implications for management

Teachers and schools need to:

- review their management structures and policies in order to be inclusive of all staff as well as all pupils, in a climate of moving towards inclusive schools and promoting a learning community
- ensure appropriate induction to the role, including knowledge of important whole-school policies such as: confidentiality; behaviour management; child protection; and support of pupils with SEN
- continue developing the current recommendations for effective schools with respect to TAs, such as recognising the leadership role of the head, the need for consistency, communication, high expectations and the development of a positive climate
- ensure the school has planned, costed and maintained policies regarding TAs' appointments, boundaries and strategies, making explicit the implicit, and giving careful consideration to appropriate systems of support and pay structures
- ensure the SDP contains professional development strategies for TAs
- ensure that all teachers, governors, parents and pupils understand the role of TAs for the school, collecting their views about the effectiveness of the work of the TAs
- consider a variety of models for allocating TAs, where they can best support pupils, teachers, the curriculum and the school.

7.8.3 Implications for external agencies

LEAs need to:

- collect exemplars of good practice for dissemination to their schools
- specify what they consider is quality, in terms of TAs, and provide appropriate advice and training for TAs, teachers and heads according to their ability to do so

- consider training teachers and TAs together on courses, where it might help teaching and learning in the classroom
- encourage intervisiting and facilitate networks or associations of TAs
- ensure that FE and HE providers running courses for TAs in their schools liaise to ensure appropriate support for students within the school, and support the school mentors
- consider governor training about the potential and needs of TAs
- consider issuing advice regarding appropriate employment, career and pay structures.

National strategists need to:

- continue to consider the availability of training and qualifications at all levels for all who work in schools
- consider making recommendations about national pay scales for TAs, even though they cannot influence their implementation
- ensure whole-school funding levels to include provision for a proportion of TA staff according to a total TA:pupil ratio
- continue to encourage CPD for all, including the Investors in People approach
- encourage the inclusion in the initial training programmes for teachers, of training in the management of adults
- consider a comprehensive, progressive, teaching qualification structure incorporating levels of TAs, QTS, and specialist teachers, senior managers and head teachers
- consider recognising TAs as a profession in their own right, with adequate guidance for schools about boundaries of responsibilities, the formation of a TA equivalent of the GTC and the possible registration of TAs working in schools
- consider the role of TAs in a twenty first century vision of a school, which might include a much higher use of ICT, individual working, and all-age provision.

Researchers need to:

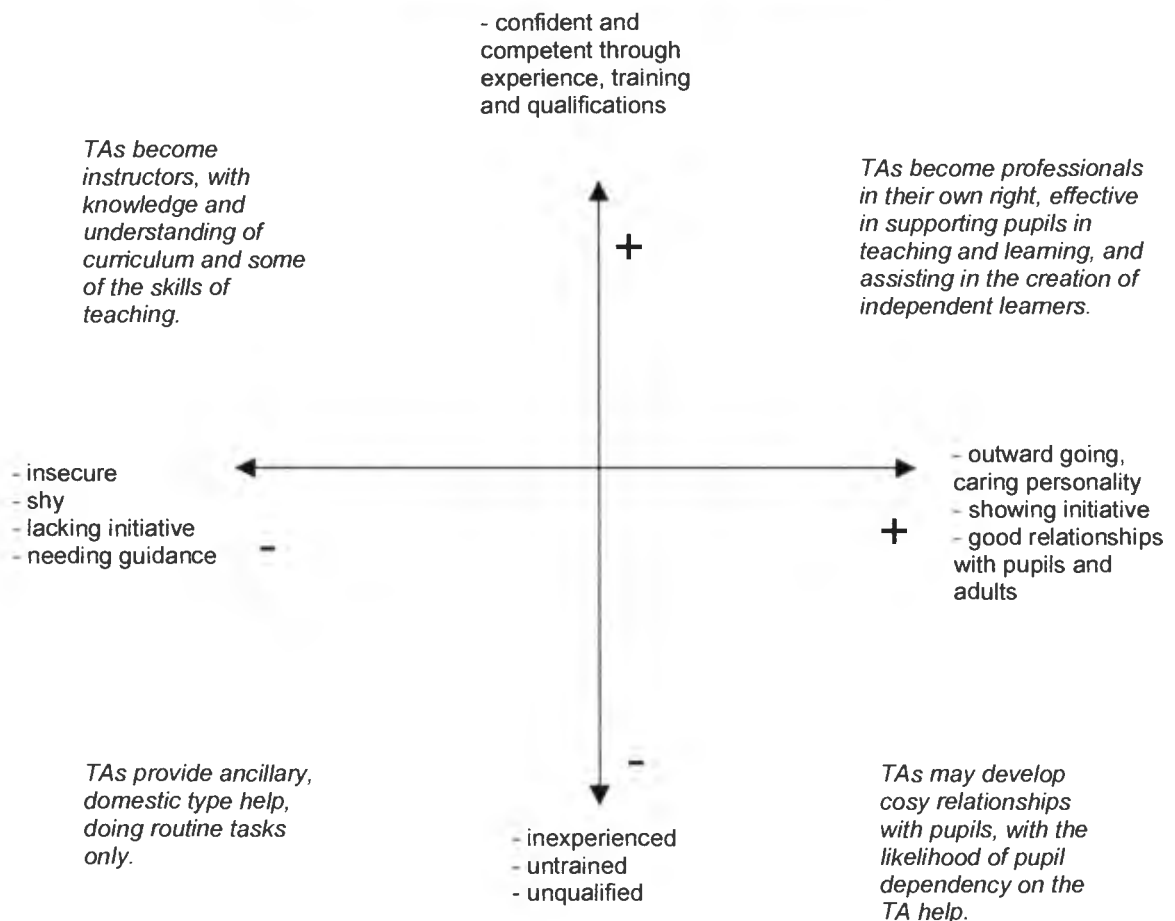
- develop a pedagogy for TAs
- consider further investigations of working strategies and effectiveness, particularly in secondary schools, with case studies of the various systems of management
- track the effectiveness of TAs through the new KS 3 Literacy and Numeracy strategies, the Year of Science 2002 and the development of more inclusive cultures
- consider how to assess the value added by TAs using some kind of outcome or comparative data on standards, using test scores and soft data
- undertake a longitudinal study, looking at a representative sample of schools
- ensure research on class sizes also accounts for the quality, role and relationship of additional adults in the classroom

- investigate the effects of the varieties of training for TAs on the schools, the teachers, the TAs and the pupils.

7.9 Conclusion

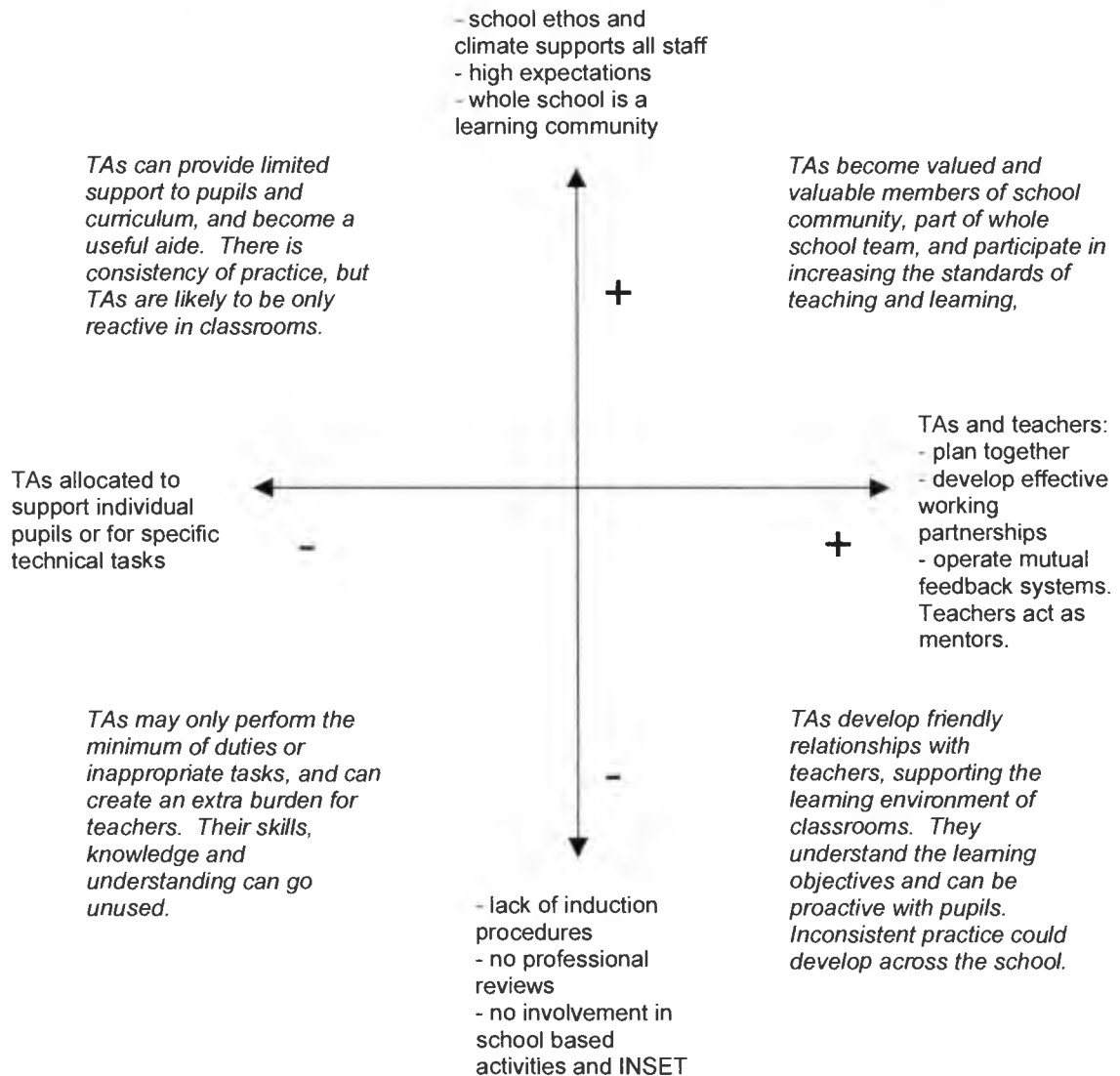
In looking at the role of TAs, this study has demonstrated the value of additional professional adult contact in the learning of pupils. Adults who have outward going, caring personalities, a commitment to education and are prepared to develop and undergo training of a variety of kinds provide responsive, sensitive and knowledgeable aides to the learning process and also teach. Hopefully, it will not be long before the professional status of TAs is recognised both in the public understanding of their role and in their pay and conditions of service. Diagram 8 shows how training and personality can combine to produce a professional TA.

Diagram 8: Looking at the TAs by themselves



However, the provision of highly, skilled, competent and professional TAs will not in itself provide the most effective support to the pupils, teachers and the school. TAs are only as effective as their use, deployment and management, and much depends on the relationships developed with teachers and the ethos of the school. Where the school systems and structures support the formation of a whole school team, the consistency of practice, and contribution of the TAs to the teaching and learning of the school is enhanced. The training and qualifications provided by universities, local authorities and colleges and national initiatives are all helpful in facilitating professional development. They can provide a standard of professional practice and national consistency. It is the use to which the school management puts these initiatives, and the use they make of the skills, knowledge and understanding developed by TAs in training, that will create support for pupils, teachers and the school. This can be shown by Diagram 9.

Diagram 9: TAs supported in the classroom and by the school



In summary the study provided:

- a picture of what TAs do to enhance learning and assist teaching
- a framework to look at the boundaries of the teacher and TA interface
- a model to indicate how TAs can be managed to facilitate best practice
- an appraisal checklist of competencies
- information for an LEA professional development programme for TAs
- a source of information for national consultations
- materials – textual and videos – to support the writing of national training guidance, various published papers and potential books.

The future for TAs is still uncertain, as the implications identified suggest. It needs the joint effort of many parties to make the best use of the potential talents observed. In the words of one of the teachers in one of the study schools:

“What next – is teaching the only route? ... making sure they are as up-to date as we are because they work with those children a lot more than I work with them, and if they are happy doing what they are doing and feel confident in what they are actually doing, then I feel they will continue to enjoy what they are doing, and do it well... and we still have the good body of TAs that we have got”.

As one TA said in the survey:

“I absolutely love the job and have given 100% time and effort to it. Unfortunately, this is frowned upon by some members of staff who, I feel, think that TAs should be there to sharpen pencils and wash paintbrushes. I feel that the opinion of TAs needs to be raised so that they are of more benefit to the children, staff and school”.

Appendix 1: Headteacher questionnaire



Questionnaire about Education Support Staff in schools 1998 (Primary, Infant and Junior)

*This information will be collated and no school will be identified in any publication of aggregated data. Any names given at the end will be for contact purposes only.
To be completed by the headteacher or a senior manager of the school: e.g. the staff development manager*

«DFE_NO» «SCHOOLNAME»

1 Please indicate who has completed the form:

Headteacher
Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)
Staff Development Manager
Other - please specify

Please tick

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

2 Shown below are the Form 7 figures for your school from the January 1998 return.

Cumulative hours worked per week by:

full-time Nursery Assistants:

part time Nursery Assistants:

Bilingual assistants

other Special Needs Support Staff:

Other Education Support Staff in Nursery Classes

Early admission Classes

Other infant classes

Junior Classes

«FT_NTS_NO»	
«PT_NTS_NO»	
«EALsupp»	
«SNSSsupp»	

Total number of full-time support staff employed including admin. staff:

Total number of part-time support staff employed including admin. staff:

«FTOTHERsupp»	
»	
«PTOTHERsupp»	
»	

PEOPLE EMPLOYED

2a How many people were employed as education support staff, either full time or part time as at Form 7 1998?

NB If possible, please ask each of these to complete an enclosed personal questionnaire.

3 Please provide details of each teaching assistant's employment in the table below:-
(Please show each contract, showing where one person is employed for more than one contract).

Person	Hours employed	Source of funding e.g.			Main role		Permanent or temporary	Contract APT&C or NNEB
		SEN	main budget	other - such as:	SEN	Other - such as		
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								

Please continue on a separate page if necessary.

3a Are there significant changes in numbers or hours since the same time last year?

Yes

No

If no, go to question 4a

3b If so, can you say what and why?

SCHOOL SUPPORT MECHANISMS

4a Is there an induction process for education support staff?

Yes

No

If no, go to question 5a

4b Please outline this process:-

5a Do you have a school handbook?

Yes

No

If no, go to question 6a

5b Do education support staff receive a copy of the school handbook?

Yes

No

6a Do education support staff receive any copies of school policy documents?

Yes

No

If no, go to question 7a

6b Please specify which documents:-

7a Do education support staff receive any training or professional development?

Yes

No

If no, go to question 8a

7b Please describe examples of this:-

In house:

Outside school:

8a Do education support staff attend any in-school meetings?

Yes - all such staff

Yes but NNEB contract staff only

No

If no, go to question 9

8b Which type of in-school meetings do they attend?

9 Are education support staff paid when they attend meetings or courses?

Yes - all such staff

Yes - but NNEB contract staff only

No

10 Is there supply cover for education support staff when they are out of school?

Yes - all such staff

Yes - but NNEB contract staff only

No

11 Are education support staff represented on the Governing body?

Yes

No

12a. Do you have an evaluation system for the effectiveness of this category of staff?

12b. Can you describe what you do and how often you do it?

TEACHING STAFF INVOLVEMENT

13a Have you or any of your staff been involved with any outside accreditation procedures?

Yes

No

If no, go to question 13a

13b If so, please say what
e.g. STAC tutor
STAC mentor
NVQ assessor
other such as:

13b With which college or centre?

13c Has this had any affect upon the staff development on the school, and if so, what?

CHANGES AND NEEDS

14a Would you like to change the role(s) of the education support staff in your school in the next year/5 years?

Yes - next year

Yes, but over a period of time

No

If no, go to question 14c

14b What changes would you like to make?

14c Do you have any suggestions about how the Essex Advisory and Inspection Service on particular, or other services of the LEA could be involved in supporting changes in the role of education support staff?

14d Do you have any specific views or requests on the training needs of your staff in relation to supporting teaching and learning?

Yes - for teaching staff

Go to 14 e

Yes for the support staff

Go to 14f

No

If no, go to question 13a

14e Please indicate by ticking if you would like courses for teaching staff in the following;

Planning with and for support staff	
Making the best use of support staff	
Support staff in the literacy hour	
Managing and developing support staff	
Other - please specify:	

15c Please outline these issues:-

16 Please add any further comments you would like to make, either about education support staff or this research.

17a Would you be willing to share any of your school documentation with us - or a wider audience?

Yes - with you

Yes with a wider audience

No

Please enclose copies of any documentation you are willing to share at this point, indicating clearly whether it is for LEA consumption only, or can be used with a wider audience, and whether you wish your school name to be clearly visible if used.

17b Would you be interested in participating further in developing guidance or support materials for teaching assistants?

Yes

No

17c Would you be willing for your teaching assistants to take part in further research into their roles?

Yes

No

Thank you for participating in this research and taking the time to complete this survey. Please return it with any separate TA forms and/or any documentation to:

**Essex Advisory and Inspection Service (TAQ),
A Block,
County Hall,
Chelmsford, CM1 1DT**

Appendix 2: Teaching assistant questionnaire



Questionnaire for individual Education Support Staff in Schools Summer 1998

*This information will be put together without any person or school being identified in the collected presentation. Any names given on these sheets will be used for contact purposes only. It is to be completed by any paid member of staff working directly to support education - teaching and learning - in the school, **not** administrative staff, mid-day assistants caretaking or cleaning staff. Please use the back of these sheets, or a separate piece of paper if you want to write at length on any question. If you do not wish to answer any questions, just leave it blank, or write 'don't know'.*

YOUR POST

1. Please give details of your current post (s):-
(complete one row of the table for each post you currently have - often TAs have more than one contract in a school)

Name of post	Paid Hours worked per week	Age of pupils	Pay scale/ grade	Time in post	Brief description of what you do, including the numbers of children you may work with at any one time (give maximum and minimum.)

Voluntary additional hours worked per week (give an average)
Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

PERSONAL DATA

2 Please circle the appropriate words:

I am:

Male Female

Under 25 between 25 and 39 between 40 and 49 between 50 and 59 over
60

Have children at the school now Had children at the school previously

3. Can you give any examples of your previous experiences that have prepared you for this role?

Please tick where appropriate:

Parent	
Child care worker	
Other profession e.g. librarian, teacher, laboratory technician	
Medical worker	
School volunteer	
Other - please specify	

4. Please give details of your qualifications gained before you took up this post:

Qualification	Where and When obtained

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

5. Please give any details of training received while in your current school:
In school:

Out of school:

6 a) Would you like further professional development - training and support - to increase your job effectiveness, or to progress towards another career?

Yes

Yes, but don't know what is available

No

if no, please go to question 5

b) Please give details of desired professional development, and any career progression you would like:

7. a) Would you like to gain additional qualifications?

Yes

No

if no, please go to question 8

b) Please specify which qualifications

c) Could this be a route to becoming a teacher?

8. What kind of published material - books, packs, guidance would help you do your job better now? *Please continue on the other side if you have lots of ideas.*

9c. Would you be prepared to contribute to the cost of gaining these?

Yes

If yes please specify what you consider reasonable in 9d

No

Don't know

9d. I would be able to contribute £ a year.

ISSUES

10. What changes would you like to make to your job - if any!

10. If you have any ideas on how to improve any of the following in our schools, please give details:-

- the way education support staff work in schools
- the nature of the education support staff work
- the development of education support staff
- the pay and conditions of education support staff
- other

11. Please add any other comments that you would like to make continuing on another sheet if you wish:

As part of this research it is hoped to carry out more in depth questionnaires with a sample of respondents. If you are willing to be involved in this follow up work please provide your name for future contact.

We would like to thank you for participating in this research and taking the time to complete this survey. Please give it back to your head or manager to return to Essex Advisory and Inspection Service (TAQ), A Block, County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1DT

Appendix 3: Letter to headteachers

th 199

Dear Colleague,

Essex Survey of Education Support Staff – Teaching Assistants and Learning Support Assistants

I know how you feel about surveys and questionnaires, and I also appreciate your persistent heavy workload, particularly with the current literacy initiative. However, I am also sure you as a manager know of the rapid growth in numbers of staff working directly with children and young people, supporting teaching and learning, other than qualified teachers. In this category we include all people who are employed to help teachers or support learning in or out of the classroom, but not administrative or mid-day staff, cleaning, caretaking or catering staff; and regardless of what you call them. We refer to them generically as Teaching Assistants (TAs).

As you know, Essex is particularly interested to promote school improvement and effectiveness, and increase the learning opportunities for all. The recent White and Green Papers both included the role of these staff in their considerations. The new Literacy and Numeracy strategies also include this role.

Your Form 7 returns gave the hours for which you employ assistants, but not how many people are thus employed or much about them. Their roles, names, pay, contracts and status within an institution are variable. They are often in the front-line for cuts in budget allocations. Many schools are developing strategies for training support staff, and whole school approaches to support their work.

The outcomes of this questionnaire are needed at many levels. Guidance is sought from the LEA to support the management of TAs and examples of where this has worked, how and why would make useful material for such guidance. There is little research on the ways that such staff enhance learning, I am hoping to rectify this by following up the questionnaire myself. EAIS need to know the scale and needs for professional development to plan future courses, by the end of this term. I am working with colleagues in neighbouring authorities to seek national recognition for some of the training. The DfEE would like to know whether TAs see this as a route to teaching. At a meeting of EPHA officers and LEA representatives, the budgetary issues were aired.

The EPHA meeting felt the need to have better information about this historically invisible group of workers was sufficiently important to justify these two questionnaires at this time. One is for you or a senior manager within your school (salmon), and one is to be photocopied for each of your education support staff (white).

The questionnaires are designed to be as easy to complete as possible, and I thank the officers of the EPHA committee for piloting them. They are compiled in a progressive way, so that even if you can only spend a little time on the early parts, it is worth returning, as your reply will be informative. We start the salmon form with a copy of the information you sent to the DfEE via us on Form 7 in January 1998. Please complete the main questionnaire from a managers/school point of view, and give individual copies of the second questionnaire, plus the accompanying letter to each of your assistants. Please return all the forms together if possible, but again an incomplete return of forms will be more helpful than none. We ask if you could return everything to us by the end of June 1998.

I am sure you understand the importance of a high return for the validity of the evidence, and hope this can be high on your priorities for attention. Your individual answers will be confidential, although the aggregated statistical information may become public when it is used. The separate staff questionnaires can be completed anonymously, unless the staff are happy to be identified.

As I hope to follow up this survey personally, with further in-depth work with a small group of schools and staff, please say when you return the survey if you are interested in participating. If any of the information gathered is of interest to you or your staff, or you wish to contact me to discuss matters please do so. You will, of course, receive a digest of the final results.

Thank you in advance for your time and co-operation,
Yours sincerely

Anne Watkinson
Senior Adviser, School Development

Appendix 4: Letter to teaching assistants

th 199

Dear Colleague,

Essex Survey of Education Support Staff - Teaching Assistants and Learning Support Assistants

In Essex we are particularly interested to promote school improvement and effectiveness, and increasing the learning opportunities for all. The recent White and Green Papers both included the role of assistants in their considerations. The new Literacy and Numeracy strategies also include this role. I am working with neighbouring authorities to gain accreditation for some of our training and the DfEE are also interested in our results.

You have an 'historical invisibility'. We know from the annual returns from your school for how many hours assistants are employed, but we do not know how many people this is or much about them. What little we do know has been gleaned from the informal responses at training courses and seminars held over the last four years in the county. We also know that many schools are developing strategies for training and supporting the work that you do. We would like to know of examples of where this has worked, how and why, in order to share the good ideas. We would like to know the most effective ways that such staff enhance learning. We would like the LEA to support your work in increasing their effectiveness, to provide appropriate guidance and to influence national policy making.

One step in furthering our knowledge is this questionnaire. It comes in two parts, one for the school to complete and one for each member of the education support staff.

Please return your form to the person who gave it to you so that they can return them to us by the end of June. You can complete it anonymously if you wish, or let us know your name if you want to take anything further. You could put the return in a sealed envelope if you wish. If there are any questions which you would rather not answer, please just leave them blank - an incomplete questionnaire is of more value than none. Your individual answers will be confidential, although the aggregated statistical information may become public when it is used. I am sure you understand the importance of a high return for the validity of the evidence, and hope this can be high on your priorities for attention. I would like to thank the TAs of the pilot schools for their helpful comments. Some of the questions seemed irrelevant to them, or unanswerable without further information. I can assure we can move forward more easily with whatever information you feel able to give us.

I hope to follow up this survey personally with further in-depth work with a small group of schools and staff. If you are interested on being part of this, please say when you return the survey. There is little available published evidence at the moment, to give us guidance about your category of staff. If any of the information gathered is of interest to you, or you wish to contact me to discuss matters please do so.

Thank you in advance for your time and co-operation,
Yours sincerely

Anne Watkinson
Senior Adviser, School Development

Appendix 5: A diary of events in the case studies of two primary schools

Date 98/99	School	Event	Contact	Minutes	Code	Description
July 8 th	1	Meeting 1	HT of School 1		Mtg 1.1	Establishing contact, exploring possibilities
Sept 14 th	1	Meeting 2			Mtg 1.2	With SENCO and TAs of School 1
Oct 14 th	1	Visit 1 Day 1	Interviews		Int 1.1.1 Int 1.1.2 Int 1.1.3 Int 1.2.4 Int 1.1.5	TA A Teacher V TA B TA C Teacher W
			Observations	26 12 34 31	Obs 1.1.1 (i) (ii) Obs 1.1.2(i) (ii)	With child B and group En writing Reading group With children C and E, & group Topic writing Hearing reading
Nov 11 th	2	Visit				First contact with School 2
Dec 2 nd	1	Visit 1 Day 2	Interviews		Int 1.1.6 Int 1.1.7	TA D and teacher X With HT
			Observations	10 23 20 30 33 39 X	Obs 1.1.3 (i) (ii) (iii) Obs 1.1.4 (i) (ii) Obs 1.1.5 (Not) Obs 1.1.6 1.1.8	TA A with child A and whole class, ERR on his own in assembly TA D with child D and group - science and group – maths TA C hearing reading TA E with child F – needed space
Jan 8 99	1	Visit 1 Day 3	Interview			With SENCO
Feb 23 rd	1	Data to school				First set of data and analysis sent to School 1
Mar 11 th	1	Meeting 3			Mtg 1.3	with SENCO and 4 TAs
Apr 2 nd		Return of data				Return of corrected data to researcher
May 12 th	2	Visit 1 Day 1	Interviews		Int 2.1 Int 2.2	HT TA F
			Observations	33 14	Obs 2.1 Obs 2.2	TA F with teacher R TA G with teacher Q
May 17 th	2	Visit 1 Day 2	Interviews		Int 2.3 Int 2.4 Int 2.5 Int 2.6	Teacher R TA H Year 6 children Teacher M

May 17 th contd	2	Visit 1 Day 2	Observations	34 13 28	Obs 2.3 Obs 2.4 (i) (ii)	TA H with target group TA H with teacher M in class TA H with group from M's class
May 20 th	2	Visit 1 Day 3	Interviews		Int 2.7 Int 2.8 Int 2.9	Teacher N TA J Teacher L
			Observations	26 29 30 21	Obs 2.5 Obs 2.6 Obs 2.7(i) (ii)	TA J with target group TA J with pairs from Teacher P's class TA I with teacher L's class – topic writing TA I hearing reading in L's class
June 28 th	1	Visit 2 Day 1	Interviews		Int 1.2.1 Int 1.2.2 Int 1.2.3 Int 1.2.4	TA B Child B Child F TA A
			Observations	10 44 34 11 27 6 2	Obs 1.2.1 (i) (ii) Obs 1.2.2 Obs 1.2.3 (i) (ii) (iii) (iv)	TA B with child B and whole class, ERR and group En writing TA E with child F TA A with child A reading class PE on TEACH programme going home
June 29 th	1	Visit 2 Day 2	Interviews		Int 1.2.5 Int 1.2.6 Int 1.2.7 Int 1.2.8 Int 1.2.9 Int 1.2.10 Int 1.2.11	TA E SENCO TA D Child D TA C Children C and E HT
			Observations	13 11 19 17 34	Obs 1.2. 4(i) (ii) (iii) (iv) Obs 1.2.5	TA with children C and E, in group En, sounds Science En, writing TA with C,E group handwriting, no class TA E with child F
Sept 1 st	1 & 2	Return of data to schools				Draft of information about their school and first draft analysis sent to schools for checking,
March 16 th 2000	1	Meeting				To check analyses while in school to video for DfEE
July 10 th	1	Meeting				Meeting with SENCO to finalise data on progress of children
Nov 1 st	2	Meetings				With DH to talk about outcome data With all TAs, HT and DH to check analyses

Appendix 6: Protocols used with study schools

For discussion and agreement by the staff.

Purpose: to try to find out how these assistants actually work with children, how an assistant actually enhances the learning of the children in her care and how the school context and processes support that work

Intended outcome: a chapter in the thesis for PhD; a qualitative description of what is seen with observer comment. NB. While this is not generally published, this document is available in a library for interested people to read.

The following **protocols** are therefore suggested:

- Either side should make comment at any time in the process if there is any discomfort or suggestion about what is taking place or being said.
- Openness, honesty and integrity will help, as sometimes what is left unsaid can indicate issues.
- The main audience of any summary written material would be the assessors of the author's PhD thesis. However, theses are in the public domain, in so far as students and others can call them up from the University library.
- If there was material suitable for more widespread publication, such as in a journal, any copy would be vetted by the school first.
- It maybe that this process might show up matters within the school that the school subsequently wished to address or celebrate. This is entirely for the school to decide.
- All names are to be changed in the final report to preserve confidentiality.
- Anything written for this purpose will be shared first with the staff involved so that comments could be made and points of accuracy checked.

- Photocopies of all that is written down about any member of staff in observing or talking to them – scribbled notes which are the basic evidence - will be given to the member of staff concerned. The originals will be kept by the researcher.
- If any conclusions or materials used by the school were suitable for use on courses etc. – i.e. suggested ways of working or planning documents, they would only be so used with the express permission of the school and ownership indicated where, or if, the school wished.
- Individual comments would be anonymised, or amalgamated with others to preserve confidentiality
- The observation material will be fed back to individuals, who would not be able to change what was seen but could add comments.
- Any quantitative data supplied by the school would be similarly anonymised.
- If others are involved, then they would be covered by the same sort of protocols
- Permission of the parents of any children known to be closely involved will be sought by the school
- Video and photographs are ruled out as involving too many children

The intention is to watch the TAs in action for half an hour to an hour while doing their normal activities, particularly when working with children. Narrative notes will be made, with a time frame, but not using regular interval observation. Semi-structured interviews will be made with each TA. A sample of teachers willing to be interviewed in the same way would be helpful, and similarly the head and any other person suggested by the head as having a role in working with or for the TAs. A small questionnaire will be available for those staff willing to complete it.

This information will be analysed, collated and reflected upon by the researcher.

Appendix 7: Observation sheets used in the case study schools

Narrative:

Date and time:

Context

Teacher's name

TA's name

Room

In classroom or not

Lesson focus

What went on before

Introduction of me to class

Other adults

Children's activities and learning objectives if known

Time	TA's activity	Children	Teacher	Comment

Appendix 8: Case study questions/prompts

Headteacher

School

Date

HT

Any documentation?

Specific: Job descriptions, Evaluation, PDR? Planning,

Reports to Governors, mentions in reports to parents?

Other?

Why? – What is philosophy behind employing them

How long employed?

Funding – Statement, SEN, general budget

How evaluate?

What is Governor involvement?

Does SENCO job description include TAs deployment?

What training do teachers have in using them?

Who writes the IEPs?

What procedures do you go through when recruiting?

What do you look for when employing them?

What training do they have?

What would you like them to have?

What changes would you like to make?

to their jobs?

to the way in which they are employed?

Anything else?

Teacher

School

Date

Teacher - name

Talk me through what I saw in this session.

Was this different because I was coming in?

What was the objective for the session for you?
for the TA?
for the child/ren?

Did you plan together?

How do you normally plan for your TA?

What assessment and/or recording do they do for you?

Who writes the IEPs?
Do the TAs have any involvement in them?

Are they involved with parents at all?

What difference do you think they make?
To your job?
To you?
To the children's learning?

Can you describe your relationship with the TA?

What helps this relationship?

What hinders?

What changes would you like to make?

Can you remember any particularly good sessions?

Or any disasters?

Anything else?

Teaching assistant

School

Date

TA – name

Talk me through what I saw in this session.

Was this different because I was coming in?

What was the objective for the session for you?
for the teacher?
for the child/ren?

How do you know what to do?

Did you plan together?

What assessment and/or recording do you do?

Are you involved with parents at all?

What involvement in IEPs do you have?

What difference do you think they make?
To your job?
To you?
To the children's learning?

Can you describe your relationship with the teacher?

What helps this relationship?

What hinders?

What is your relationship to the child/ren

What changes would you like to make?

Can you remember any particularly good sessions?
or any disasters?

What qualifications do you have?

What training has the school given you?

What involvement in meetings do you have?

What would you like to do in the future?

Anything else?

Pupil

School

Date

Child/ren

Talk me through what I saw in this session.

Was this different because I was coming in?

What were you supposed to be doing?

Who was helping you?

How?

Why?

Could it be different?

Have TAs always been there?

Are TAs there all the time?

What will happen as you get older?

**Appendix 9: Researcher participation in events taking place
during the study**

Year	National events	Essex Events	Researcher participation
1993		SEN TA courses available	Headteacher employing TA staff
1994			Joined advisory staff of LEA as Cross Curricular Consultant Started short courses for TAs
1995		OU/STAC course started	Started LEA/OU STAC partnership as tutor
1996		NVQs in Early years started ; LEA CACHE Assessment centre established	LEA/OU STAC representative
1997	May: General Election – Labour emphasis on Education July: White Paper <i>Excellence in schools</i> includes Support for teachers by TAs Dec: Green Paper Excellence for all children	New Chief Education Officer LEA Assessment Centre established for C&G Accreditation started.	Registered for research Post changed to being a School Adviser Internal Verifier for NVQs and C&G programmes
1998	Literacy Strategy introduced DfEE Action Programme: Meeting Special Educational Needs Dec: Green paper <i>Teachers meeting the challenge of change</i> includes work of TAs National Standards for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) includes managing other adults TTA Corporate plan includes pathways to teaching for TAs	Reorganisation of county boundaries Changes of adviser pastoral patches of schools Developed quality framework for schools	Questionnaire sent to all new LEA primary schools Initiated Edexcel working group to produce BTECs for TAs Started case study work in a school Publications: (Watkinson, 1998a; 1998b; and 1998c)
1999	Southampton report on Career ladder for TAs published Numeracy Strategy introduced to schools TA Working Group set up	Assessment centres for NVQs and C&G closed Education Development Plan includes work for and about TAs Liaison with APU to produce local STA course	Case study work of TAs in two schools Joined DfEE TA Working Group at DfEE Retired at end of year from LEA Publications: (Watkinson 1999a and 1999b)
2000	£130 million to recruitment and training of TAs Training materials developed for LEAs to train primary TAs National framework of courses available for Progression into Initial Teacher training published by TTA Draft National Standards drawn up National Guidance written	Continue funding OU and APU courses Participate in induction training Consultation on Pathways to teaching and National Standards	Working free-lance in retirement Developed quality framework for use of TAs in schools with ex-colleagues. Assisted DfEE in compilation of training materials for TAs, and presentation of materials to LEA representatives and trainers: (DfEE, 2000b and 2000c) Participated in consultations
2001 +	£200 million to recruitment of TAs Further election pledge of continued funding to 2004 DfES training materials for secondary TAs Aug: NOS published Nov: PricewaterhouseCooper draft report on teacher workload; Estelle Morris' speech Further increase in support staff promised	Developed job descriptions and negotiated local agreement for Single Status pay scales for TAs	Writing up complete study Publications in development: Paper for Education 3-13; Books for David Fulton Publishers and Routledge Falmer Video for DfES TA training material for secondary SEN TAs, and presentation of materials to LEA representatives and trainers (DfES, 2001b) EU/EPICE conference in Barcelona (Watkinson 2001a and 2001b)

Appendix 10: Possible checklist of teaching assistant competencies

L	Competencies expected (Supporting the teacher/s)	Experiences typical in school (Supporting the school and personal development)	Knowledge and understanding (Supporting the pupil and the curriculum, teaching and learning)
1	<p>Essential qualities for working with children or young people(1) Carry out instructions, show common sense, able to ask for help Work within statutory frameworks and school policies, follow H&S guidance including child protection, respect confidentiality. Support the principles of equality of opportunity and inclusion</p>	<p>On appointment, be able to undertake: domestic chores - paint pots and bookmaking, photocopying basic child care - grazed knees and wet knickers In class: keep children on task, facilitate play activities, relay instructions of teachers, and support teaching programmes and individual pupils as indicated Personal development: induction training, job description, understand purposes of appraisal, take advantage of CPD opportunities</p>	<p>Understand the values and principles underpinning the NOS for T/CAS Understand how the school community works, how to be part of a team, to take responsibility for own actions Use equipment safely according to instructions Understand principles of National Curriculum, National Strategies, related reforms and aspects of SEN Understand principles of behaviour management</p>
2	<p>NOS level 2 Able to work in partnership with teacher and with selected children Help with classroom resources and records Provide support for learning activities Provide effective support for colleagues Support curriculum activities as appropriate particularly En, Ma or ICT Contribute to behaviour management strategies, and maintenance of H&S</p>	<p>Awareness of variety of resource provision and appropriate use to facilitate curriculum delivery, carry out practical tasks e.g. display, make or maintain resources and learning environment Work with groups or individuals, facilitate independence, encourage interaction and know when to intervene and when to stand back Contribute to planning and assessment activities Actively seek feedback on performance, take charge of own professional development, undertake further training, background reading and child observations</p>	<p>See the relevance of activities to intended learning objectives, understand relevant school policies and implement strategies Begin to know theory underpinning practice in curriculum and child development Understand the spectrum of individual needs, attend IEP reviews to support individual children with needs and facilitate their learning Know the limit of responsibilities, understand the need for effective communication with pupils and other staff</p>
3	<p>NOS level 3 Able to undertake some self initiated tasks, especially in nursery situations, but not take responsibility for children in school Assist decision making Establish and evaluate routines, provide welfare, guidance and support to children Management in private nursery and playgroups, Social Services 'fit person'</p>	<p>Given a curriculum task, devise games, resources, activities to support learning; be able to adapt and modify activities within control, to promote learning Participate in teaching: instruction, questioning, challenging etc. Provide reports and records Promote and support school policies and strategies Work in and contribute to the school teams Review and develop own practice</p>	<p>To have an awareness of parts of the national curriculum e.g. literacy and numeracy, and Early Learning Goals Know about all aspects of child development – physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, cultural Support children with particular needs and develop expertise e.g., autism, dyspraxia To understand the legislative framework of the education system, including assessment and inspection procedures Know of Code of practice, contribute to IEP reviews, relate to parents</p>
4	<p>HEI undergraduate status As above, working in partnership with teachers, sharing in planning and assessment, attending school meetings, contributing to decision making Some qualifications will enable training and management responsibilities Undertake a longitudinal child study or other study appropriate to HE courses</p>	<p>Can take responsibility, under direction of teacher for: - a particular aspect of curriculum development - resource management, or equipment maintenance – e.g. ICT, library, SEN resource area, environmental study area Implement parts of national strategies as specified by senior management Set high expectations Able to manage and lead a team of TAs/adults Able to liaise with agencies on behalf of identified pupils Evaluate own learning and set appropriate goals for development Manage other adults</p>	<p>Know about learning objectives and aspects of NC, particularly in a core subject Know and understand a subject of the NC in some depth Some understanding of teaching and learning theory, i.e. awareness of how pupils learn and what affects the learning Communicate effectively, establish and maintain working relationships with pupils, staff, parents and other adults associated with the school</p>
Q T S	<p>National Standards for Qualified Teacher Status: Take In charge of class, responsible for teaching and learning, planning and assessment, standards and progress</p>	<p>Define learning needs and strategies for a class of pupils, evaluate their performance against NC criteria</p>	<p>Level 7 in all NC subjects with level 8 in core subjects with degree in one of them, or in Early childhood studies Understand professional requirements of QTS</p>

Appendix 11: Overhead transparency list of major qualifications available to teaching assistants in probable NVQ levels

Current TA Qualifications framework is probably:

◆ Level 1
Basic skills awards

◆ Level 2

'O' level, GCSE

- *DfEE TA Induction course (part only)*
- *NVQ2 Early Years Care &Ed,*
- *C&G 7321-01,*
- *NCFE TA certificate*
- *PLA Certificate*
- *BTEC Intermediate Certificate in teaching assistance*

◆ Level 3

'A' level

- *NVQ3 EYC &E,*
- *PLA diploma*
- *C&G 7321-02 (FE teachers),*
- *RSA/CLANSA*
- *NNEB, BTEC/NN, CACHE Certificate Child Care*
- *Some FE STA awards (even with CATS points),*
- *BTEC professional development award in teaching assistance*

◆ Level 4

Part of a degree

- *BTEC Professional Development certificate*
- *OU STAC, APU Diploma*
- *FE teachers certificate*
- *HND;*
- *NVQ4*

◆ Degrees

QTS

• Level 5

PGCE or other professional qualification

MA, PhDs, etc.

Anne Watkinson June 2000

Appendix 12: Draft outline of needs for teaching assistants to achieve professional status

In response to Estelle Morris's speech 12.11.01 – Professionalism and trust – the future of teacher and teaching (Morris, 2001). Given to Ianthe Wright, Chair of TAWG at DfES, 20.11.01

Morris (2001, p. 19) talks of six characteristics being present in a modern profession. She then details how that can bolster the teaching profession. They could also be used to support the case for a profession in teaching assistance for the majority of TAs who are not aspiring to be teachers.

A. High standards at key levels of the profession, including entry and leadership, set nationally and regulated by a strong professional body

NOS already in existence

- Needs:
- to include entry requirements and a higher level of 'supervisor, manager, and/or instructor'
 - support of LGNTO, QCA, exam boards, Unison and teacher unions
 - regulatory body for TAs cf. GTC and/or professional association of teaching assistants
 - basic qualifications for some levels
e.g. GCSEs in En and Ma for competent level; a level 3 for higher level + experience +

Should TAs be registered cf. teachers?

Should there be indemnity insurance?

B. A body of knowledge about what works best and why, with regular training and development of opportunities so that members of the profession are always up to date.

- Needs:
- pedagogy for TAs: teaching and learning theory and practice, curriculum K & U, child development, SEN etc.
 - body of literature and research
 - professional association and journal/magazine
 - national and local conferences for TAs – dissemination
 - pump priming, facilitation, starter support - ? funding

C. Efficient organisation and management of complementary staff to support best professional practice.

Good Practice Guide and associated research

- Needs:
- stronger lead from DfES and some LEAs ?code of practice
 - additional guidance in employment practices re support staff especially if additional responsibilities

D. Effective use of leading edge technology to support best professional practice.

- Needs:
- appropriate access to resources and technology to give learning environment support
 - access to ICT for lesson preparation, resource ideas, CPD, support of ICT in pupils

E. Incentives and rewards for excellence, including through pay structures

Use examples of creative budgeting

- Needs:
- school funding for target levels of staff numbers and competence
 - LEA/school partnerships to promote best practice in pay scales
 - governor training in best employment practices

F. Relentless focus on what is in the best interests of those who use the service – in education, pupils and parents – backed by clear and effective arrangements for accountability and of measuring performance and outcomes.

Inspection already looks at use and deployment of support staff; do schools?

What would accountability to governors and parents be for higher level responsibilities?

- Needs:
- school vision, stakeholder involvement, effective school self-review systems
 - ways of looking at affective effectiveness of TAs – raising teacher morale, providing additional staff expertise, maintaining inclusive practices, promoting pupils self-esteem and independence, allowing flexibility of teaching groups etc. as well as test outcomes
 - celebration of good practice

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